PURPOSEFUL EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: GRADE 7 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

This study explores how developing purposeful relationships with students fosters engagement. Grade seven students were surveyed, interviewed, and given the opportunity to reflect on the first seven years of their schooling. Based in Appreciative Inquiry (AI), the students took a closer look at attitudes, teaching skills and the relationship with an enjoyable teacher and added their own personal experiences to research-based examples of factors contributing to engagement. The results confirm that developing purposeful relationships contribute to raising student engagement and yield numerous examples of what students value. These examples were compiled and highlight that there is an undeniable human aspect to teaching. Building purposeful relationships does not solve all school related issues but provides students with a more positive outlook on schooling.

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Dedication

To my husband Dave, better known as Mr. Hill

Thank you Mr. Hill for being supportive, patient, helpful and most importantly

for loving moi.

To my son William and my daughter Madeline

Thank you for encouraging mommy with chocolate and for being patient.

Mommy loves you.

À mes racines...

C'est à mon tour de parler d'amour!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Student Needs

In grade one, a great number of very small happenings can disrupt or derail even the best "best practice-full" lessons: an ant on the floor, a garbage truck at the dumpster, and especially a loose tooth that has finally come out. My experience as a teacher has taught me that despite my best effort to carry on, grade one students often momentarily, and certainly collaboratively, redirect their focus to these important experiences. At those times, they can become quite engaged with the ongoing happening. I qualify these moments as students expressing "spontaneous needs". Spontaneous needs have this effect of placing the teacher in front of a choice. At times, we may qualify these as teachable moments, at others we may see these needs as an opportunity to strengthen the classroom bond. Sometimes these needs are not acknowledged for one reason or another. This happens with older students too, although such distractions may be seen as work avoidance behaviours, and at times, they may very well be! A marked result of a spontaneous need is the level of engagement a student displays. For those few minutes, the engagement can be complete. Due to the nature of spontaneous needs, they are sporadic. The more we know our students, the more we know how to build on those derailments or distractions, to enhance engagement.

Spontaneous needs, however, are not the only needs students display at school. Noddings (2005) explains that students come to school with "expressed needs" which relate to *life*. These needs take root in socio-emotional development, socio-economics, bullying, health and parenting issues (p. 151). They can be as easy to solve as giving a band-aid or as challenging as dealing with bullying. Our capacity to address these needs

is highly dependent on our ability to assess them. Regardless of the grade, I have found

that students do not come to class like "open books" ready to share such needs willingly.

Younger students might just feel awkward and not even understand why. The older the

students, the more concealed or difficult to figure out these needs become. Noddings

(2005) points out that it takes "skillful and sensitive interpretations" to detect such needs

as they are expressed in various ways (words, behaviour) (p.151). She goes on to

acknowledge that "assessing and responding to needs is one of the most difficult tasks

faced by parents and teachers" (p. 148). I have seen it countless times, students coming to

school with far bigger preoccupations than what's on the agenda for the day. Whether it

is a specific want or a hidden pressing need, teachers' failure to recognize and attend to

students' wants and needs, can lead to student disengagement (Noddings, 2005). Hence,

the importance of building purposeful relationships.

Ultimately we, as teachers, want to be able to connect with students in such a way

that we can help them meet some more basic needs in order to start seeing the emergence

of others. While describing his hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1943) notes that when a

more "physiological need" is met (or at least partially satisfied) it allows for "the

emergence of other more social goals" (p. 375). In short, when my students are able to

attend Breakfast Club because they haven't eaten, chances are that they will be able to

move on to less basic needs and focus their new needs on areas such as building

friendships or lessons (curiosity). Maslow (1943) admits that the hierarchy of needs is not

fixed and does not necessarily work in an upward fashion. It is more fluid (p. 386). A

student, for example, could see the need to make friends in the classroom as far more

important than the need to read. As this need is being met, the willingness to work on

reading might increase. At the same time, reading better might provide the same student with the confidence to go out there and make more friends! Our job then, is to know our students so that we are able to organize the triage of needs being expressed in such a manner that over time each student is given the opportunity to reach the top of the hierarchy, and display the creativity Maslow (1943) describes. Maslow (1943) explains that "we shall call people who are satisfied in these needs [physiological, safety, love and esteem], basically satisfied people, and it is from these that we may expect the fullest (and healthiest) creativeness" (p. 383). For students to thrive and reach that level of "creativeness" we need to invest ourselves in differentiating needs.

<div align="center">Supportive Relationships</div>

A supportive relationship in a caring environment makes a difference but it is truly the depth and nature of the relationship that affects the students. We must pay attention to the sincerity we convey in our everyday interactions. The essence of the relationship requires *care* embedded in every aspect of the students' school life. Noddings (1995) believes that "personal manifestations of care are probably more important in children's lives than any particular curriculum or pattern of pedagogy" (p. 2). Like everyone else, students have a need to feel like they are heard and received. Often I have seen students walk away in frustrations (in tears or not) because "their side" of a story is not clearly understood. Noddings (2005) explains that "if my expressed needs are not treated positively, or at least sensitively, I will likely not feel cared for" (p.148). In the elementary school context, with which I am most familiar, I have found this equation to be true. It is the way in which we, as teachers, choose to respond that creates this impact. Noddings (2005) acknowledges that at times we may not have the

resources or the power to properly address expressed needs but she definitely encourages teachers "to respond in a way that will maintain the caring relation" (p.148). Engagement at school starts with being engaged in the students.

Signs of Disengagement

Low self-esteem, lack of motivation, lack of interest and negative behaviours are associated with disengagement. Although these behaviours may occur with various degrees of intensity they can impact one another and cause students to withdraw. Most students do not come to school openly defiant and fed up. Klem and Connell (2004) recognize that "students can show up and do the work without being emotionally and cognitively engaged" (p. 270). Research acknowledges that disengagement is problematic and suggests that the teacher's particular attention to the quality of everyday relationships plays a role in the students' academic, and behavioural achievements. Students' confidence increases as they feel valued and validated. They need to feel they matter. Therefore, we can influence the level of engagement in students by increasing the positive quality of the relationships we form with those same students.

Development of Inquiry

Whether I have been teaching primary or intermediate students, I have made a conscious effort to develop purposeful educational relationships with students as a means to increase their engagement in the classroom. I believe if I go the extra mile in getting to know students on a more personal basis they come to feel that they matter. When students matter, they feel like they belong to the group. Noddings (2005a) notes that although many teachers profess to care, and although many teachers might measure up well on cleverly researched and constructed attitudes scales, "students may not agree" (p. 1). I am

curious as to what students themselves identify as teacher attitudes, skills and strategies that engage them. O'Brien and Moules (2007) explain that "in order to understand the lives of children, data must reflect where children say they are now and be based on their experiences rather than on an analysis based on adults' interpretations of the child's needs and experiences" (p. 398). In this research project students are involved as "researchers". Their perceptions matter most in this study.

Rationale

Throughout my career I have observed that parent and student feedback about school often pertains to the emotional domain. Parents report how their child felt in a particular class and how they feel they were received by the teacher as well. Students describe rapport with the teacher and feelings about school by listing various curricular activities they liked, and mostly the extra-curricular happenings. Each year in our school district, transition meetings are carefully planned at the beginning and end of the year to meet the needs of struggling students. During those meetings, compatibility with the new teacher is duly considered and effective strategies are shared thoroughly. A positive relationship with the teacher increases the chances of success.

The majority of my teaching assignments have focused on transition years: kindergarten, grade1, grade 4 and grade 6. At these particular grades students experience new aspects of school for the first time. Whether students are embracing school part-time or full-time for the first time, facing intermediate grading systems, or simply learning to grow up and bid farewell to elementary school, the teacher's attitudes and care in making those years successful is vital.

In my role as the Literacy Coach for my school, I coordinated projects that involved teaching reluctant readers in small groups. The objective was to improve inferencing skills. The recipe for success lay in the scheduling structures we had put in place, which allowed teachers to work with very small groups on a regular basis. At the end of the projects, teachers unanimously reported drastic improvements in students' attitudes towards reading, and appreciated the opportunity to get to know their students better. They had improved the relationships with students and the students were more responsive to learning.

My role at the school was also that of an administrator. My experiences as an administrator have also confirmed the need to reinforce purposeful relationships with students. Students who receive an office referral during class time often have done so because they displayed behaviours associated with disengagement. Short term solutions do not offer the benefits that a long-term relational investment would achieve. Hence, some students become permanent fixtures in the office. Noddings (2005a) explains that even though teachers may say they care, students still feel like no one does (p. 1). As an administrator I have attended to the relationships with those frequent visitors in an effort to increase the student's engagement towards the school as a community.

Central Question

Over the years, from these experiences as teacher and administrator, I have paid particular attention to the essence of the relationships I develop with students. Topics such as formative assessment, multiple intelligences, differentiated learning, transitions strategies and community-geared philosophies reinforce that meaningful communication is vital to students' achievement. My central research question is set within a framework

of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), looking more deeply into the nature of teacher-student relationships from the students' perspective: In what ways does developing purposeful relationships with students foster engagement in the classroom?

Radiant Questions

Radiant questions to help clarify and define this study include:

- What is engagement and how is it perceived by teachers and students?

- What effective teacher attitudes, skills and strategies promote, support and sustain engagement in students?

- How are these factors related to the teacher-student relationship and how is the relationship nurtured?

- What implications exist for practicing teachers, new teachers and pre-service teachers?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to establish suggestions of attitudes, skills and strategies supported by concrete examples for teachers to know and use in the pursuit of developing purposeful relationships with their students. These suggestions of professional knowledge are not only composed of researched examples but also of examples provided by grade seven students after a reflection on their elementary school life. Their experiences support research and allow research to gain *real life* credibility. This research makes it possible for new teachers and practicing teachers to consider the needs of their students from their students' perspectives -whether they are in kindergarten or grade 12.

I seek to build and improve on an already existing paradigm that will first benefit students, and, as a result, also benefit teachers and parents. When relationships improve a

win-win situation starts developing. If students feel they matter and are motivated at school, parents witness the improvements at home, and teachers reap the rewards of having engaged students as well as supportive parents. I can confidently say that from experience, the stakeholders (the students) are very much aware of the issue of teacher-student relationships. By the time students reach middle school, relationships are paramount in their lives. Lee (2007) explains that middle school students "in contrast to elementary school students " have developed more independence and are more inclined to play their own role in developing trust with teachers (p. 210). I have found that younger students are far more independent than what is attributed to them. They, too, are very aware of their relationships with teachers. Hamre and Pianta (2005) note that research about young students suggests, "positive and responsive interactions with adults (parents, teachers, childcare providers) contribute to regulation of emotional experience and social behavior" (p. 951). Younger students may not have the words but can certainly display the behaviour to signify the state of a relationship (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Noddings, 2005). My experience in elementary school is that a good relationship with the teacher equates to a good relationship with school.

Connections with Teachers

Caring and meaningful relationships benefit all students, especially those who are disengaged. A connection with students contributes directly to an increase in their chances for learning successes. Disengaged students perceive school as an activity that happens to them rather than with them. A lack of thorough consideration and acknowledgement of their individuality and learning styles dampens their spirits. Alternatively, a *caring* teacher can make a positive difference. Noddings (2005a) notes

that some students may "recognize the teacher as caring, but they do not ultimately feel cared for" and insists that the "relational sense of caring" is what ultimately matters (p. 1).

School: An Emotional Business

Parent and student feedback over the years has prompted me to critically look at the ways in which students are engaged at school. Comments associated with feelings about school generally dominate informal communications and when asked, parents usually start by stating whether their child likes or dislikes school. Ravet (2007) recognizes that parents are generally in tune with their child's perception of school (p. 345). Montalvo, Mansfield and Miller (2007) have researched the effect that liking or disliking the teacher has on students. While reporting on previous works, they synthesize that "when students like the teacher their effort and quality of work improves [In contrast] when they dislike the teacher their effort and quality of work lessens" (p. 145). School is an emotional business and parents are generally concerned first and foremost with their child's happiness.

Effects of Poor Teacher-Student Relationships

As a school administrator I have seen the devastating effects of poor teacher-student relationships. They can literally make or break a school year especially for those students standing at a critical point. This became extremely evident to me when I worked as a vice-principal and an intermediate teacher at a school in a disadvantaged neighborhood. There was a real gap between the expectations of the teachers and the level of interest of the students. As a result, we had a lot of "frequent visitors" to the office. Noddings (2005) exposes this dichotomy when she explains, "teachers may infer a

need for children to learn the standard school subjects, while children –through their behavior or verbalizations- express a need to learn how to live" (p. 148). The teachers and the students at our school had this in common: they felt frustrated -the former about their *inferred* needs not being achieved, the latter about their *expressed* needs not being met. Noddings (2005) states that "when we insist unreflectively on inferred needs and neglect expressed needs, we are likely to have unhappy, confused and resistant students" (p. 156). Hence, the focus of this thesis deals with "the rules of engagement." Student engagement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The pursuit of purposeful relationships to foster student engagement requires a more in-depth understanding of the many facets of engagement as well as how engagement is linked to other concepts such as *teacher attitudes*, *relationships* and *pedagogy.* Skinner, Furrer, Marchand and Kindermann (2008) recognize that "engagement itself combines behavioral and emotional dimensions and refers to active, goal-directed, flexible, constructive, persistent, focused, emotionally positive interactions with the social and physical environments" (p. 766). They also discuss the negative construct called "disaffection" which "refers to the occurrence of behaviors and emotions that reflect maladaptive motivational states" (p. 767). Engagement is complex; it is at times defined by positive descriptors and at times, by negative descriptors. That is not to say that they are opposite but rather part of "a metaconstruct encompassing multiple dimensions of attraction to or involvement in school" (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004, as cited in Skinner et al., 2008, p. 766). Engagement comprises many related concepts affecting one another in various degrees and producing effects and affects on both teachers and students.

Student Engagement

Reactions

Klem and Connell (2004) study relationships on the premise that "reaction to challenge" is one indicator of student engagement (p. 262). They conclude that the student *reactions* teachers experience in class seem to be a primary source of feedback indicating the degree to which students are engaged. Those *reactions* often translate into behaviour or words (negative or positive), depending on the situation at hand. In

clarifying a definition of engagement, Skinner et al. (2008) identify that "the core construct, most prototypical of engagement, is behavioral participation in the classroom" (p. 778). Similarly to Klem and Connell (2004) they also indicate that " behavioral engagement seem to be a good summary indicator, diagnostic of the state of the entire motivational system" (p. 778). Hence, behavioral reactions to schooling activities provide a first glance assessment of where students are at in terms of learning and participation in school activities (including lessons). From that perspective, Ornelles (2007) points out that the general educational attitude seems to be reactive when it comes to dealing with students' learning difficulties, rather than proactive (p. 3). Adults react to kids' reactions, but this current trend does not conclusively address students' needs whether they are social or academic.

Emotional Component

The most noticeable student *reactions,* the ones teachers themselves react to, are usually negative. They are often only the tip of the emotional, relational and cognitive iceberg. Ravet (2007) identifies low-level disengagement as "off-task" behaviour which includes distracting others, and avoidance tactics (pp. 333-334). Klem and Connell (2004) also describe avoidance behaviours as a sign of low engagement, and further add that negative emotions accompany these behaviours (p. 262). Jarvis and Seifert (2002) note that "emotions are motivational catalysts" and work from the premise that "work avoidance is linked to students' emotions" (para. 10-12). Through an extensive literature review, Libbey (2004) exposes the range of behaviour linked to student engagement, going from observable behaviour such as time spent on homework to emotions such as feelings about school and "quality of the teacher-student relationship" (p. 276). In that

way, student engagement not only consists of a set of behaviours, but it is rather multi-layered.

Skinner et al. (2008), recognize that within the concept of engagement exist the notions of engagement and disengagement, behaviour and emotions (p. 766). Emotional engagement is linked to, and affects, behavioral engagement (p. 777). They observe that "educators' efforts to increase behavioral engagement in ways that do not engage positive emotions may not have the intended lasting effect on children's high quality participation in learning activities" (p. 777). Although the behaviour seems to indeed indicate the general state of engagement of a student, Skinner et al. (2008) further explain that more so than behavioural engagement, emotional engagement "seems to be a sensitive barometer of the whole motivational system" (p. 778) and, more importantly, that "emotional engagement appears to be the active ingredient in sustaining motivation" (p.778).

Skinner et al. (2008) are able to establish a breakdown into smaller parts of behavioural and emotional engagement such that they can identify and link specific emotions to their particular behaviours (p. 767). They explain, "because the disaffected emotions can be differentiated, it is possible that they may have different effects on behavior" (p. 767). Jennings and Greenberg (2008) describe how teachers with this ability to differentiate emotions are beneficial:

> A teacher who recognizes an individual student's emotions, understands the cognitive appraisals that may be associated with these emotions, and how these cognitions and emotions motivate the student's behavior can effectively respond to the student's individual needs. For example, if a teacher understands that a

student's challenging behavior and difficulty with self-regulation results from

problems faced at home, he or she may show greater concern and empathy and be

better able to help the student learn to self-regulate rather than resorting to

punitive or coercive tactics. (p. 3)

Jennings and Greenberg (2008) recognize that "teachers influence their students not only

by how and what they teach but also by how they relate, teach and model social and

emotional constructs, and manage the classroom" (p. 9). Thus student engagement

embraces an emotional component that lies right in its core.

Student Engagement Perceptions

At times, student engagement is perceived as an output of behaviours on the part

of the students. However, students come to school with a variety of shortcomings and

may or may not be able to initially display particular behaviours even though teachers

might be looking solely for positive outputs. Klem and Connell (2004) list signs of

engagement as the intensity, effort and ability to be on task, a good grasp of the work and

its importance and "positive emotions" as a result of work completed (p. 262). Although

working with older students, Bryson and Hand (2007) similarly look at engagement as

being "active" (participation in class), a personal involvement in learning, and a greater

display of autonomy (pp. 352-353). Skinner et al. (2008) add initiative and perception to

the above list, as well as positive emotions such as enthusiasm, enjoyment, interest, and

pride (p. 766). They refer to the above observable behaviours and emotions as

"indicators" of engagement (p. 766). They identify relatedness, competence and

autonomy as factors that facilitate engagement, meaning that they can cause engagement

(pp. 766-768). Engagement can therefore not only be displayed, but also influenced.

Ornelles (2007) reviews the indicators of low engagement such as negative attitudes, low motivation, and learned helplessness. She stresses that the ability of students to engage is particularly important, especially in classrooms where they need to be independent and display some initiative (p. 3). She defines engagement as 'on-task' behaviour, applying appropriate working skills and using appropriate strategies to get involved socially in the class (p. 5). Ornelles (2007) proposes that students have everything to gain from learning how to be engaged, and that engagement usually means academic gains (p. 4). She recognizes that to see students make gains as far as student engagement goes, direct support is needed for students to know how to be engaged (p. 4). Ornelles (2007) further mentions that positive experiences for students translate into such things as a positive classroom climate, liking for school, increased motivation and self-esteem, and greater concern for others (p. 11). Peterson, Young, Salzberg, West and Hill (2006) add that teaching student-specific social skills, such as self-management, would increase student engagement (p. 2). They acknowledge the lack of methods to teach social skills and note that part of the students' social skills is to establish a connection with the teacher by being able to accept feedback and ask for help (p. 5). Patrick, Ryan and Kaplan (2007) also note the benefit for students to be cognizant of their learning processes by stating that "students who monitor their engagement have information about their understanding of the material, which they can use to make decisions about regulating their cognition" (p. 86). Therefore, engagement can be a deliberate process where students take action towards their own learning.

Ravet (2007) explains that at times, disengagement is rationalized as an 'innate' trait or ability within the student, "family background [being] the key explanation used by

teachers" (p. 352). Some teachers feel a sense of helplessness in trying to deal with

engagement-related behaviour in school. Jennings and Greenberg (2008) recognize the

strain that dealing with student behaviour and emotions might incur for some teachers (p.

2). They stress the importance for teachers to be aware of their own socio-emotional

competence in order to be able to build "supportive teacher-student relationships" (pp. 2-

3). In this way, engagement is not only a student display of observable behaviour but also

an input of teachers' socio-emotional awareness.

Students' Perceptions of Engagement

　　Klem and Connell (2004) report that teachers tend to see engagement from a

behavioural point of view whereas students tend to see engagement from both a

behavioural and emotional point of view (p. 266). More specifically, they explain that

teachers see engagement as the result of behaviour tied to *performance* (Klem & Connell,

2004). Unfortunately, engagement doesn't only affect struggling students but all students.

The *emotional* aspect of engagement is critical. Cornelius-White (2007) reports on

research where students expressed "the number one problem identified [with school] was

relationships" (para. 11). He further notes that students look to teachers to trust them, to

give them responsibility, and to treat them in a warm, honest and dignified manner

(Cornelius-White, 2007, para.12). Ravet (2007) acknowledges that there is an emotional

dimension to disengagement (p. 343). She explains that teacher and student perceptions

of feelings at school are diametrically opposed, in noting that "teachers, it seems, are

singularly out of tune with pupil feeling states" (p. 345). Students identify the

relationship with the teacher as one factor impacting disengagement and they look to the

teacher for fairness and support (Ravet, 2007). Wentzel (1997) has studied the

perceptions of students and reports that "students are more likely to engage in classroom activities if they feel supported and valued" (p. 417).

Munns and Woodward (2006), realize that students may have a "history" with the school system and that it needs to be acknowledged (p. 193). They define student engagement as being cognitive, emotional and behavioural all at once (p. 194). They go a step further than Klem and Connell (2004) who saw that student engagement was composed of these same three components, but separately (p. 262). By involving students in self-assessment strategies, Munns and Woodward (2006) demonstrate that student engagement is achieved by directly involving students in the teachings of the class, with a particular philosophy, which is to change the way teachers address students and deliver classroom instruction (p. 197). The notion of being intricately *involved*, defines student engagement as meaning something more than just being on task (p.197). The gist of this research centers literally around changing the messages sent to students, from a teacher-led classroom to a shared space where self-reflection is valued and respected.

Strategies Contributing to Student Engagement

Engaging practices (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; de la Ossa, 2005; Doveston, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ravet, 2007), *engaging environment* (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hymel, Schonert-Reichl & Miller, 2006; Jones & Jones, 2008; Klem & Connell, 2004; Montalvo, Mansfield & Miller, 2007; Ornelles, 2007), *differentiating instruction* (Anderson & Algozzine, 2007; Bowman, 2004; Campbell, 2004; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; de la Ossa, 2005; Jones & Jones, 2008; Klem & Connell, 2004; Libbey, 2004; Noddings, 2005; Noddings, 2005a; Noddings, 2006; Park, Singer & Gibson, 2005; Ornelles, 2007), and an *engaging teacher* (Bryson &

Hand, 2007; Doveston, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ornelles, 2007; Tate, 2006) are all

factors which research has strongly demonstrated contribute to raising students'

engagement as well as developing purposeful relationships. Student engagement can be

observed via an emotional change and/or a change in behaviour. Skills to enhance student

engagement can be directly taught in a context of cooperative and collaborative learning

by teachers who consciously pay attention to the relationship with the student. When

teachers share the learning space with students they allow them to be directly involved in

their education, raising student engagement and achievement as a result.

     Engaging practices. Ravet (2007) relays examples of the gap that exists between

how students feel and what teachers perceive (p. 345). While addressing feelings

associated with disengagement, she brings up an interesting twist highlighting that

disengaged students still have fun at school. Students might be experiencing boredom in

learning activities and find much enjoyment in disengaging (p. 345). Skinner et al. (2008)

report that boredom can have a significant impact on students' motivation to learn (p.

777). Consequently, they note that "when children find learning activities interesting, fun,

and enjoyable, they will pay more attention and try harder" (Skinner et al., 2008, p. 777).

Fun can be channeled such that it serves a greater purpose. Cassidy and Bates (2005)

report that students felt that at their school "they could laugh and that fun was infused

into the learning" (p. 91). They describe students' perceptions of their school being a safe

place where mistakes can be made and the students' interests are taken into account

(Cassidy & Bates, 2005, p. 91). Relevance of the work also constitutes an important

factor in developing and maintaining student engagement (de la Ossa, 2005; Klem &

Connell, 2004; Skinner et al., 2008). Bryson and Hand (2007) see a link with engaging

practices and state that" teachers and the approaches they take can have a positive influence on the quality of learning" (p. 351).

Engaging environment. Klem and Connell (2004) add another dimension to the promotion of student engagement; the importance of developing an engaging environment. Klem and Connell (2004) acknowledge that "parents would prefer their children experience a caring school environment" and set out to show that such an environment affects student achievement (p. 262). Hymel et al. (2006) highlight that "creating a caring and safe environment is the foundation for both social emotional learning and academic achievement, and teachers hold the key" (p. 158). There is much to be gained by paying attention to the quality of the environment in which the students are welcomed and work for extended periods of time. A nurturing environment where students feel autonomous (Jones & Jones, 2008), a sense of community (Bryson & Hand, 2007) and are validated and encouraged towards positive interactions (Ornelles, 2007), contributes to raising engagement. Klem and Connell stress that although a personalized environment is a necessity as well as a foundation, it is not enough (p. 271). Klem and Connell (2004) emphasize teacher support, the structure around learning goals and being nurturing by explaining, "students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school" (p. 270). Montalvo et al. (2007) add that an environment that promotes achievement encourages mastery, risk taking and confidence in students (p. 146). Hamre and Pianta (2005) raise the concern that inconsistency in the quality of the learning environments only produces short-term results, and that puts students at risk, especially students who receive low maternal support (p. 963). Hence,

not only does the classroom environment need to be nurturing and to offer structure and achievement goals, it is essential that students experience quality in their environment on a yearly basis.

Differentiating instruction. Within an engaging environment lie engaging practices and within those, the ability of teachers to differentiate learning. Noddings (2005) describes this ability as being able to differentiate needs and also being able to offer varied ways through which students can show their learning (p. 150). She talks about a negotiation between the expressed needs of students and inferred needs of teachers, stressing that "balancing expressed and inferred needs is of central importance" (p. 154). Anderson and Algozzine (2007) identify differentiating teachers as recognizing the uniqueness of every child and using that knowledge to pay special attention to learning styles (p. 50).

Differentiated instruction encompasses a wide range of strategies leading to engagement and student involvement. Park et al. (2007) recognize the value of variables such as the work and how it is presented, feedback from teachers and the pace in the classroom, although their study focuses on the teacher's affect on students. Anderson and Algozzine (2007) list several key elements they see as differentiated learning going from the availability of choices in activities, content and assessment strategies to pointing out that teachers who differentiate provide "a learning environment and opportunities that exclude no child" (p. 50). Cassidy and Bates (2005) see this importance of acknowledging each child and discuss how adapting the curriculum to the individual needs of the student allows each student to be successful (p. 84). Bowman's (2004) teachers as leaders "find ways to make meaning personal for students by creating a

shared experience to which students can relate" (p. 189). Jones and Jones (2008) report on the use of cooperative learning strategies as well as the need to allow students to construct meaning (para. 12). Noddings (2005a) thinks along those lines as well in suggesting that teachers need to be able to connect their school subjects to others and help students "make connections between school studies and great existential questions" (para. 13), thus, allowing students to see the big picture. Libbey (2004) mentions safety as one measured component of school life (p. 280). de la Ossa (2005) discusses safety with students and highlights how developing a feeling of safety is beneficial "both academically and psychologically" (p. 33). Cassidy and Bates (2005) also talk about students wanting to feel safe at school in all areas and add that students want to be able to ask for help and be shielded from labels (p. 88). To differentiate instruction is to pay attention to individuality and adapt learning such that it is reachable and safe for all students.

Engaging teachers. Student engagement comprises promising practices, a motivating setting and the ability to address the needs of every student. But student engagement also requires that the teachers rise up to the task. Klem and Connell (2004) state that "students need to feel teachers are involved with them" (p. 262). Bryson and Hand (2007) report that students from their focus groups felt that "enthusiastic and engaged teachers […] were a prerequisite for student engagement" (p. 357). Bryson and Hand (2007) also note that student engagement is related to the enjoyment of what they do and posit that it should be a similar case for teachers (p. 360).

Tate (2006) summarizes his findings of what good teachers do by highlighting that they are passionate, curious and enthusiastic (p. 5). He explains that "it is their

attention to the social, emotional, and moral environment of their classrooms that sets the stage for the trust, confidence and enthusiasm necessary for good learning" (Tate, 2006, p. 17). Good teachers show a commitment to learning and a willingness to keep abreast of current information (Tate, 2006, p. 5). Noddings (2006) adds that "good teachers should never stop asking [questions]" even with regards to the higher goals of education (p. 340). Finally, Tate (2006) recognizes that good teachers give an investment of their whole person (p. 17).

<div align="center">Teacher Attitudes</div>

Teacher Support

Akos and Galassi (2004) state that teachers can play a pivotal role in addressing challenges successfully if they are knowledgeable and sensitive (p. 4). It seems that no matter how the topic of student engagement is turned around, the key element to success lies in the specifics of the teachers' attitudes.

Klem and Connell (2004) explore the concept of student engagement as a result of teacher support. They caution that a non-supportive teacher for one year is related to low engagement in elementary school (p. 10). Jennings and Greenberg (2008) further add that "teachers' negative affect may have long-term effects on students" (p. 11). According to Klem and Connell (2004), students need to feel that teachers are involved with them (p. 3). They recognize that engagement is important and should be the result of teachers creating a supportive and personalized environment as well as conducive to supportive relationships (p. 3).

Many researchers refer to students' perceptions as the indicator of support from teachers (Jennings & Greenberg, 2008; Le Mare & Sohbat, 2002; Patrick, Ryan &

Kaplan, 2007; Skinner & al., 2008; Wentzel, 1997). This stems from the idea that

students each come to school with their own history and personality, which are tied to

their behaviour (Patrick, Ryan & Kaplan, 2007 p. 83). Wentzel (1997) also recognizes

this link to students, and posits "students beliefs that teachers are caring and supportive

reflect, in part, their beliefs about personal control at school" (p. 412). Furrer and Skinner

(2003) identify the perception of control, among other variables, as having an effect on

students' engagement (p. 151). Hence, to start with, students' own beliefs about school

affect their motivation and engagement. Research shows that these beliefs can be

changed and create a desired positive effect on students' engagement. To complete the

circle, Skinner et al. (2008) conclude that "students' perceptions of teacher support

seem[ed] to contribute to changes in engagement over the school year by shaping

children's views of themselves as competent, autonomous, and related to teachers" (p.

778). Students' beliefs can be transformed and, consequently, some of their behaviour.

Jennings and Greenberg's (2008) findings confirm that indeed "teacher support shapes

changes in students' behavioural engagement through its effects on children's perceptions

of the support teachers provide" (p. 776).

Although emotional support is of vital importance to students, caution is

expressed as to the nature of the support. It is important for teachers to recognize that

teacher support consists not only of looking after emotions but also looking after quality

learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Jennings & Greenberg, 2008). Patrick et al. (2007)

discuss two strands within the notion of teacher support: perception of academic support

and the perception of being cared for. The former refers to the teacher caring and helping

with learning, and the latter refers to the teacher liking and caring about the student (p.

84). Patrick et al. (2007) note that often, those two strands are combined together into the more general heading of teacher support (p. 84). Through their findings they show how the two types of support are unique yet tied together:

> students' perceptions of their teacher as providing academic support are intertwined with their perceptions of the teacher as providing emotional support, and these intertwined yet empirically distinct perceptions share a large amount of variance with students' orientation toward learning and understanding in class as well as with their engagement in schoolwork. (p. 94)

Teacher support is an agent of change in students' lives and its magnitude is measured in terms of student engagement but duly filtered through the students' perceptions.

Relationships

Bowman (2004) discusses relationships as being an important asset for teacher-leaders. He notes that teachers need to create an atmosphere that strikes the students as "worth it" (p. 188). Weissberg (2004), as a high school student herself, agrees and adds that a closer relationship with students is formed out of the knowledge of each other, which in turn, impacts student learning (p. 67). Noddings (2007), whose entire body of work could be quoted here, states that showing children we care is far more important than content or using the right strategies (p. 2). Jennings and Greenberg (2008) recognize that "supportive student-teacher relationships provide the keystone to effective classroom management" (p. 10). Because the relationship with students is central to the students' lives, it may be the *most* important component of student engagement.

Teaching Qualities

Tate (2006) reaffirms these themes, and provides a variety of examples of 'how' good teachers 'are'. Though he stresses the importance of taking care of the student's intellectual abilities, Tate (2006) centers mostly on the fact that central to teaching is the relational aspect (p. 7). Good teachers push the boundaries of their personal educational investment (mainly an academic output) and go beyond the expectations of their duties. It is then that the impact is felt by students. Noddings (2006) notes that "for caring teachers the child is more important than the theory" (p. 343). Cassidy and Bates (2005) highlight how teachers in their research also put students first and describe how the teachers "see their role as being different from that of the typical teacher who, they say, is primarily concerned with students' academic success" (p. 87). There is an added component to the quality of teachers who seek to reach all students. One of the students in Cassidy and Bates' (2005) research sums it up by saying "you've got to go beyond the boundaries of what you're supposed to be doing as a teacher to help the person learn" (p. 94).

In their research, Le Mare and Sohbat (2002) explore the teacher qualities that students identify as encouraging help seeking. They start off by listing researched-based, but (more importantly) student confirmed, attributes such as kindness, willingness, competence, and awareness of the students' needs in asking for help (p. 240). Le Mare and Sohbat (2002) further add listening, expectations of the teacher, the perceived teacher-student relationship and the notion that teachers speak 'student language' (pp. 244-248). They acknowledge, "help-seeking interactions were shown in this study to evoke strong feelings" (Le Mare and Sohbat, 2002, p. 251). There is recognition that indeed emotions are part of the student construct of school. With that, the ability of the

teacher to pay attention to finer details, such as avoiding embarrassment for example, or being encouraging and understanding, can yield positive feelings as a result of being sensitive to the students state of being.

Self-Monitoring Attitudes

The purposeful educational relationships issued from 'teacher-investment' are based on a wide variety of attitudes displayed by teachers. Campbell (2004) looks into these attitudes from both a moral and ethical point of view. She explains that although teachers may be aware of their ethical responsibility, consciously monitoring one's own attitudes would be of further benefit in transforming the climate in classrooms. She notes:

> the moral agency of teachers should be regarded as more than an inevitable state of being, created by circumstances that bring adult teachers and children together in a learning environment. As a principle-based role, it should be considered in terms of both deliberate and spontaneous or unconscious intentions, actions and reactions in relation to what teachers teach of a moral and ethical nature and how they interact with students generally. (p.409)

Campbell (2004) recognizes that unconscious displays of attitudes hold quite a bit of value (p. 425). Park, Singer and Gibson (2005) have concentrated their research mainly on the teacher's emotional impact on the achievement of students with severe learning disabilities. They, too, stress the importance of paying attention to the affect teachers may have on students and recognize that there are links between all students' (with and without learning disabilities) emotional states and their achievement (p. 245). Park et al.

(2005) conclude, "when faced with a difficult task, some students perform better when teachers provided prompts and consequences with positive affects" (p. 245).

Jennings and Greenberg (2008) study the impact of teacher-student relationships and note the importance for teachers to be in touch with their own emotional states (pp. 3-5). They present the arguments that teachers who are more socially and emotionally aware create positive environments, model positive interactions, and enhance students' achievement (pp. 9-10). Jennings and Greenberg (2008) note that "supportive relationships with teachers can promote feelings of safety and connectedness among students, providing the social support necessary to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically" (p. 11). However, Jennings and Greenberg (2008) emphasize that a lack of social emotional competence in teachers can have disastrous effects on both students and classroom atmospheres (p. 2). They further add that although many programs exist to teach about social emotional learning, "these programs are primarily focused on teaching students these skills and do not provide explicit instruction to promote social and emotional literacy among teachers" (p. 14). Hence, they suggest interventions and training for teachers (p. 20).

Teacher Qualities Contributing to Relationships

Teacher attitudes have an impact on student learning, and a wide variety of those teacher qualities have been identified through research. For the purpose of this research these research-based teacher qualities were grouped into six attitudes that impact student engagement and that contribute to development of purposeful relationships: *Caring* (Campbell, 2004; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Montalvo, Mansfield & Miller, 2007; Noddings, 1995; Noddings, 2005a; Noddings, 2006; Tate, 2006), *respect*

(Campbell, 2004; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Jarvis & Seifert, 2002; Ravet, 2007; Tate, 2006), *helpfulness/supportive* (Jarvis & Seifert, 2002; Campbell, 2004; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hymel, Schonert-Reichl & Miller 2006; Jarvis & Seifert, 2002; Klem & Connell, 2004; Libbey, 2004; Montalvo, Mansfield & Miller, 2007; Noddings, 1995; Tate, 2006; Ravet, 2007), *fair* (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Campbell, 2004; Libbey, 2004; Ravet, 2007), *being encouraging* (Campbell, 2004; Park, Singer & Gibson, 2005), and *considerate* (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Campbell, 2004; Cassidy and Bates, 2005; Ornelles, 2007; Park, Singer & Gibson, 2005; Ravet, 2007; Tate, 2006).

Caring. Being a caring teacher is often identified as an umbrella quality encompassing many others. Examples of caring help define more precisely what 'caring' is in relation to other terms such as the ones cited above. Much like teacher-support, student perceptions of caring are seen as influencing their engagement (Montalvo, Mansfield & Miller, 2007, citing Phelan, 1992, p. 145; Wentzel, 1997). Noddings (1995) specifies that "caring is not just a warm, fuzzy feeling that makes people kind and likable" (p. 2). On the contrary, caring seems to include more rigorous introspection on the part of the teacher, and thought-out outputs. Noddings (1995) specifies that "caring implies a continuous search for competence", to do one's best in nurturing a relationship and providing a sound education (Noddings, 1995, p. 2).

Tate (2006) describes caring teachers as having a built-in sense of responsibility and commitment for the students (p. 2). He subtly notes that good teachers *accept* students (p. 2). Cassidy and Bates (2005) also describe caring as a commitment and report that the teachers they studied worked "outside of the box" (p. 82). Noddings (2005a) explains that "teachers who work from the care perspective are in constant touch

with their students" (para. 16). In this way, caring teachers are tuned in to the needs of their students to a higher degree. Tate (2006) notes that caring teachers do so despite the lack of reciprocal encouragement from some students (p. 10). Thus, caring teachers go on caring although some students may continue to balk at them. In this paradigm, Tate (2006) adds that teachers exert compassion, and that very compassion can lead to teachers going to "great lengths to serve as advocates for children who have no one to fight for them" (p. 12). Further to that, Tate (2006) observes that "best teachers have a special place in their hearts for the students that others have found unlovable" (p. 12; Campbell, 2004). Caring teachers go the extra emotional step without getting "touchy-feely or sentimental with students" (Tate, 2006, p. 11).

Although caring means a higher emotional awareness and output, Wentzel (1997) lists communication as part of being perceived as caring, especially communicating behavioural expectations (p. 417). Campbell (2005) identifies "creating the right environment, building relationships, showing respect, adapting the curriculum, being empathetic and nonreactive, and working in the youths' best interest" as qualities encompassed under being caring (p. 82). Noddings (2005) cites dialogue and the negotiation of needs as part of the caring teacher's attributes (p. 157). Cassidy and Bates (2005) state that "caring is seen as embedded in relationships, as needing to be recognized by the receiver of care, as individually focused, and as being variably responsive to students' needs as whole beings" (p. 95). Caring is the business of paying attention to the individual in such a way that attention is paid to the receiver's individuality and personal social and academic educational needs are met.

Respect. Cassidy and Bates (2005) state "students see their teachers' respect for them as key to their success at school" (p. 89). Respect strikes a chord with students and teachers often because both parties expect it to start with. The response from students is often a lack of interest and engagement in school when respect does not come from the adults first (Jarvis & Seifert, 2002; Ravet, 2007). Not only is it paramount to initiate and give respect to students, but it is equally important to respect students as individuals (Campbell, 2004; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Tate, 2006). As a result, respect can and will flow in both directions (Cassidy & Bates, 2005, p. 89). In order to be conducive to motivation in learning, respect must be seen as a fundamental part of the educational climate (Jarvis & Seifert, 2002).

Help and support. The intricacies of the nature of support are discussed at the beginning of this section. This part focuses on examples of what help and support might look like for teachers and students.

Cassidy and Bates (2005) report that students in their study value direct help with schoolwork and also in the way it is presented and taught (pp. 89-90). They discuss how students also appreciate support with personal and emotional issues (pp. 90-92). Tate (2006) speaks of good teachers in the same sense, remarking they "will do almost anything to help their students grow intellectually, morally, and physically" (p. 3). Good teachers do so through careful planning, creating better environments, and advocating for students (p. 3). Teachers who provide adequate emotional support to students may also be able to alter the continuum of social challenges some students face, and encourage engagement on the part of the students (Hamre & Pianta, 2005, p. 962).

In practice, teacher help and support can be simple, yet vital, everyday actions that make a world of difference for the students. For example, talking to students about their life, or school-related topics that enthrall them seems to count for a lot (Campbell, 2004); Noddings, 1995). Montalvo et al. (2007) list one on one support, feedback, and an interest in students' lives as elements of support (p. 144). Libbey (2004) adds praise, good teaching, and help with problems as counting as support from teachers (p. 281). Ravet (2007) highlights how students long for teachers who listen, understand them, believe them and allow students to have a say (p. 349). In any case, help and support come in the form of an interaction between the teachers and students, which in turn contributes to the development of a purposeful relationship. Klem and Connell (2004) conclude that learning support and high expectations paired with a personalized environment result in much higher achievement and engagement levels (p. 271).

Fairness. Bryson and Hand (2007) note that "sensitivity to students' sense of equity and justice appears to be a key element in developing and maintaining trust" (p. 358). Fairness is important to students and is identified as one of the measures by which they perceive the quality of the teacher-student relationship (Ravet, 2007, p. 350). Encompassed into this concept are items such as how rules are enforced, how others are treated, and how discipline is handled (Libbey, 2004, p. 279). Campbell (2004) states in her work that "of greatest concern to most of the teachers is to ensure that they are treating students with fairness at all times" (p. 413). She exposes how the teacher in her study "engages in considerable self-reflection on her level of fairness and courage" and is careful to treat student equitably (pp. 415-423). Fairness is seen both as being equitable and holding justice. To be fair in an equitable sense, teachers must gain the confidence to

justify their thinking, hold firm and promote dignity for all students (Campbell, 2004, pp. 417-420). To be fair in a judicial sense Campbell (2004) admits that "there are many occasions and contexts in which the fairest course of action may be to treat students differently" (p. 413). Thus, fairness requires the recognition of individuality.

Encouraging and considerate. Encouragement is a quality that can take many forms. For some students, it is the kinds words (Campbell, 2004, 413) whereas for others it means being understanding and providing adjustments in the type of work or the length of time to complete assignments (Ravet, 2007, p. 350). Encouragement often seems to be marked by an emotional response that is transmitted to the students. Cassidy and Bates (2005) describe teachers in their study as valuing students and supporting them in identifying their talents (p. 87) -hence, bringing them further along on the learning continuum. Ornelles (2007) adds that recognizing students' uniqueness can lead to better relationships with peers as well as higher levels of engagement (p. 11). In this sense, encouragement is seen as showing students that they are worth it.

Tate (2006) notes that good teachers can be so passionate about learning that they can recreate the same passion in their students, and it can last a lifetime (p. 5). Bryson and Hand (2007) identify enthusiasm as a central element and state that "the disposition of the teacher appears to make an enormous difference to the disposition of the student" (pp. 357-359). They add that engagement rises when the teacher is enthusiastic for both the subject and the process (p. 359). Thus, teachers simply enjoying what they do, and showing it, can affect how the students feel about school and learning.

Warmth appears as a theme in research, sometimes fused with enthusiasm, sometimes pertaining to developing a sense of community. Associated with warmth are

qualities such as being accessible and being welcoming (Bryson and Hand, 2007; Ravet, 2007; Tate, 2007). Cassidy and Bates (2005) reiterate these themes highlighting how students feel a sense of safety as a result (p. 88). The consideration of the students contributes to creating this feeling and more. Ravet (2007) notes that students enjoy teachers who made jokes and who handle disengaged behaviours discreetly (p. 350). Campbell (2004) reports on a teacher talking about being empathetic towards students and investing the time to understand the motives behind students' behaviours (p. 416). In this paradigm "considerate" encompasses the traits of warmth, accessibility, being welcoming, being discreet, humour, and empathy.

<div align="center">Teacher-Student Purposeful Relationships</div>

Emotions and Relationships

The emotional component is present within the establishment of relationships as well as within the perceptions of engagement. Students react not only to the way they are taught but also to the person who is teaching them. It is equally as important for teachers to build relationships, as it is important to display proper attitudes, and figure out the right way to engage students. All three concepts are intricately related: student engagement, teacher attitudes and relationships. According to Witmer (2005), citing Caine and Caine (1994), "relationships in the classroom have an impact on student achievement because the brain does not automatically or perceptually separate cognition from emotions" (p. 224). Hence, the nature of teacher-student relationships affects the way students perceive engagement. It also affects the way students may respond to the teacher. Witmer (2005) explains that "teachers who can 'connect' with their students are generally more engaging in the classroom and can make learning more meaningful for

their students" (p. 224). Furthermore, relationships have an impact on the teacher as well.

Tate (2006), citing Clark and Jensen (1992), stresses that good teaching and professional

satisfaction rests on quality relationships (p. 7). Building purposeful relationships is a

source of motivation for both the teacher and the students. Jennings and Greenberg

(2008) acknowledge that building relationships with students is crucial yet not always

easy (p. 10). The students who benefit from the relationship the most can also be the

students who exhaust the teachers the most (p. 11). That negative affect can have an

impact on students and may last for years (p. 11). Hence, Jennings and Greenberg (2008)

recognize the importance of the teacher being a role model (p. 10), and the need for social

emotional competence (SEC) training (p. 20). In all, relationships can affect students and

teachers profoundly. Although managing behaviours can be the cause of emotional stress,

a purposeful relationship can counter this negativity and be uplifting for both the teacher

and the student.

Building Relationships

Through their review of research on pro-social classrooms, Jennings and

Greenberg (2008) identify two concepts which describe the ability to develop purposeful

relationships with students: "psychological-mindedness" and "withitness" (pp. 15-17).

"Psychological mindedness" refers to the teacher's own emotional response awareness,

the ability to show empathy in response to students' emotions, and the ability to teach

social emotional skills (p. 15). "Withitness" is a term coined by Kounin (1977), as cited

in Jennings and Greenberg (2008), and refers to a teacher being able to recognize the

slightest emotional and behaviour changes in students and effectively monitor and

address these changes with the students (pp. 17-18). A relationship implies that there is knowledge of another such that particular attention can be given.

Specific attitudes contribute to relationships and, in turn, the relationships allow teachers to reach students in a far more meaningful way (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Cornelius-White, 2007). In class, students respond on an emotional level which means that they are sensitive to the way they are taught. Whether they are in higher education (Bryson & Hand, 2007) or struggling with mild disabilities (Park, Singer & Gibson, 2005) students are influenced by the attitudes of the teacher. Bryson and Hand (2007) comment "at the levels of class or task, the disposition of the teacher appears to make an enormous difference in the disposition of the student" (p. 359). Klem and Connell (2004) report that elementary students are more impacted by low levels of teacher support and that may be a function of having only one teacher to draw support from (p. 270). Le Mare and Sohbat (2002) describe how perceived negative teacher-student relationships affect how students feel about seeking support (p. 248). If the relationship between the teacher and the student is limited, then so is the engagement. Hamre and Pianta (2005) and Ray (2007) both recognize the long lasting effect of positive teacher-student relationships. Ray (2007) also adds that each relationship is particular and requires a different set of attitudes. She explains:

> the quality of the relationship is individualized to each dyad and dependent on the individual characteristics of the particular teacher and the particular student involved. Problematic student behavior is somewhat stressful for all teachers but how a teacher responds to this behavior may impact the student's academic, psychological, and social development. (para. 9)

To elevate the quality of the teacher-student relationship, teachers need to draw from a set of attitudes and skills that are conducive to developing students socially and academically. Campbell (2004) notes that although teachers have the ability to measure acts of caring and render them deliberately, spontaneity is of greater "enduring effects" (p. 425). Patrick et al. (2007) recommend "attending to the quality of social relationships and environments that foster them is an important factor in promoting positive student motivation and engagement" (p. 94). Although some teachers may be "natural" at what they do, building relationships requires a conscious and deliberate effort.

Skills Contributing to Purposeful Relationships

Research has yielded several skills that contribute to developing teacher-student relationships: *Personalizing purposeful relationships* (Bowman, 2004; Campbell, 2004; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Montalvo, Mansfield & Miller, 2007; Tate, 2006; Witmer, 2005), *nurturing* (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Jarvis & Seifert, 2002; Tate, 2006), *trust* (Bowman, 2004; Bryson & Hand, 2007; Campbell, 2004; Cornelius-White, 2007; Noddings, 1995; Noddings, 2005a; Sook-Jeong, 2007), *acceptance* (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Cornelius-White, 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hymel, Schonert-Reichl & Miller, 2006; Libbey, 2004; Ray, 2007; Tate, 2006), *building relationship with parents* (de la Ossa, 2005; Ravet, 2007; Tate, 2006; Witmer, 2005), *listening* (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Noddings, 2005; Noddings, 2005a; Noddings, 2006), and *empowering students* (Campbell, 2004; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Doveston, 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hymel, Schonert-Reichl & Miller, 2006; Jarvis & Seifert, 2002; Jones & Jones, 2008; Klem & Connell, 2004; Libbey, 2004; Munns & Woodward, 2006; Noddings, 2005;

Noddings, 2005a; Tate, 2006; Ravet, 2007; Rogers, Bolick, Anderson, Gordon, Manfraw & Yow, 2007; Weissberg, 2004).

Personalizing purposeful relationships. While a human touch can make a difference in any walk of life, in teaching, it has the possibility to ignite and sustain engagement. Bowman (2004) explains that sharing stories plays an important role for human beings because they allow "a lens through which they can view things that happen to them" (p. 188). Bowman (2004) adds that stories contribute to developing confidence and as teacher-leaders use them "they capture interest and sustain collective engagement" (p.188). Sharing stories opens the door to knowing another person a little bit better. When students share stories it allows the teacher some insights into each personality. As a means to establish a positive connection it might prove beneficial for teachers to share some stories as well. Campbell (2004) relates the story of teachers who share a few stories to bring relevance to learning and to develop empathy (p. 412). Stories need not be personal but a connection may allow for a better understanding of a student's situation, for example.

Witmer (2005) states that "students want to know who the teacher is as a person" (p. 225). Sharing stories is important and Witmer (2005) recognizes the importance of doing so as well as teachers' levels of comfort in sharing (p. 225). Tate (2007) notes that good teachers do not necessarily share large amounts of information about themselves; however, they "do not hide their true selves" (p. 6). It is therefore possible for students to get to know the teacher to a certain degree. Tate (2007) describes good teachers as being able to consider the "human" side of teaching and as being able to invest time in building relationships with students (p. 13). Cassidy and Bates (2005) stress the importance of this

very concept and state that teachers can fill many other roles at any given times (p. 83).

In providing caring, listening, encouragement, and role modeling, teachers see to the

development of a relationship that has the potential to foster growth (pp. 83-83). Cassidy

and Bates (2005) state "relationships are paramount to… change" (p. 84). Thus, the path

towards improving attitudes or grades in school lies in the establishment of a relationship

with the teacher.

     Montalvo et al. (2007) and Campbell (2004) both suggest that showing an interest

in the students is another step towards developing a relationship. Montalvo et al. (2007)

note that students value "a caring and approachable teacher who provides written

feedback, one-on-one assistance, and who is interested in students' lives outside of

school" (p. 144). Campbell (2004) believes that asking about the little things makes a

difference if only by demonstrating empathy with students' particular situations (p. 416).

It is often the little everyday interactions that count the most!

     Nurturing. Tate (2007) identifies "nurturant" as being "the closest adjective in

English for the cardinal virtue of the relational responsibilities of teaching" (p. 8).

Nurturing implies that there is an investment of some kind on the part of the person

nurturing, almost like *working towards*. Tate (2007) explains how being nurturant has

been considered rather less valuable since the Greeks and calls for the recognition that

"the kind of care required in nurturing a child to learn in a classroom is complex and

crucial" (p. 8). Essentially, Tate (2007) describes good, nurturant teachers as knowing

exactly what to do and when to allow students to grow (p. 9). Jarvis and Seifert (2002)

point out that "if teachers are not perceived as being helpful, respectful, or nurturing, then

learning-goal pursuit declines" (p. 11). Bryson and Hand (2007) note that students

express the need to see relationships nurtured (p. 358). Being nurturing might very well refer to the ability of a teacher to read and address a student's needs and to continue working towards scaffolding the combination of addressing needs as well as helping the student move along on the continuum of learning.

   Trust. An integral aspect in the construction of purposeful relationships is the notion of trust. Students and teachers alike want to be trusted (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Cornelius-White, 2007; Noddings, 1995). Campbell (2004) observes how a teacher she studied starts off trusting her students with the confidence that, in return, trust will grow between the students and the teacher (p. 418). Much like respect, trust that comes from the teacher first contributes to a positive relationship. Lee (2007) explores the notion of trust in Korean schools and explains how trust works as a motivator and fosters more positive psychological and emotional perceptions in students (p. 210). This in turn, promotes the development of more positive attitudes towards school and raises student achievement (pp. 210-211). Lee (2007) concludes that "student-teacher trust relationships have effects on academic performance by having influence over school adjustment and academic motivation" (p. 215). Noddings (1995) describes how this comes about by simply stating "first, as we listen to our students, we gain their trust and, in an on-going relation of care and trust, it is more likely that students will accept what we try to teach" (para. 12). Trust is a fragile value. Bowman (2004) sees trust "inextricably linked to honesty and sincerity" (p.189). Trust means putting a little of our faith into the hands of someone else. Regardless of the grade, for students to receive trust means that they matter.

Acceptance. I have included with the idea of acceptance the concept of belonging. Acceptance in school brings a sense of belonging. Although it could be argued that belonging to a group does not necessarily mean that one is accepted, in looking at building purposeful relationships, the teacher seeks to achieve both a sense of acceptance and of belonging. Hymel et al. (2006) define belonging as " the degree to which students feel that they are cared for and respected and to which they feel connected to or bonded with others in the school" (p. 164). Libbey (2004) includes items such as interest in students, respect, participation at school and availability of teachers as part of a wider description of belonging (p. 278). Bryson and Hand (2007) observe that students who experience a sense of belonging seem to enjoy their study more (p. 354). They emphasize how building relationships contributes to the development a sense of community and in turn increases engagement (Bryson & Hand, 2007, p. 354).

Cassidy and Bates (2005) observe how students they interviewed "placed a high value on being acknowledged and understood" (p. 88). Hence, the humanistic aspect of school marks the students. For students, knowing that they count can lead them back to school, towards academic and social gains (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Ray, 2007). Hymel et al. (2006) note that "school belonging appears to be a significant determinant of students' present and future educational functioning" (p. 168). In establishing relationships where students feel like they matter, teachers provide the motivation for those students to come back to school everyday!

Building relationships with parents. The relationship with the teacher influences parents as well as students, their relationship with school and their willingness to be supportive. Witmer (2005) highlights that "parents often form their opinions about the

quality of a whole school based on their relationship with their child's teacher" (p. 225). Tate (2007) asserts that excellent teachers know a lot about children in general and about their students in particular (p. 10). He mentions how "parents often claim that excellent teachers know more about the parents' children than they do themselves" (Tate, 2007, p.10). A positive relationship can foster involvement. Witmer (2005) notes that when teachers reach out to parents in a positive manner, parents may be far more receptive when having to deal with academic or behavioural issues (p. 226). Witmer (2005) states, "encouraging parental involvement and partnering with parents are key components to establishing these helpful relationships" (p. 226). Ravet (2007), on the other hand, presents situations and contexts in which parents' interpretations of their children's disengagement demonstrates how important the relationships with the teacher are (p. 355). Parents have only their own school experiences as references. Thus, by involving parents and working towards positive relationships with them, teachers can reaffirm, recreate, or improve the school experience such that it benefits families rather than just individual students.

  Listening. Listening seems to be the quality teachers want most out of students, perhaps forgetting that students themselves have an incredible need to be listened to. Cassidy and Bates (2005) report on suggestions students have made for beginner teachers to consider. Not only do students wish to be cared for but they also want "teachers to listen to them" (p. 94). Noddings (2005) describes how caring teachers listen to students and juggle the needs of the students as well as the need for them to learn (p. 156). Noddings (2005a) further adds that by listening to the students teachers are able to "help them acquire the knowledge and attitudes needed to achieve their goals, not those of a

pre-established curriculum" (p. 2). In being able to listen and support students along, a difference seems to emerge between being able to listen and hearing. Noddings (2006) uses both the terms 'listen' and 'hear' to refer to teachers understanding and addressing students' needs (p. 341). She notes that teachers "hear their students' expressed needs, whether those needs are expressed verbally or in some other way" (p. 341). Thus, the ability to listen to students does not simply mean to engage in an exchange of conversation and feedback but also to hear the underlying messages that may be conveyed by the students.

Empowering students. Communication plays a vital role in developing relationships. Students build their perceptions of teachers and of the state of relationships based on the messages they receive on an ongoing basis. Jarvis and Seifert (2002) stress the importance for teachers to pay attention to how they communicate with students in areas such as expectations, practices, reasons for success and failure in school (p. 11). Munns and Woodward (2006) examine how students seem to receive messages that lead to their disengagement (p. 199). Munns and Woodward (2006) acknowledge how the impact is felt more particularly by students who struggle and who come from disadvantaged backgrounds (p. 199). Students look to teachers for acceptance, guidance and inspiration. As they thread through the education system they can simply go through the motions, sometimes reluctantly, or have a first-hand in their own achievement. Munns and Woodward (2006) explain how their research project evolved from merely asking students' feedback about learning to designing "ways of encouraging the students to think more deeply about their processes of learning and the relationship between reflection and engaged learners" (p. 202). Students can develop the motivation to come to school not

only for the fun extra-curricular activities but also for the knowledge that they can influence their own learning. Campbell (2004) notes, as a step towards building trust, that teachers can negotiate some parts of schooling such as times for assignments or exams (p. 418). Libbey (2004) also mentions the availability for students to make decisions and "whether students can design independent projects and teachers listen to student suggestions" as a measure contributing towards a sense of connectedness (p. 280).

Cassidy and Bates (2005) describe how teachers in their study "gave students a voice in decision making about curriculum" (p. 96). This matters greatly to students. Ravet (2007) reports that sometimes students feel like they do not have a say for various reasons, the main one being that teachers are too engrossed in their own endeavor to pay attention to what the students are trying to express (p. 349). Hymel et al. (2006) acknowledge the need for students to feel like they belong to the school community and that being able to have a voice increases this feeling (pp. 164-165). Thus, involving students in the process of learning contributes to their engagement. Klem and Connell (2004) recognize that students have a need to want to make decisions and specify how "they also need a clear sense of structure within which to make those decisions" (p. 262). The control of the classroom can be an ongoing exchange in which the students learn to make decisions. Jones and Jones (2008) note that "to create expectations [however] is to realize that the teacher is not in control of students' thoughts and actions, that it is in fact the students who can be responsible for their own choices" (p. 4). Still, with younger grades, it is part of the learning process for students to realize that they can transform their own achievement. Noddings (2005) emphasizes that through the process of dialogue teachers do their part and "students should be encouraged to criticize and re-evaluate

their own interests, wants and purposes" (p. 157). Having a say perhaps comes with the responsibility of playing an active role in shaping one's own learning, including a reflection of the process as well as assessment practices. Quite an endeavor for young students, yet attainable within the process of developing purposeful relationships.

Giving students a voice and empowering them yields some benefits for students, teachers, and for the improvement of practice in general. Doveston (2007) notes how involving students in the classroom decision process for her research impacted practice at the school during the following years (p. 48). Rogers et al. (2007) report how giving students a voice allowed teachers to "view [my] students as unique learners [instead of] clumping students together or making decisions for efficiency" (p. 220). Allowing students to be heard provides great insights into their thinking and learning processes and emotional connections. Noddings (2005a) adds that by communicating with students "we gain important ideas from them about how to build our lessons and plan for their individual progress" (para. 12). Hamre and Pianta (2005) stress that "high quality feedback and the engagement of students in discussion of academic concepts may be particularly important in facilitating achievement gains for children with fewer economic resources" (p. 961). Thus, the level of communication allows the teacher to adjust teaching as well as create the cycle through which a relationship between achievement, feedback and dialogue is ongoing and circular.

Effects of Relationships

Furrer and Skinner (2003) suggest that relationships play an important role for students. They note that "secure attachments and their corresponding internal representations functions as safe haven, allowing children the freedom to explore and to

engage constructively in activities and interactions with other" (p. 148). Skinner et al. (2008) discuss that feelings of relatedness contribute to a sense of belonging (p. 768) and that "children who began the year secure in their relationships with teachers increased in their effort and enjoyment" (p. 777). Skinner et al. (2008) also note the opposite effect in that students who are not as secure in their relationship with teachers tend to decrease effort and interest as the year moves along (p. 777). When the relationship is positive, student engagement tends to increase. Students are more motivated, willing to take risks and to work on just about any goals if they feel that they are trusted and liked by the teacher (Montalvo, Mansfield & Miller, 2007; Noddings, 2005; Witmer 2005). To prolong the benefits of positive relationships, one idea is that teacher and students might continue working together in subsequent years as long as both parties consent (Noddings 1995; Noddings, 2006). Investing in a purposeful teacher-student relationship, however, is not necessarily an easy concept for all as it requires an ability to let go of educational control. The belief that the adults have superior knowledge holds firm not only educationally but also culturally (Noddings, 2005a; O'Brien & Moules, 2007; Ravet, 2007). This can result in relationships that are one-sided and of low quality; engagement can be affected. Klem and Connell (2004) put forward the concept that by demonstrating the correlation between teacher support and student engagement "program designers and investors gain the idea of the payoff in student engagement associated with improving relationships between teachers and students" (p. 270). Clearly, there is much to be gained when teachers are able to develop purposeful relationships.

Literature Review in a Nutshell

Engagement is formed of three basic components: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. These components interact and affect each other to various degrees at different point in students' lives. At times, defining engagement is more easily accomplished by looking at how students become disengaged. Teachers and students are affected by engagement and disengagement.

Engagement, or disengagement, is often noticeable through the positive (+R) or negative reactions (-R) that students display on a daily basis (Figure 1). The manner in which teachers choose to react to these displays increases or decreases student engagement. Teachers can have a hand in raising student engagement by working on building purposeful relationships, and by paying attention to the quality of their interactions with students. Research yields a great number of skills and attitudes that can transform the way students perceive school. These skills and attitudes are regrouped in three main subject areas: Teacher Attitudes, Engagement, and Building Relationships. Each of these three main subject areas includes eight smaller themes, which contribute to building purposeful relationships and raising engagement. The link between relationships and engagement becomes increasingly evident throughout the description of the eight themes in each main subject area. Developing purposeful relationships holds the potential to transform students' lives. It is the students' perceptions however, that continue to prevail throughout the school year. Figure 1 summarizes the literature review by depicting the relationships between student engagement and the components for building purposeful relationships.
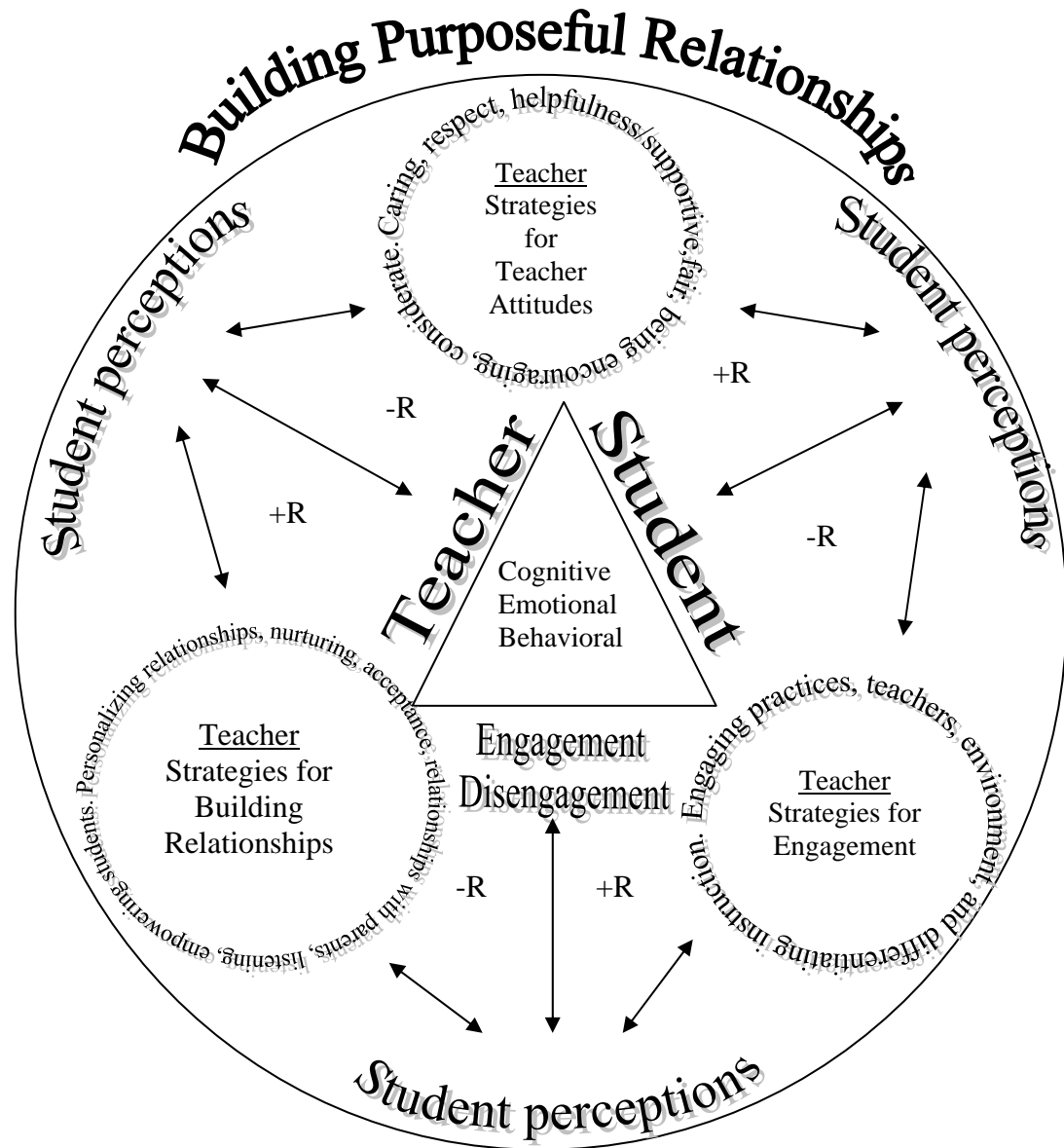
Figure 1. Relation between engagement and the components for building purposeful

relationships.

Chapter 3: Method

Through this research I wanted to encourage students to look back at the positive attitudes and skills displayed by a teacher they have enjoyed. It is not only good teaching that impact students but the attitudes embedded within, as well as the delivery mode. In the spirit of encouraging scaffolding by educators, I seek to expose the students' versions of what makes a difference in their schooling.

This chapter first presents the research and the thinking behind the emphasis on students' responses. The selection of participants and the modalities of the work sessions follow, along with a discussions of the methods on which this research is based: Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Lickert-type scales, surveys, and journaling. The Lickert-type scales and the survey questions are available in appendix A, B and C. Variants that may affect the data collection such as parents, the *Halo effect* and the *Hawthorne effect* are discussed and considered in the data collection process. Finally, I explain how the data is organized according to the three different strands initially developed for this research.

Students as Researchers

Although the impact of teacher attitudes, relationships and engagement is felt by students, they are seldom included in the processes that seek to improve their school life. Students are aware of the issues. In this research they were given the opportunity to participate as researchers. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) specify that action research "addresses fundamental issues of power and power relationships, for, in according power to participants, action research is seen as an empowering activity" (p. 301). "Students as researchers" is a new avenue in the realm of action research and stems from the growing perspective that children can be agents of change. Ravet (2007) notes

that "young children, like adults, are active agents in their own learning, and are capable of, and entitled to, full democratic participation in research pertaining to their interests" (p. 334). O'Brien and Moules (2007) also mention the democratic value of children's input. They go deeper into the participatory model by having students involved in establishing the process of the research as well (p. 387). Doveston (2007) calls her action research "emancipatory" because it is "aimed at empowering the participants by giving them the self-confidence to challenge accepted ways" (p. 47). Although her explanation is specific to her research about social and emotional development, the reason for using that method seems valid. Students who participate in this research gain a sense of empowerment and learn to recognize in more teachers the conditions that lead to successful purposeful relationships in school.

This research project is similar to the work done by Ravet (2007) and Doveston (2007) in that it seeks to give students a voice, and puts them front and center. Much like the method used by O'Brien and Moules (2007), my research also seeks to involve students in some of the research processes, although because it takes roots in researched facts to start with, I, the adult, am imposing somewhat of an adult perspective. However, in terms of student engagement, teacher attitudes and teacher-student relationships, students should qualify as field experts. In order to maintain a positive tone to my project, I have chosen to anchor the process in the stages of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Doveston (2007) explains how AI focuses on what works based on the assumption that there is room for growth (p. 48). Students are therefore given the opportunity to think about actions and words that made school work for them at distinct points in time, and they are given the opportunity to express this message to the larger educational community.

Interestingly, the room for growth seems almost continuous since what works for one student might not work exactly in the same manner for another. In that way, investigating students' thoughts and responses contributes to creating, perhaps even confirming, a baseline upon which to measure current attitudes, skills and levels of relationships.

Participant Selection

I collaborated with, and collected information from, students who have completed their elementary schooling. These "Students as Researchers" were currently in grade 7 at either of the two Middle Schools in our city. A group of 11 students were selected to represent the seven public elementary schools, the District Behavioural Program and the two language programs offered (Mainstream English and French immersion). Our School District has an Enhancement Agreement with the Ktunaxa Band and has developed an extensive set of goals aimed at increasing Aboriginal student achievement. Across my sample Aboriginal students were also represented. However, they did not form a distinct sub-group nor were they specifically identified. Accordingly, with respect to ethnicity, most students were Caucasian, which reflects the make up of the community. The criteria for picking the participants aimed at creating a homogenous grouping that represented the feeder schools rather than any particular individual or sub-group.

Academic abilities were not a leading factor in selecting the students As the literature review shows, some students can come to school and do as they are asked without really being engaged (Klem & Connell, 2004). However, a range of abilities was considered, including whether students were on an Individual Educational Plan (IEP), behavioural or academic. One student was on a behavioural IEP.

In order to represent both genders, five boys and five girls were selected. In addition, a boy with some experience in the Behavioural Program was included, bringing the total "Students as Researchers" group to 11. Students were selected based on their grade six attendance at one of the seven public Elementary schools, feeding into the two public Middle Schools. A boy or a girl from each of the Elementary schools was selected. Within that grouping, five students, three boys and two girls, were selected from three schools with a lower socio-economic status. Included in that group was the boy with some experience in the District Elementary Behaviour Program. The remaining six students, three boys and three girls, were selected from the schools of middle to highest socio-economic status. Included in that group were two students, a boy and a girl, selected from the French Immersion program. Grade seven students were informed that their selection was based on the last school they attended during their Elementary years in order to preserve their self-esteem about their academic abilities.

Table 1 represents the gender distribution split amongst the seven Public Elementary Schools. It also highlights the selection of students per District Programs as well as the socio-economic spread within the school district. The selected students were not past students of mine, but they attended school in the same district where I teach. The Elementary Schools represented in this project have populations that range from 140 to 355 students. One Elementary school offers French Immersion and one Elementary school houses the District Behavioural Program.

Table 1

Student Participation

Schools/Programs	Girls	Boys
French Immersion Program	1	1
District Severe Behaviour Program	-	1
School 1 –Low Socio-Economic Status	1	-
School 2 –Low Socio-Economic Status	1	-
School 3 – Low Socio-Economic Status	-	1
School 4 – English Stream of Dual Track School (which includes French Immersion). Average Socio-Economic Status	1	-
School 5 –Average Socio-Economic Status	-	1
School 6 –Higher Socio-Economic Status	1	-
School 7 –Higher Socio Economic Status	1	1

Setting –The Breakfast Club

The research took place at each of the Middle Schools. Both schools are similar in

size with an average of 470 students and offer varied programs in the Arts and Sports.

French Immersion continues to be offered at one of the two Middle Schools. The largest

sample of students in the research group came from one of the Middle Schools. However,

to make sure that French Immersion was represented, it became necessary to include

students from the other Middle School. In my sample, nine students formed a group

(Middle School 1) and two students formed the second group (Middle School 2), for a

total of eleven students.

I met with the students at their respective schools, after school. With the larger group, we were offered a classroom space. However, more conducive to the type of work we were doing, we were subsequently offered the space which usually housed the "Breakfast Club". Hence, the group earned the nickname "The Breakfast Club"! The Breakfast Club was situated a few doors down the hall from the school's central office. With the smaller group, we met in an office adjacent the school's central office. The school is newly renovated and the space is usually used for meetings.

<div align="center">*Procedure*</div>

Students were asked to reflect on their schooling from kindergarten to grade six, and identify teachers who stood out for them. The identity of these teachers has remained anonymous. Students were asked to complete three surveys: *student engagement, teacher attitude,* and *relationships*, as well as responding to a reflective open-ended question to allow for refining answers if there was a need.

The surveys each began with a four-point Likert-type scale asking students to indicate how frequently they were the recipients of qualities attached to *student engagement, teacher attitude,* and *relationships.* The students were given the choice of answers ranging from "All the time" to "Rarely". The intent was for students to measure how perceptible each quality or skill was, and if the rate of perception affected the ability to recognize actions that are said to match the qualities or skills identified in the literature. These qualities and skills were taken from a body of research indicating that they contributed to raising student engagement, teacher attitudes, and building relationships.

For each question on the surveys, participants were asked to provide concrete examples whenever possible. Participants were given the choice to respond by indicating what the qualities "looked like, sounded like, and felt like." They were able to answer all three or choose one. This contributed to developing a list of "ideas" from participants as to what concrete expressions, teachers have used to demonstrate qualities identified in research.

The reflective open-ended questions were set to provide participants with the opportunity to add to their survey answers as well as provide information about the ongoing process of the action research, or any other aspect of the research.

Data Collection

The Alberta Teachers' Association (2000) document suggests "collect data from as many sources as possible" and further stresses the importance of triangulating data to "increase the credibility of the information" (p. 21). In working with students, Ravet (2007) addresses triangulation through the research design itself, by using multiple activities to get authentic data from students (p. 340). She explains, "this enabled pupils to revisit their perceptions (…) again and again, from various different angles, and using different mode of expression and communication" (p. 340). This is what I sought to achieve by offering a Likert-type scale accompanied by questions, and by planning for a reflective question the following session. Students then had the possibility to revisit their previous answers and refine them if needed. Montalvo et al. (2007) used different scales to move around their topic of motivation and engagement, allowing similar data to be collected through various scales, as well as sub-topics to be explored (pp. 147-148). While I explore three sub-topics (student engagement, teacher attitudes and

relationships), some questions may overlap due to the similarity of the terms and provide information in a broader sense. The reflective aspect of the research then becomes essential in helping clarify and refine data collected.

The baseline information to start this project was drawn from students with seven years of schooling experience each, their previous daily observations, their previous conversations with parents, their experience with teachers and administrators, and research as presented in the literature review.

The information gathered through research shows that student engagement encompasses a wide range of positive and negative behaviour. Teachers' perceptions of engagement focus mostly on a show of positive "on-task" behaviour in class, whereas students include an emotional component to engagement. Their perceptions focus on relationships between teachers and students, and the ease with which teachers can be approached. Teacher attitudes play an important role in the delivery of instruction and in the careful construction of purposeful educational relationships with students. The results greatly impact student engagement.

Although parental feedback (written on report cards, notes and cards, or through informal conversations) has proven to be relevant to some extent, it is truly the accounts of the students that offer the most relevant information; their perceptions of how teachers feel about them matters most in their education.

Data for this research was collected through meetings at both Middle Schools. Students meeting in Middle School 1 -*The Breakfast Club*- met for three, one-hour sessions, over the span of four weeks: one session per week with the exception of one week. These sessions took place in January and February 2010. Students meeting in

Middle School 2 -*The Renovated School*- met for one, one-hour session. The students at Middle School 2 were keen to answer all three surveys in one session, mainly because they formed a group of two. They provided feedback about the process at regular intervals during the session.

Information was gathered through the following methods:

- Surveys: Three sets of Likert-type scales made of eight statements rather than questions, highlighting researched behaviours and attitudes relating to teacher attitudes, students engagement, and teacher-student relationships. Table 2 provides an example of the four-point scale used with each questions.

Table 2

Sample of Likert-type scale

1. I feel that teacher had a *caring* attitude towards me.
All the time   *Most of the time*   *Some of the time*   *Rarely*

- Open-ended interview questions: Questions allowing students to define clearly what the behaviour or attitude experienced "looked like, sounded like, felt like". Table 3 shows an example of the table students were asked to fill.

Table 3

Sample of open-ended questions accompanying the Likert-type scale

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher cared about you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

- Open-ended reflective question: At the beginning of sessions 2 and 3, students were asked a reflective question about the previous session, and given the opportunity to add to their thoughts. Table 4 provides a sample of the reflective poster that was used with the group at Middle School 1.

Table 4

Sample of poster used for reflective questions

<u>Reflections</u>

Use a sticker to show how you feel our research project is going. The closer to the center, the more satisfied you are.

- Do you feel you are able to share everything you want?
- Would you like to add details to your thoughts?
- How do you feel the research project is going?
- Do you have suggestions about the process?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?
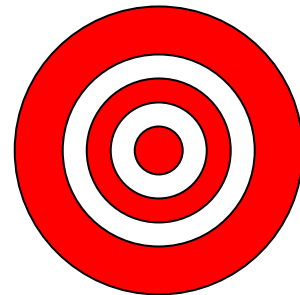
- Journaling for myself, as a means to record verbal feedback about the sessions and questions themselves, and to add observations and notes about students' non-verbal language.

Once we proceeded with the first session we were able to reflect on the process formally during the two following sessions. I had made provisions during sessions 2 and 3 for reflections and to allow us to modify/adapt questions, reflection questions, and the actual process of the research. Ongoing evaluation via feedback from the students was critical to the process so analysis and evaluation were not be restrained to the time allotted. It was my intention to make provisions for extra meeting time (individual or group) if it became necessary.

An extra individual session was added for one of the participants who had to miss the first group meeting at Middle School 1 due to an extra-curricular commitment. A session at Middle School 2 was created when I was confronted with the reality that in the school year 2009-2010 no French Immersion students I had never taught had opted to go to Middle School 1. In order to gain a full representation of the programs and the students in the School District, I enrolled the support of Middle School 2.

Surveys and Interviews

To create the three distinct surveys I compiled exemplars of student perceptions surveys identified through research, and used some of the questions as part of this research. Examples of such questions can be found in the *"The Survey on High School Student Motivation"* (Montalvo, Mansfield & Miller, 2007), the impressive body of questions compiled by Libbey (2004), and suggestions from Klem and Connell (2004). I also compiled a list of teacher attitudes, skills and strategies, gathered through research, which I organized into surveys for students. From the body of research I gathered I looked for recurring qualities and regrouped examples of such qualities into eight statements per survey.

The "Teacher Attitudes" survey centers around qualities of the person, the "Engagement" survey focuses on the teachers' ability to engage students and to differentiate instruction, and the "Relationship" survey highlights teacher strategies and efforts made to build a bridge with students. I adapted the surveys to include the provision for students to expand on their answers. For example, when responding to a statement such as "When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed… I feel the teacher was caring", students had the opportunity to provide open-ended

responses describing what *caring* might look like, sound like and feel like, with concrete

examples and description of actions. In some cases students were able to provide

examples for all three descriptors. However, in most cases, they much preferred to write

across the three descriptors. Another adaptation I have taken into consideration is the use

of student friendly language, and the language they are familiar with from their School

District. One simple example is the question "What does it look like, sound like and feel

like?" In using such language, I also paid attention to the learning nature of the

participants and tried to tap into their preferred mode of reference, that is, whether they

were visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners. For each student one of these descriptors

might evoke more vivid memories. Table 5 regroups the themes of all three surveys along

with the eight subjects that were selected as most common observable qualities or skills

exhibited by favored teachers.

 The ATA (2000) document offers tips and strategies about surveys and interviews

and weighs the pros and cons of each method. Surveys allow for anonymity and prove to

be an effective way of gathering and rating data. In contrast, they demand clarity and

open-ended questions take more time to analyze (p. 23). Cohen et al. (2007) further add

that surveys can establish a certain amount of confidence in that they allow for large

samples to be used and be generalized from (p. 207). However, Cohen et al. (2007) stress

that surveys tend to skim over finer details mainly because results are used to create

broader generalizations (p. 207). The sample for my study is smaller, which, according to

Cohen et al. (2007) is still acceptable because smaller scale surveys can be done (p. 207).

The surveys are designed to correlate how students perceive enjoyable teachers and what

they describe as observable signs. Cohen et al. (2007) refer to the type of surveys I used as *exploratory*, where "relationships and patterns are explored" (p. 207).

Table 5

Survey themes and distinct qualities

PURPOSEFUL RELATIONSHIPS SURVEYS		
Teacher Attitudes	Engagement	Relationships
• Caring	• Wanting to go to school	• Sharing about one self
• Respectful	• Wanting to be in classroom	• Trust
• Helpful	• Differentiating learning	• Knowledge of student
• Encouraging	• Involvement with class	• Sense of belonging
• Fairness	• Learning is interesting	• Caring about family
• Considerate	• Explained why/what of learning	• Listening
• Welcoming	• Encouraged risk taking	• Including students in decisions
• Enthusiastic	• Easy to talk to teacher	• Teacher there for students

Along with completing the Likert-type scale, students were interviewed and asked to refine their answers. Interviews are "useful for gathering data from younger students", are rich, and offer opportunities for clarification. In contrast, they are time consuming and there exists the possibility of "interviewer bias" (ATA, 2000, p. 24). Cohen et al. (2007) reiterate those benefits and limitations and also add that with interviews there exists the opportunity for spontaneity with behaviours and responses, and the availability of the

researcher being right there (p. 221). The interviews were conducted at the same time as each of the surveys and time was spent helping clarify terms that students found difficult to discern such as being considerate versus being encouraging, welcoming or caring. Cohen et al. (2007) note that one of the limitations of using interviews is that data may be challenging to standardize (p. 221). For this study, the interviews were specifically designed to gather information that stood out in terms of observable teacher behaviours.

Journaling

I included room in my study for observations although this was not the primary method. Cohen et al. (2007), listing helpful hints originally issued by Kemmis and McTaggart (1992), recommend to "make time to write throughout the project" (p. 308). The ATA (2000) document lists one of the pros of observations as yielding non-verbal clues. In contrast, validity and time consumption come into question (p. 25). In the tradition of researchers' field notes and observations, I added a journaling exercise for myself, for reflection and reporting purposes. My intention was to pay particular attention to the students' non-verbal cues, as well as incidental conversations and comments, when they talked about teachers they had enjoyed.

Cohen et al. (2007) note that action research allows for eclectic methodology and data collection (p. 309). This is where creativity in the use of techniques allowed for students to be part of the process in various degrees.

Role of Researcher

Ravet (2007) talks extensively about the process she uses to involve students at the center of her research. She acknowledges the influence of the researcher as a person with power over the students and coins the expression "friendly researcher" as a means of

explaining how she sees her role while working alongside students (p. 338). O'Brien and

Moules (2007) discuss the notion of negative and positive power relationships

extensively. They also recognize that, although children are given ownership of the

process of the research there is still adult involvement at some level (pp. 398-399). The

key is to leave much of the process to the students if possible. O'Brien and Moules

(2007) note "participation work raises self-esteem as children and young people are

listened to and taken seriously" (p. 399). The standpoint I took as an adult researcher is

similar to Ravet's (2007) in that I wished to be considered "friendly" but not necessarily

as a "friend". Unlike O'Brien and Moules (2007) I set the parameters for the process.

However I also left room for students to provide input. The very core of action research

calls for modifications of the plan, evaluations mid-way and ongoing reflections (Cohen,

Manion & Morrison, 2007). It is a rigorous yet flexible process. Cohen et al. (2007) cite a

list of suggestions for action research (established by Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992), in

which they encourage researchers to "be persistent about monitoring" (p. 308). I was

open to what the students were bringing up and, for the purpose of this specific research,

I made sure all of us were clear about the purpose, aims and goals on a regular basis.

Research Format

Ravet (2007) is sensitive to the format she uses with the students and elaborates

on a few key points. First, she recognizes that "sit down and talk" interviews might not

"enable" students as much as if she proceeded with an "activity-based format" (p. 339).

To this end, she uses a variety of activities to gather information and sees benefits such as

"enhancing motivation, concretizing complex abstract ideas, (…) scaffolding (…) and

meeting individual needs" (p. 339). Similarly, O'Brien and Moules (2007) developed a

dartboard as way to evaluate their research on an ongoing basis (p. 395). They note "the exercise showed contentment with the project and resulted in further discussion and positive engagement" (p. 395). This strategy is used to evaluate aspects of the process as much as the researcher, and it is fun (O'Brien & Moules, 2007). Clearly action research, especially action research with students, can be organized and presented in a creative manner while retaining the "research" qualities. As part of the process with the students I included a creative process in the construction of the Likert-type scales and I used the O'Brien and Moules' (2007) dartboard idea during the reflective activities. Students were given an array of glittery and colourfully designed pencils to choose from to fill in their surveys. The surveys included areas for doodling and the students were also encouraged to pick a nickname and design a card that would be used on the dartboard.

Munns and Woodward (2006) provide an example of continuous analysis and evaluation. While they were implementing a first action research called the *Fair Go Project* (about interrupting disengaging messages), the need for a second project arose. *The Real Framework* came about with the realization that students needed to be able to self-assess in order to be engaged at school. As the project progressed, a readjustment had to be made in the teaching techniques and the process of reflection to bring validity to the research, via the answers the students were providing. This was done ten weeks into the project (Munns & Woodward, 2006). Cohen et al. (2007) stress that "the notion of reflexivity is central to action research" and the "participants-as-practitioners-and-researchers need to apply to themselves the same critical scrutiny they are applying to others and to the research" (p. 310). Self-reflection is not only beneficial but also essential and, if one can use an oxymoron, there needs to be "flexible rigor".

Although in my research the notion of student engagement is, logically, central, I intended for the students to work on *Teacher Attitudes* first. Students are emotional beings. Relationships, even purposeful educational ones, are tied to emotions. I believe that identifying the good qualities about their teachers would facilitate students' ability to zone in on particular teaching strategies later in the process.

Student-Friendly Format

A point brought up by Ravet (2007) is that the age of the students could affect their ability to expand on particular issues. She recognizes that students can be of few words (yes/no) and that they may look to give the right answer to adults, highlighting here again the relationship of power that inevitably exists (p. 339). In addition to the Likert-type scales I added the open-ended questions after each statement to allow students more answering room. In my case, I faced less "yes" or "no" answers and more "I don't know" and "It's all good!" which is typical of Middle School students and, at times, enabled the students to get away with limited thinking. In light of Ravet's (2007) sensitive attention to creativity, I paid attention to the way I crafted my questions so they generated conversation. Having the students take part in the process also helped refine the questions. I was not only looking for ways to create authentic engagement but also to gather authentic answers.

Cohen et al. (2007) present an extensive list of responsibilities owed to the participants of a research project. That list includes "respect vulnerability (e.g. interviewing children or those without power)" (p. 77). Despite strong advocacy for involving students in research such as Ravet's (2007) and O'Brien and Moules' (2007), we are reminded that indeed children remain children. In this way, The ATA (2000)

document cautions that "the best practice is to be mindful of the ambiguities that confront us in the complex life of schools" (p. 8).

Appreciative Inquiry

To maintain a thoughtful and ethical process, I have grounded my project in Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a process initially developed in the 1980's by David Cooperrider and refined with Diane Whitney and Jaqueline M. Stravos. de la Ossa (2005) explains that AI focuses on a positive approach to change and encourages participants to look at a situation in a different manner (p. 30). Cooperrider and Whitey (2005) describe their approach as "the art of asking unconditionally positive questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential" (p. 8). My goal was to continuously focus on positive comments and outcomes with the students, a feat that proved interesting. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) highlight that "at the heart of AI is the *appreciative interview*, a one-on-one dialogue among organization members and stakeholders using questions related to: highpoint experiences, valuing, and what gives life to the organization at its best" (p. 14). It seemed natural to ask students about the factors that have contributed to their most enjoyable experience in school since they have remained the primary recipients of a variety of trends in teaching philosophies. AI is composed of four distinct phases: the discovery phase, the dream phase, the design phase and the destiny phase (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005, p. 16). Although it would prove interesting to see how students may envision their future in the education system, the aim of this study took us as far as the first phase, through which we identified qualities and skills that lead to purposeful relationships and further along, to richer school engagement.

Treating Conflicting Information

I foresaw parental influences as possible interferences and possibly contributing to conflicting information during the overall process. For many parents, their own schooling and that of their children represents a highly emotional topic. I spent time detailing to parents the purpose and the aim of the research. I ensured that I communicated with parents regularly throughout the process of the research, prior to each interview session. I was able to work with parents on making sure that students' voices were genuinely heard without bias because the approach was grounded in "appreciative inquiry".

Other conflicting information may have been connected to the way students interpret "student engagement" and "teacher-student relationships". I defined those terms clearly with the students prior to starting any questioning, during each session. Conflicting information may have also arisen with interpretations of student engagement as being of *behavioural* and *emotional* nature. Clarity of the terms used in each survey was crucial. Lastly, the nature of the participants and the propensity of some to express opinions aloud could have influenced how others may have responded.

I was hoping that the "Students as Researchers" would become more comfortable with each other as the sessions progress, to the point where they could assist each other in clarifying terms, and clarifying "what they mean". Who would better understand students, than other students? O'Brien and Moules (2007) recognize the value of student-to-student communication and note "they have access to a much larger audience than adults do, and children may be more likely to open up to their peers than to other adults"

(pp. 387-388). Students in the group enabled and prompted each other with further discussions as well.

<center>*Hawthorne Effect*</center>

Brannigan and Swerman (2001) describe the *Hawthorne effect* as being a social shift where interactions have importance and result in heightened positive outcomes in a work place (p. 57). They stress that communication is key to this shift, along with creating a social integrity, "a more humane system based on knowledge of human nature" (pp. 58-59). Brannigan and Swerman (2001) point out that the lack of acknowledgement of the importance of interpersonal relationships sometimes might explain the outstanding violent outbursts, such as school shootings, we have witnessed in recent years (p. 60). The Hawthorne studies have shown that workers harbor negative thoughts when work relationships are negative (Brannigan & Swerman, 2001). This can be extrapolated to students over the lack of purposeful relationships, perhaps. Brannigan and Swerman (2001) describe the *Hawthorne effect* as creating positive change. They note "when people realize that their behavior is being examined they change how they act" (p. 56). Students participating in this research, who may not be fond of school, may have painted themselves as better students and minimized conflicts they may have had with previous teachers. They may have also embellished how teachers acted with them. To attend somewhat to this *Hawthorne effect*, students were asked to comment on the frequency of attitudes, skills and strategies displayed by teachers and also to describe actions taken by the teachers in concrete terms. The frequency of the actions shown by teachers according to the students provided opportunities for correlation.

Halo Effect

The *Halo effect* described initially by Thorndike (1920) pertains to the notion that when people are to assess various personality aspects of others, they tend to rely on general feelings about the person (p. 25). Thorndike (1920) reports that an assessment of qualities was done on a group of teachers and the ratings seem to indicate that specific qualities influenced the perceptions of the rater (p. 28). A *Halo effect* might contribute to conflicting data for this research. Indeed, students might think of a teacher they liked in general terms. That may influence their judgment and minimize or emphasize actual teacher qualities. Three different surveys in three different sessions, over three different sub-topics, and together with allowing the students to reflect on their previous answers may have helped alleviate some of the *Halo effect*. Thorndike (1920) explains that in any work looking at rating qualities, "the observer should report the evidence, not a rating, and the rating should be given on the evidence to each quality separately without the knowledge of the evidence concerning any other quality in the same individual" (p. 29). In Thorndike's work, I noticed that the qualities he used actually included a brief description to clarify each term. In the surveys I constructed for the students, each term is rooted in research, and time was allocated in the interview session to allow for term clarification. Students had to rate teachers' attitudes, skills and strategies relating to purposeful relationships. Since they were encouraged to think about these sub-topics in concrete terms by providing evidence, as Thorndike (1920) suggests, then perhaps students might have been less inclined to think in general terms.

Organizing the Data

This study is qualitative. It includes many of the components from content analysis, which looks at written data and summarizes its main messages (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 475) and borrows from grounded theory, through which data itself generates theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, as cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p. 491).

The research generated a generous amount of data, already set in categories. Cohen et al. (2007) identifies this as a significant trait of content analysis and further distinguishes the presence of emerging themes, all contributing either to testing a theory or generating a new one (p. 476). Under the umbrella of purposeful relationships, the data for this study is regrouped into three major sub-topics: teacher attitudes (TA), engagement (E) and building relationships (BR). Within each of these three sub-topics, the data was divided and introduced under the eight themes per sub-topics as referred to in Table 5 (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8) that were to be further categorized into three strands: actions, words, and feelings. To manage the variety of responses and response styles received from the students I used open coding. Cohen et al. (2007) describe open coding as "exploring the data and identifying units of analysis to code for meanings, feelings, actions, and so on" (p. 493). From the sub-topics and the themes the data was further coded and categorized into the "looked like" (L), "sounds like" (S) and "feels like" (F) categories. Table 6 demonstrates the structure of the data.

Table 6

Open coding categories

<div align="center">

PURPOSEFUL RELATIONSHIPS

</div>

TA	E	BR
T1 T2 T3 T4	T1 T2 T3 T4	T1 T2 T3 T4
T5 T6 T7 T8	T5 T6 T7 T8	T5 T6 T7 T8
T*n* (L, S, F)	T*n* (L, S, F)	T*n* (L, S, F)
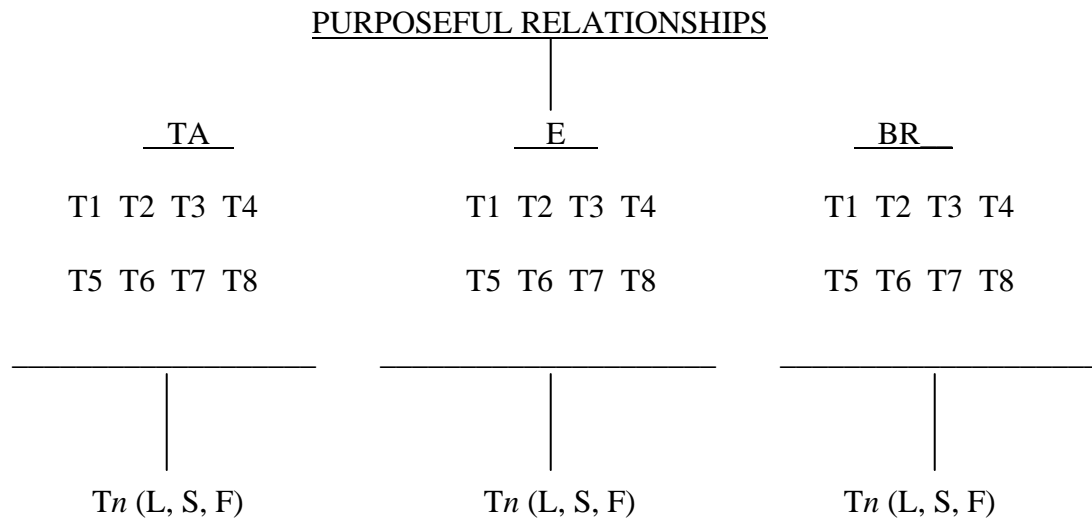
Once the data was set in these categories, I used axial coding to crosscheck for repetition of ideas. Cohen et al. (2007) explain that with axial coding "codes are explored, their interrelationships are examined, and codes and categories are compared to existing categories" (p. 493). The purpose of this study was to build a list of teacher qualities and skills identified by students as contributing to purposeful relationships. I crosschecked students' responses against the twenty-four existing themes (see Table 5). I essentially looked at whether the students' responses were new or if they fit directly under any of the themes initially identified through research for the purpose of this study. This necessitated the development of another code to clearly identify all data that was new (N).

Cohen et al. (2007), citing Cresswell (1998) and Ezzy (2002), describe selective coding as uncovering a central code around which other codes are clearly tied and "compared with pre-existing theory" (p. 493). Through this new code (N) I have found

data that can stand alone or be regrouped to generate new or further theory. I used the (N) new data to establish different teacher attitudes and skills themes that either connected to the three pre-existing sub-topics (A, E, and BR), and/or created new sub-topics.

The data provided through the survey scales was used to indicate the frequency of perception of teacher attitudes and skills, and to study discrepancies between the scale rating and the examples provided, if any.

Sharing Data

I intend on using the results to create a short DVD, which highlights both the research and the result from this study. My first intention is to share this DVD with the "Students as Researchers" group, like-minded colleagues and, possibly, the Parent Advisory Group. Ultimately, it is my goal to have this DVD available for teachers who express interest as well as for pre-service teachers.

O'Brien and Moules (2007) make an interesting observation; because they used students as researchers, they were confronted with "new" ways of sharing results (p. 389). In their case, students opted for drama (p. 389). For this research I looked for an enduring medium that would allow any recipient to revisit the ideas presented over time. When participants were invited to participate in the creation of the final DVD, most of them welcomed the idea although they had much different thoughts about the type of "action" we were using: action research versus action movie!

O'Brien and Moules (2007) highlight a limitation, stressing that adults present societal constructs of power with regards to children (p. 398). Ravet (2007) identifies a similar limitation and notes that her research "challenged canonical notions of children's structural location power status and rights within school and society" (p. 334). In

stressing the importance of taking students into account, Noddings (2005a) explains that

"the relational view is difficult for some educators to accept [because] people in almost

all cultures have been taught to believe that teacher knows best" (p. 2). To accept results

shared by students there needs not only to be a shift in the adults' thinking but also a shift

in the students' thinking. O'Brien and Moules (2007) emphasize that "to gain a

collaborative partnership and achieve a diffusion of power, children and young people

need to believe that this is possible" (p. 398). No matter how or who shares the results,

the ATA (2000) document reminds researchers to make sure "the product relate to the

purpose of the project" (p. 30). To this end, I believe that if we remain mindful of the

purpose then boundaries, such as having students present the information, can be

explored comfortably.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion (Part One)

Teacher Attitudes

Engaging students is no small task. It is the combination of a variety of attitudes and skills on the part of teachers that initiates the process. However, it is the students' reception and, more so, the students' perceptions that seals the deal. Maya Angelou expresses it well when she says "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel" (Brainy Quotes). Students are sensitive to the goings-on in their school life. By building purposeful relationships teachers gain a wider knowledge of their students and they are able to create learning situations that suit those students, either individually and/or as a group. Research yields suggestions on how to be, how to teach, and how to reach students, among other things. For this study, I compiled a large number of these suggestions and proceeded to ask students "What else?" I regrouped the skills and attitudes I found into three categories, understanding that there may be some overlap, and asked the students to add to this body of research by describing what they saw as contributing to building purposeful relationships.

The data for this study is presented in three sections: Teacher attitudes, Engagement, and Building Relationships. For each section I looked at the eight themes (see Table 5) separately. I present the scale with the students' rating and a table with the students' (N) new comments. In the discussion I first highlight the ideas brought forth by students and confirmed through research, then I introduce the students' additional suggestions. This study was an action research, which involved "students as researchers". Throughout this chapter I will refer to those students as "student-researchers". At the end

of each section comments are included about the student-researchers' aims and desires with regards to the research process itself.

Caring

Caring means possessing and displaying a relentless passion for the learning and well being of students. Caring can be evident to the students through personalized communication and individualized attention. It is a broad term that was difficult for the students to fully grasp. The student-researchers provided a series of examples of what caring can be. They identified "help" as one of the overwhelming qualities describing caring. Help, and being helpful, is another theme within the Teacher Attitudes sub-topic so I eliminated this theme through axial coding and will refer to it in a subsequent paragraph. The student-researchers described feeling like being cared for as encouraging school attendance, as teachers looking after the welfare of the students, and as teachers being concerned with every day life. These examples are confirmed by research and are also reoccurring within the study. The scale indicates the perception frequency of the theme and Table 7 shows new or additional ideas suggested by the student-researchers. Question for caring:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher had a *caring* attitude with me.

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
5	6	0	0

Table 7

Results for Caring

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher cared about you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Hugs • Was more than a teacher, more like a friend • Gave us prizes/presents • Made me smile even if I was sad • Chose me for important activities	• Talked to us in a calm voice • "Here you go!" • "You're doing such a great job!" • Always positive (2) • "You did amazing on your test" • Gave compliments about work/person (4) • Explained what we were doing well • "Thank you"	• Amazing • Happy (5) • Confident

(*n*) represents the number of similar responses.

Caring, it seems, is also a display of thoughts and gestures set to confirm a human interaction of some kind. In the "looked like" section, a student-researcher reported that hugs can be a sign of caring. Hugs represent a point of contention in many regards nowadays but used appropriately and respectfully they express a message of acknowledgement. Whether it be a sideway hug or a high five, a pat on the arm or knuckles-to-knuckles, there is a need expressed to be a few degrees inside of impersonal that works for some students. Far more than the physical contact of a hug is being sought after here. A hug, for some students, means they matter, they are being noticed. In the same manner, being chosen for important activities also denotes some acknowledgement. It is not just building trust it is investing in the student, specifically because of who the student is. Caring, in this way, is about acknowledging a human being. Similarly, the

notion of friendship appears most likely as a means to describe a higher level of familiarity. It is not a new concept but it is mentioned here because, for the students, as for most human beings, friendship signifies that they matter to another person. I would qualify the notion of friendship as "purposeful friendship" where the friendship is existent throughout the school year and likely dissipates as the students move on. When students want a teacher to be more like a friend, that may also imply a need on the part of the students to see the teacher put in that extra effort to be more knowledgeable about them. Having all that knowledge is also perhaps what would allow a teacher to make students smile even when they are sad…

Considering the debate that exists over rewarding students, it was interesting that prizes and presents were mentioned as a sign of caring. Giving a prize or a present, independently of the fact that it may act or be used as a motivator, implies a thought about the receiver. Again, here, students like to feel they matter and tend to measure how they matter in much more concrete ways, such as hugs, being picked, or getting a precious two dollars artifact. Even if the thought is not individualized and is for the class, a prize represent an understanding of what being a student is like. Everybody likes a perk once in a while, even if it comes once at the end of the school year!

The student-researchers listed quite a few examples of "caring" sentences that have been said to them. Upon reading this list, I was reminded of the famous "100 good things to say to students" lists that seem to come through teachers' trays once in a while. I couldn't help but notice how these lists ring true, and how vital it is for teachers to actually take such lists seriously. It is not necessarily the items on the lists that have the greatest impact but rather the use of a sentence like the ones on such lists, at the right

time with the right student. Students, like any other human being, notice the content, the tone and the manner in which things are being said to them. The ratio of positive versus negative comments is said to have an impact on the receiver. Accordingly, for a few students to label an enjoyable teacher as "always positive" the ratio experienced must have been very high. Perhaps that indicates the presence of the Halo effect whereby an enjoyable teacher is regarded more forgivingly. Four student-researchers described being caring as giving compliments about the work accomplished and/or the person. Much like gestures, words are powerful. Being acknowledged is valued by students.

The feelings of happiness that were added in the "felt like" section are indicative of a satisfied state. Much like the results on the scale, students overwhelmingly agreed that caring was observable under various forms. The feeling they were left with as a memory was highly favorable. Being happy tends to predispose students to accepting new concepts, or new challenges. If confidence is also added in the mix, then a simple cycle between happiness and confidence can start building, one generating the other!

Respect

The notion of respect is central to building purposeful relationships. Perhaps even more important is the need for respect to begin with the teacher in order to create a flow that eventually can go in both directions. In their confirmed responses, student-researchers associated respect with being helped with friends or problems and with being listened to. Respect was also interpreted as students being able to express their opinions and ideas. Student-researchers felt that teachers who are respectful create a "warm" feeling and are fair. Much like caring, being respectful is a teacher attitude that was frequently observed by the student-researchers, as seen on the scale. It is interesting to

note that the student-researchers responded to respect on the scale identically to the way they responded to caring. In looking at the student-confirmed themes and (N) new ideas, respect, just like caring, also seems to encompass several other themes (Table 8). Question for respect:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher was *respectful* towards me.

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
5	6	0	0

Table 8

Results for Respect

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher respected you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Happy person • Would not get mad because I was hyper	• "How do you feel?" • Treated issues with respect	• Not being judged • Happy to be around the the Teacher • Disciplined in a kind way

      The common thread in the answers provided by the student-researchers is about individuality. Students who feel respected can indeed be happy but, furthermore, some students are sensitive to how the teacher reacts to personal traits or issues. For example, being hyper! Students responded that they did not feel judged which pertains also to being respected as individuals. Discipline issues can be a point of contention at the best of times. Student-researchers felt that enjoyable teachers were respectful in their dealings with discipline. That, once again, can be extrapolated to paying attention to the individual, seeing as most discipline issues stem from a person, or a few. Of note in Table

8 is one student-researcher's response about being happy to be around the teacher. Although this could be included in confirmed research through axial coding, I deemed it important that the comment remains as new data mainly because the student-researcher truly expressed clearly that when teachers are respectful, some students are happy to be around them. Since this is a perception from a student's point of view, it suggests that indeed respect coming from the teacher first is a good way to start. In this section students confirmed yet more research, and their words offered concrete examples of what they look for in a respectful teacher.

Help

"I felt happy that someone would put aside their lives, so they could help me" (Laces, February 2010). Help, in a nutshell, is the investment of an effort towards another person. In a classroom help takes many forms, from helping an individual to helping with school. Student-researchers confirmed that help in all situations is important, as is getting lots of help. A willingness to explain work several times over and providing individual help was also noted by the student-researchers. Help seemed to be a more concrete concept for students to grasp. In this way their perceptions presented very little overlap with other themes, except for being encouraging and caring. Student-researchers recognized help as being highly observable in enjoyable teachers.

Question for help:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher was *helpful* with me and my learning.

All the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely
9	2	0	0

Table 9

Results for Help

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was helpful?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Offered to tutor • Made sure students had everything they needed • Helped as soon as someone wasn't understanding • Always responded when hand was up • Always came over and helped me work on what I needed help with • Helped by teaching in fun ways and explaining everything thoroughly	• Telling student it was easy • Was nice • Would not tell answers	• Felt good even if I wasn't doing good • Thankful

Responding and its timing emerged as noticeable elements within the theme of help. In the "looked like" section student-researchers referred to help being given "as soon as" it was needed or "always", indicating that how teachers respond to requests for help matters to students. It seems though that along with responding -making that personal effort- timing also counts. If students raise their hands to request help, the timing of that help perhaps plays a role in how the students perceive the help as "always" being there. The perceptions of responses to help and timing are not only about help being given to the individual, but also how help is provided to others in the class as well. One of the student-researchers described that broader view in stating that help would be given as soon as "someone" would need it.

Students are sensitive to the quality of the help they receive. The very last remark in the "look like" section mentions explaining things "thoroughly". One student-researcher mentioned not getting answers from teachers as a positive element. In their daily quests for help, students may be looking for help understanding *how* to achieve. They don't want answers as much as they want a "thorough" explanation. In hearing from enjoyable teachers that things are "easy" students could be looking for the step-by-step "thorough" explanation, almost in the manner someone would go through the steps of an origami project. No one can produce an origami project without being methodical about its steps. The student-researchers might have recognized in enjoyable teachers an ability to make work look easy. By the same token in expressing that receiving help felt "good even if I wasn't doing good" (Danny, nickname, February 2010), seems to speak to the recognition of the time invested by the teacher as well as the knowledge that help is continuously available.

Helping students can mean looking after different aspects of a student's life. The student-researchers offered two examples of what that might look like. Tutoring was mentioned in reference to help. Tutoring most likely implies smaller group instruction, even perhaps one-on-one support. It can also mean that the teacher invests extra time to help the students achieve. This once again confirms that special attention to the students' needs is given. In the same manner, teachers making sure that "students had everything they needed" is another way to describe how students' needs are addressed. Seeing to it that students have everything they need is a broad response that could range from making sure the appropriate lesson material is accessible to students to personally supplying some students with school supplies. Depending on the culture of the school, that could also

mean contacting the appropriate outside agency to provide breakfast or lunch. In any case, it is another indication that students indeed notice when teachers go above and beyond their regular assignment. As a result, and put simply in the words of the student-researchers, students are "thankful".

Encouraging

Students see teacher's encouragement as being able to provide the right words and attitudes to elevate students' self-esteem such that they are able to recognize who they are and what they can do, feel good about it and move forward. Student-researchers confirmed that the use of kind words is part of being encouraging and included receiving help as a sign as well. Table 10 shows few results because many of the examples provided overlapped with the theme of help. For some students, being encouraging meant furthering help. It is apparent in some of the sentences left in Table 10. Still, the student-researchers recognized being encouraging as a very noticeable quality in enjoyable teachers.

Question for encouraging:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher was *encouraging* me in my learning.

All the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely
7	4	0	0

Table 10

Results for Encouraging

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was encouraging?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Being motivated to do to my best • Would explain how we use this in the future • Would keep me going if I didn't want to do the work • When I gave up the teacher helped me still to work		

Underlying the theme of encouragement is the notion of motivation. Basically, the ability of the teacher to instill a will to try, to continue, and to strive to do one's best is highlighted in the responses above. Thus it seems that being encouraging also means being able to develop the skills to motivate students. One student-researcher commented on the teacher being encouraging by explaining the relevance of the learning. It can be far more motivating to learn something if students know how their knowledge can be used in the future. In this sense, motivation and encouragement seem tied together with "encouraging" perhaps being the easier term for students to grasp.

Fairness

For this part, the majority of student-researchers' responses confirmed other research findings. The responses confirmed the need to respect students' dignity, and teachers' sensitivity to students' individuality. Both concepts of fairness, equitable and judicial, were addressed through statements that were agreed upon by several student-

researchers at once. Interestingly, students included never being refused help as an indication of being fair. The scale shows that fairness is an important feature in a student's life, with the student-researchers again highlighting that this is a good attitude for an enjoyable teacher to demonstrate.

Question for fairness:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher was *fair* with me.

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
8	3	0	0

Table 11

Results for Fairness

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was fair?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Picked me a lot • Teacher was also a little strict		

As a measure of fairness a student-researcher commented on being picked a lot. Although this parallels caring where a similar response was given, it serves as a reminder that fairness can also be observed in everyday activities such as choosing students for answers or for particular responsibilities. One student-researcher brought up the notion of "strictness" as a good measure of being fair. To recognize being strict as fair perhaps implies that the teacher has established clear boundaries in terms of class functioning and discipline. In any case, the student-researcher recognized the "meaning business" aspect

of being fair, which could be included within the idea of fairness as equitable.

Considerate

Being considerate is a paradigm that includes several other terms, some of which are used as separate themes within the Teacher Attitudes sub-topic (such as being welcoming, encouraging). The student-researchers confirmed ideas previously seen in the "caring" section, stating that being considerate means caring, giving hugs and being like a friend. They also reiterated ideas about fairness, respect, establishing relationships and listening. Being considerate is close to empathy in that a person is able to understand how another would feel. Table 12 reflects the ideas the student-researchers had about their enjoyable teachers being considerate. Much like the scales for the other themes in this section, student-researchers perceived being considerate as an important attitude to display.

Question for considerate:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher was *considerate.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
8	3	0	0

Table 12

Results for Considerate

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was considerate?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• They noticed me • Always happy when I was early to help • Treated me good by greeting me and giving me compliments	• Complimented me on my changes • "Oh my little early butterfly"	• I felt noticed

Two general ideas seem apparent when looking at these responses. The student-researchers identified being noticed and getting compliments as means of being considerate. Students not only want to matter, they first of all want to be noticed. Just as in the story of the lost tooth at the very beginning of this paper students appreciate teachers' ability to notice the little things and value them. In this way, giving compliments and greetings reinforce being noticed in a positive manner. Similarly to the section on respect here students are happy to be around a respectful teacher, and look for the teachers' reactions to them. It is that much more of a boost to experience a teacher happy to see a student who wants to help even if it is "early". I would suspect that early means early in the morning, or early back from lunch. Being considerate in that context, can be about being happy to see students and noticing them.

Welcoming

In the literature review, being welcoming is included with being considerate. I asked the students how welcoming they perceived their most enjoyable teachers to be simply because it speaks to the very first interaction of the day. In building a purposeful relationship with students, how a teacher welcomes the class can have an impact on the

students' perceptions of that teacher and the day to come. The student-researchers only associated being welcoming with greetings and with being able to listen. They offered many suggestions as to what being welcoming can be like. On the scale, although most students perceived an enjoyable teacher as being welcoming for the majority of the time, one student-researcher reported experiencing the teacher being welcoming only some of the time, and one student-researcher did not respond.

Question for welcoming:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher was *welcoming.*

All the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely
7	2	1	0

Table 13

Results for Welcoming

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was welcoming?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• If you came in late the teacher would help you • Let us in early at lunch • Smile • Being welcomed every morning •Would welcome parents, siblings and even pets • Was happy when the class was starting and the class came in	• "Hello, glad you're here!" (2) • "Come in, come in" • Cheerful • Talking to us	• They wanted me in the class • Happy • Felt welcomed

In the "felt like" section, the first comment pertains to experiencing a sense of belonging. If anything else, being welcoming can contribute to giving students a sense that they are at the right place. Many of the student-researchers' responses have to do with the positive demeanor that being welcoming implies. Teachers "smile" and are "happy" but more so, they are "happy when the class [comes] in".

Similar to the "early" comment of the previous section, one student-researcher responded that an enjoyable teacher was welcoming by letting the students come in early at lunch. It is not the gift and presents we give but the things we do that carry some impact. To students, the privilege of being "inside" before everyone else speaks to feeling special in some way and to the notion that they are experiencing something outside of the general rules of the school. At the same time, those few minutes early allow for building or strengthening purposeful relationships!

One of the student-researchers mentioned coming in late and the teacher's reaction. In my experience, students who come to class late do not wish to be singled out. They would much rather it doesn't show. In specifying that the teacher's reaction was helpful, the student-researcher was perhaps indicating that coming in late is not as much the issue as recognizing that the student is there. The focus shifts from a potentially embarrassing situation to an acknowledgement of the human being. The comments in the "sounds like" section almost seem a perfect fit although not necessarily related. The acknowledgement of anyone with a "Glad you're here!" adds meaning to the reasons for being at school.

One student-researcher identified a welcoming teacher as welcoming families. While this is part of the building relationships sub-topic, I wanted to make a note of the

siblings and family pets being added by the student-researcher. Students value what they have. They do not own a lot but they have families. When teachers welcome families (and the pets), there is perhaps a message sent that what matters to the student, matters to the teacher. In this way, what the student *has*, his/her reason for being and his heritage is valued and appreciated. The ever so popular "show and tell" activities that most teachers dread are a great example of students looking for a way to feature what they value. Being welcoming is a far bigger business than just saying a cheerful "Hi" in the morning.

Enthusiastic

Being enthusiastic is an attitude that impacts students enormously. Enthusiasm is communicative and reaches students because it is a mood. It also speaks to inner interests and passions in the teacher, even if it is just school related. Students respond to joyous dispositions! Just start dancing in a class and watch what happens. The student-researchers confirmed that being enthusiastic can mean "loving" one's job, bringing fun and excitement to learning and "cracking jokes". Fun was a consistent reoccurring theme in the student-researchers' responses. Furthermore, in this section student-researchers did not identify any ideas that related to other themes of the research. The scale shows how enthusiasm seemed to be fairly straightforward to explain and easy to perceive with most student-researchers observing that quality a majority of the time. One student-researcher did not provide an answer. Table 14 shows additional responses for being enthusiastic. Question for enthusiastic:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher was *enthusiastic.*

All the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely
8	2	0	0

Table 14

Results for Enthusiastic

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was enthusiastic?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Students invited the teacher to competitions and the teacher would come with his/her family • Took us to the park • Had energy and active classes • Extra gym	• "Let's go outside and run around" • Had a cheery voice	• Teacher was always happy (2) • Teacher was happy when I came in the room

Happiness seems like a natural fit to go along with enthusiasm. Student-researchers did not comment on their own feelings this time, but rather on the feelings they perceived in their teachers. The teachers were unmistakably happy.

As a mark of enthusiasm student-researchers identified "energy" and "active classes" as well as outings. It seems like opportunities for students to be in a less structured environment is seen as a sign of enthusiasm. At the very least, the teacher may perhaps be perceived as innately understanding what it is like to be a student. "Active classes" and "energy" suggest movement and oomph. It may very well be that the students get to move around and perhaps experience hands on lessons and activities.

The intriguing response in this section is in the "look like" section -the mention that the teacher and family would attend "competitions". This response meant more specifically that the teacher would be invited to attend functions outside of school with students and their own families. This was seen as being enthusiastic. This is by no means

an expectation but it is indicative of the fact that there is a life outside of school and students know it. Whether it be attending an event with the family in tow, or simply greeting students from the class or the school, the message here is perhaps that outside of school, students exist. Teachers remain teachers outside the classroom and especially in the eyes of students. Acknowledging students in a different context means that they are valued.

New Ideas

Each theme within the sub-topic of Teacher Attitudes confirmed existing data and yielded new ideas. Many ideas and themes overlapped, sometimes acting as interlocking blocks with each other. There was evidence that the gestures or words brought forth in the students' responses seem to fit several themes. It is quite possible that teachers' actions and words may fit what a student needs them to be. Help, for example, can very well be interpreted as being helpful, caring, respectful, considerate and fair. Teachers do not need to pay attention to each theme separately, but rather to the bulk of their interactions. They certainly hold the ability and perhaps the responsibility to continuously tweak how they go about building relationships that can entice students to be enthralled about school and engaged so much more. Figure 2 shows the relationship between the researched themes and the clarifications the students suggested.

About the Process

The process was different for each Middle School. For Middle School 1, there were discussions and adjustments, suggestions and bonding. For Middle School 2, there was a request at the beginning of the first session to complete all three surveys on the spot. Students at Middle School 2 welcomed the challenge of providing their responses

all at once, all the while discussing some items on each surveys. Considering the group at Middle 2 was significantly smaller, the time was used wisely and progress was made at a steady pace. At the same time, the two students were most interested in exchanging with

I matter; I'm an individual; Words mean a lot to me; Time matters to me; I notice you; I care about what you do for me; Notice me; Motivation matters; Boundaries matter; Be positive; Be enthusiastic; Acknowledge who I am.

CARING

RESPECT

HELP

ENCOURAGING

TEACHER ATTITUDES

ENTHUSIASTIC

CONSIDERATE

WELCOMING

FAIR
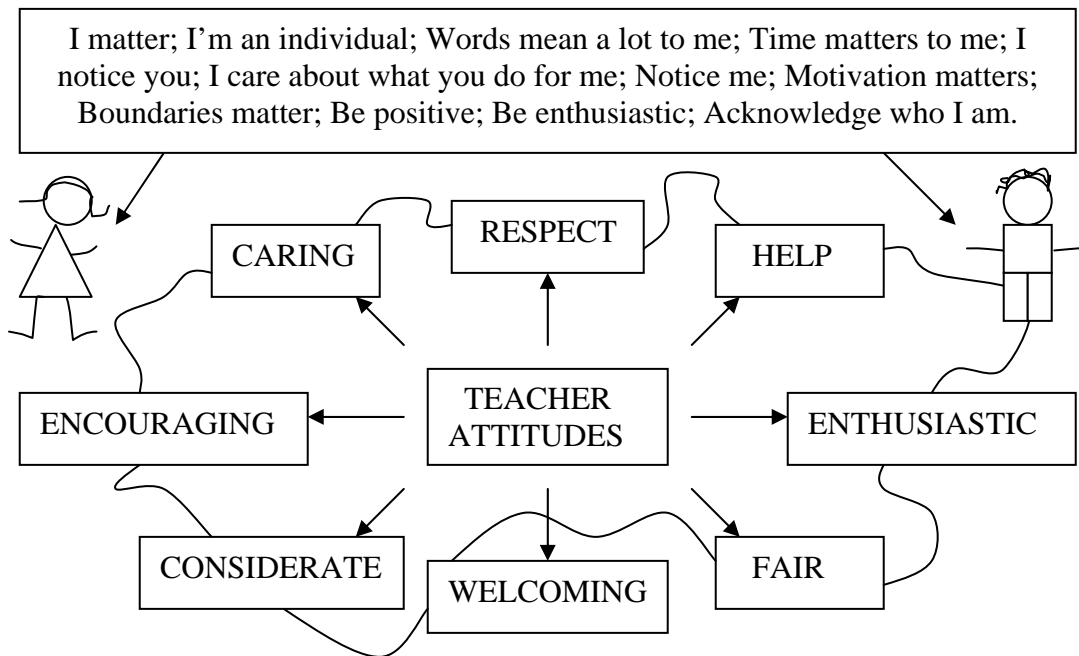
Figure 2. Relationship between teacher attitudes, themes and students' new ideas.

each other about the meaning of some of the terms. At Middle School 1, the group was larger. Students in that group were not only curious about this study but also about each other in a social manner. At the same time, they exhibited the same wish to want to help each other with clarifying terms. They were not working individually, but rather as a group, all adding their own flavour to the responses.

The student-researchers became more comfortable with each other as the first session progressed, to the point where they were able to assist each other in clarifying terms, and clarifying "what they meant". Who could better understand students than other

students! Students in the group enabled and prompted each other with further discussion for several questions. It was interesting to note that at times, the students used an "opposite" way of describing a terms, by using an example of a bad experience. This always ignited lively discussions, especially around the topics of respect and fairness.

The beginning of the first session with Middle School 1 was marked by an expectation on the part of some of the students that I validate each answer. Students were also concerned with giving the right answer and at times, were at a loss for "answers". At first, the student-researchers did not seem to know *how* to give their opinion. Rating and working with the scales worked well, although providing concrete examples proved more challenging.

During the first session, an ongoing discussion about the process was helpful to the group. As the students started to feel more comfortable with what to do, we agreed as a group that they could write any answers across the three sections "looked like, sounded like and felt like". For some students verbalizing their answers seem to help with the writing involved. This verbalization allowed me to make notes as part of journaling the goings on of the sessions and jot down some comments that otherwise would have not been recorded. This was important in the case of one of the student-researchers who exhibited high intensity behaviours.

At the end of the first session, the student-researchers suggested an array of plans as to how we should celebrate this group work. They were looking forward to the second session.

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion (Part Two)

Engagement

What motivates students to attend school, aside from the fact that they "have to",

can be summed up as a multitude of reasons. Over time, in the presence of teachers who

foster purposeful relationships, some students start looking forward to school. In working

towards building purposeful relationships teachers display certain key attitudes that speak

to students. Teachers also organize and run the classroom business and the business of

learning in such a way that students thoroughly enjoy the process.

In Part Two, the student-researchers were asked to look more specifically at the

classroom and the way that learning processes were presented to them by enjoyable

teachers. This time they were not looking at teacher attitudes but rather how some learned

teaching skills were applied.

Eager to go to School

Considering that students can have fun at school being engaged or disengaged,

being eager to go to school may stem from contradicting sources. Feelings about going to

school vary on a daily basis even for positive students. For this theme I decided to present

all the data without axial coding to show the range of responses that comes from students

even when they are in a classroom with an enjoyable teacher. The data yielded some

noticeable contradictions.

The scale shows an almost even split between being eager to go to school and not

being eager. This is not surprising, since going to school is not necessarily a priority for

some students despite having an enjoyable teacher at the helm. These results contrast

with the eight scales presented in Part One where the student-researchers

almost consistently ranked their perceptions of enjoyable teachers as high. Getting to

school certainly can represent a feat for some students, hence the need for teachers to be

welcoming and helpful when they do walk in the door! None-the-less, the student-

researchers offered some ideas as to what can make them go to school as represented in

Table 15.

Question for eager to go to school:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I was eager to go to

school.

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*	*Never*
2	4	1	3	1

Table 15

Results for Eager to go to School.

Can you think of some examples of what made you go to school?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Extra gym • Made me eager by telling us what we were going to do the next day • Learning as fun • Teacher shared about his/her culture • Wrote to penpals • Fun things, experiments activities • Educational games • Exciting Teacher • Chicks (girls) • Drove me to school (I liked that)		• Always inviting • I had lots of friends

Once the students are in the building, it is what is taught and how it is taught that

makes a difference. Still, once in the building some students' motivation remains focused

on other equally as important aspects of their school life. The social aspect of school is undeniable and friends are perhaps the main reason most students come to school. In a class with a teacher they enjoy, student-researchers responded that they felt like they had lots of friends. Student-researchers list that what made them go to school were also fun activities, learning made fun, games, extra gym and activities involving the possibility of making more friends such as writing to penpals. Fun, just like friends, seems almost like another "must" in students' lives. School can be fun and games, educational games that is, as pointed out by one of the student-researcher.

Some of the student-researchers commented on the teacher having some impact on the motivation to go to school. Having an "exciting teacher" was identified as a factor. Teachers' sharing about their "culture" was deemed important and fits into one of the themes under building relationships. One of the student-researchers described the teacher as featuring "what we are going to do the next day". Highlighting the "next day" gives students something to look forward to other than friends. If the activities are indeed "fun" as students like to have them, then it makes school that much more appealing.

What made one student-researcher come to school was to be driven there. That particular student "rarely" was eager to go to school but expressed liking being driven to school. This is an example of the "school", perhaps the teacher, or perhaps another equally involved adult in the life of that student, taking that extra step and demonstrating care for the student. With a positive start like being driven to school and the student enjoying that, there is certainly hope that the same student might enjoy other parts of school eventually. Interestingly, that same student found the classroom to be a good place to be "all the time".

Classroom Environment

Part of what makes school enthralling is the environment: the physical environment, the social environment and the learning environment. All three contribute to fostering engagement and work best if they function in unison. The student-researchers confirmed that a classroom with an enjoyable teacher was welcoming and offered a feeling of belonging. The teacher was noticed to be friendly and the environment a safe place to be. One student-researcher reported that it felt "good" to be in such a classroom. On the scale a majority of student-researchers indicated that the classroom was a good place to be "all the time". Only one student-researcher on the other hand ranked the classroom environment as low. Table 16 shows some of the concrete reasons why a classroom with an enjoyable teacher is a good place.

Question for classroom environment:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher made the *classroom* a good place to be.

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*	*Never*
7	3	0	0	1

Table 16

Results for Classroom Environment

Can you think of some examples of how the classroom was?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Decorated the class with all our work • Recognizing friends and letting us be with them • Clean • Vibrant • Colourful	• Teacher was in a good mood not yelling	• Teacher and friends were like family • There was a happy aura in the classroom

In looking at the three aspects that make up a good classroom environment, students gave examples for each. Student-researchers highlighted some physical elements of the classroom. It was "clean", "colourful" and "vibrant", perhaps indicating here that there were noticeable things going on, one way or another. One student-researcher indicated that the teacher "decorated the class with all our work". Most times, the assignments or creations produced by students are intricately tied to who they are. Decorating the classroom with student work sends a clear message that the student and his/her work is important. Furthermore, the message can also be clearly transmitted to the parents. It is once again acknowledging and putting value on the individual. To put value on student work also shows that there is value on the learning that goes on in the classroom, not necessarily the learning that is delivered but the learning that is achieved.

Another aspect of the classroom as a good place to be is the social aspect. One student-researcher commented that the teacher pays attention to the friendships in class and allows the students to be together. All friendships may not be healthy; however, the ability for the teacher to recognize the need for students to be together a friends seems to complement earlier discussions that friendship is one reason for students to come to school. Another student-researcher added that further to friendship, the "teacher and friends were like family". If students happen to come from a positive family setting, then having people at school be like a family may make the transition between home and school that much easier, and that on a daily basis.

One student-researcher, in explaining about a classroom being a good place to be, noted "there was a happy aura in the classroom". Much like the family feeling, "a happy aura" seems to indicate a palpable and pleasant feeling. An aura usually gives the

impression of a special "something" enveloping a place or a person (or anything else). In this way, a classroom with an enjoyable teacher may indeed ooze with "something special".

Making Learning Work

Differentiating instruction encompasses a great many strategies, each fitting with the specific needs of the student who needs them. In essence, differentiating instruction is the ability to notice *how* a student learns, and *what* learning strategies are effective for that particular student. Student-researchers confirmed that teachers who make learning work for them are encouraging, spend time with individual students, find ways to make learning fun and take the time to "explain everything". Emphasis was also put on the fact that teachers who make learning work for students are helpful, and sensitive to the particular help a student may need. In a classroom with an enjoyable teacher, students felt that the teacher was paying attention to their own learning styles (Table 17).

Question for making learning work:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher was *making learning work for me.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
5	4	2	0

Table 17

Results for Making Learning Work

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher made learning work for you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Accepted the way I learn was different • Teacher worked separate		• Making me happy about what I was learning

In these three examples of teachers differentiating learning, three messages are expressed. First, it meant something to one student-researcher that the teacher "accepted" that the student learned in a different way. Acceptance can mean that the individual is acknowledged. In this instance, the learning style of the student was taken into account within the classroom organization and setting. Another student-researcher noticed how the teacher worked "separate" perhaps indicating that to differentiate learning is to provide more individual support, rather than address the entire class. The feeling of success is evident as yet another student-researcher pointed out being "happy about what I was learning".

Involvement

Differentiating instruction usually necessitates an extra involvement on the part of the teacher. Being involved means a bit more than being helpful, although being helpful does suggest a teacher being involved. Involvement in the classroom implies movement and responses in the same way teachers expect students to be involved. Building "personal relationships" and "asking questions about the weekend" was mentioned by student-researchers as a sign of involvement. Most of the student-researchers' responses were concentrated in the "sounded like" section, indicating perhaps that they notice

teacher involvement most when there's a verbal interaction. Involvement can be about the purposeful relationships and also the learning. Student-researchers wrote that an involved teacher interacts with the class, gives compliments and listens to what students have to say. Most student-researchers felt that the teacher they enjoyed was involved with class, as demonstrated on the scale.

Question for involvement:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher was

involved with the class.

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
6	3	2	0

Table 18

Results for Involvement

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was involved with the class?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Worked in groups and the teacher would do what we are doing	• Commented on my learning • Talked to you separately	

Students are attuned to what goes on in a classroom especially with the teacher. They notice what the teacher is doing while they work on what the teacher assigned. Involvement for one of the student-researchers meant that the teacher was working *with* the students at doing the same task. For another student, being involved meant that the teacher "commented on my learning". This perhaps indicates that the teacher was monitoring the learning processes, therefore noticing how the learning was going. In any

case, the student was being acknowledged. One student-researcher mentioned being talked to "separately" which could mean that the student felt respected. Being involved is about being present in the learning of the students both with words and with actions.

Making Learning Interesting

If I were to summarize this theme according to students, fun would seem to unanimously describe "making learning interesting". Fun is actually a very broad description and could fit any out of the ordinary ways of teaching! Making learning relevant is another way to make learning interesting and to engage students. For this section, student-researchers did not yield much data. Sometimes, learning is fun but *you just had to be there to experience it.* Student-researchers did say that group work, appealing to their interests and having an exciting teacher made learning interesting. The majority of student-researchers found an enjoyable teacher made learning interesting as shown on the scale. One student-researcher did not respond.

Question for making learning interesting:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher *found ways to make learning fun.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
6	2	2	0

Table 19

Results for Making Learning Interesting.

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher made learning interesting?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Simple drawings • Hands-on activities • Playing learning games • Bring in things to teach • Science experiments		

The examples the student-researchers gave are not new ideas. On the contrary they are widely known to constitute the basics of making learning interesting. I decided to let these examples stand as they are to highlight that it is the student-researchers who thought of those ideas and that indeed when a teacher works and thinks outside the box, students notice.

What and Why of Learning

This theme is about making learning relevant to students by being able to explain what it is the students are to achieve and more importantly, why. Good teachers stay "in the loop" in terms of the subjects they teach by constantly improving their practice. A key element in raising student engagement is to make learning meaningful to them. The group of student-researchers understood that to know what to do and to make sense of why a concept needs to be learned there must be an explanation. With that, the word "explain" became the focus of the responses. What and how the teacher explains mattered to the student-researchers and they provided numerous responses, which pertained to this theme and a few other overlapping ones. The students confirmed several times that teachers

bring relevance to learning by explaining why concepts are necessary. In this section, they confirmed the idea again and added that enjoyable teachers explained work several times over, gave examples, used differentiated learning and were encouraging. The results therefore only reflect the scale, which shows that students indeed perceived their enjoyable teachers as explaining what and why they had to learn.

Question for what and why of learning:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher explained *what we had to learn and why.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
7	3	1	0

Encouraging Risk Taking

Engaging practices included bringing students to a place where they felt comfortable experimenting with something that is a challenge, something that is new, or something that is the result of a connection they made with previous learning. Autonomy seems to characterize risk taking behaviours and ultimately, being a "risk taker" implies that the student has made a learning leap. The student-researchers associated risk taking with the teacher providing encouragement to be autonomous and with being challenged. They also noted that risk taking is about "taking steps", much like differentiated learning.

On the scale, one student-researcher did not respond which created an even split between the student-researchers who perceived that an enjoyable teacher spent a lot of time encouraging risk taking and the student-researchers who perceived that this happened only some of the time. In looking at previous results there is a correlation between the students who were not eager to go to school and those who perceived their

teachers as encouraging risk taking only "some of the time". However, that correlation is not consistent with all the students who were not eager to go to school. This perhaps indicates issues with motivation, seeing as most of the scales in Part Two, except the scale about going to school, show high student perceptions of themes such as classroom environment, presentation of learning and teacher involvement with the class. This is perhaps also an indication of a shift, where the students saw themselves as receivers of most of the questions in Part One and Two but had to look at their own level of comfort with risk taking.

Question for encouraging risk taking:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher *encouraged me to take risks with my learning.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
4	1	5	0

Table 20

Results for Encouraging Risk Taking

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher encouraged you to take risks?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Would make you use your strengths to help others • Encouraged to think outside the box • Grow on ideas • Did things that weren't part of the curriculum to help us learn •Encouraged kids to exceed their own expectations		

For some students, risk taking is an ongoing battle against "I can't" and "I don't know how" statements no matter how small the learning steps. One student-researcher responded that an enjoyable teacher "encouraged kids to exceed their own expectations". That, in a nutshell, is "encouraging risk taking". It is no small task to convince students of their own abilities, and to guide them through!

Another student-researcher explained that the teacher "did things that weren't part of the curriculum to help us learn". Although this examples fits under "making learning interesting", it also serves as an example of a teacher doing some risk taking. I am curious as to what the perception of the curriculum is for that student, for many progressive teaching strategies do not make content appear as being part of the curriculum. In any case, a teacher taking a learning leap with students can serve as a demonstration of what risk taking looks like. In the same manner, teachers encouraging students "to use their own strengths to teach others" places those students in a similar situation. Furthermore, those students are encouraged to take risks socially.

Risk taking is not only about moving forward, farther than one originally thought, but also increasing the students' abilities to scaffold and think. Student-researchers associated risk taking with "growing" on ideas and "thinking outside the box". It is important for students to become familiar and comfortable with the processes behind success, or good ideas, or simply asking "What if?" This does confirm research but, once again, was deemed important if only because *students* said it.

Easy to Talk to

      This theme looks at how approachable a teacher is perceived to be. Much like risk taking, it implies a level of comfort on the part of the students in being able to seek out their teachers. Although one student-researcher did not respond, the rest of the group overwhelmingly perceived an enjoyable teacher as being easy to talk to. Student-researchers associated a teacher being easy to talk to with responses they would get from that teacher. For example, student-researchers found that teachers would "listen", "help" and "encourage you" (Table 21).

Question for easy to talk to:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher *was easy to talk to.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
9	1	0	0

Table 21

 Results for Easy to Talk to

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was when you talked?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Always understood what I was asking or talking about • Interested • Very understanding • Calm when I talked to her • Providing insights		• I could tell my teacher anything

In a teacher easy to talk to, students recognized two elements. First, the availability of the teacher and, second, the interest that was demonstrated. Student-researchers mentioned again the word "always", explaining that the teacher *knew every time* what the students wanted. This could mean that an enjoyable teacher is literally on the same wavelength as a student and does not necessarily need an enormous context around questions or stories. In turn, this requires the teachers to be knowledgeable about the student. The use of the word "always" to describe being able to talk to the teacher also speaks to the availability of the teacher.

Student-researchers noticed how the teachers responded and described them as being "interested", "understanding" and "calm". If anything, students seemed to notice non-verbal language as well as acknowledgement. A teacher looking "interested" and "understanding" perhaps also indicates that the teacher is taking the time to listen to the student. If teachers understand students then it almost goes without saying that they are able to "provide insights" that are interpreted as a confirmation that the teacher is easy to talk to. In the same manner another student-researcher reported being able to tell the teacher "anything". Availability and teacher responses (including helping the student) play an equally large role in students reaching the point where they felt that a teacher is easy to talk to.

New Ideas

In Part Two, students faced responding to some questions about their own involvement with school. As receivers they were quite happy to rank how another person was doing. As members of a school community, some students continued to feel slightly less than enthralled about school. Despite the potential Hawthorne effect, some of the

student-researchers were honest about their own involvement in school and did not try to depict themselves as gleefully happy about school. This perhaps can serve as a reminder that even with the best teachers and in the best conditions possible, part of the learning responsibility falls on the students. In thinking of an enjoyable teacher the student-researchers were able to provide another group of suggestions of what can be done to raise their engagement above and beyond the eight themes discussed (Figure 3).

Make things fun; Use games; Use hands-on activities; Be exciting; Be available; Be interested; My environment matters; Value my friends; Value my work; Accept me; Teach me; Be involved; Explain Learning; Encourage me; Inspire me to do better; Step out of the box

Making Learning Interesting

Risk Taking

Making Learning Work

Easy to Talk to

ENGAGEMENT

What/Why of Learning

Involvement

Classroom Environment

Eager for School

Figure 3. Relationship between engagement, themes, and students' new ideas.

About the Process

Upon starting the second session, the student-researchers at Middle School 1 were asked to express whether the research process needed tweaking. The pace of the session was adjusted and students, now knowing what to do, were able to work within a shorter time limit. Students were given the opportunity to add to their previous comments and all

decided to "pass", indicating that they had shared all they wanted. The dartboard used for

the students to indicate the levels of satisfaction as to the goings on of the sessions

showed that they enjoyed the "meeting", "the food", and that "things were fine".

The scales that were used for this research included four points ranging as

follows: All the time, Most of the time, Some of the time, Rarely. On two occasions one

of the student-researchers decided to add another point on the scale, "Never", to make it a

five point scale (see Table 15 and 16). Whereas perhaps students not responding to some

questions during the first session may have indicated that they were tired or truly "didn't

know", this time a discussion was sparked about what was allowed to be answered.

Students spent some time discussing adding a "Never" on the scale, leaving it to the

individual, and realized that they could rank a certain way and still provide some

examples.

The range of answers on the scales seems to not only reflect the students'

perceptions about engagement but also their level of comfort with the process of the

study. Unlike Part One, where the answers on the scales are high, the range in part Two is

more varied. Although there could be a multitude of explanations, I wondered if it simply

was a function of understanding the process better considering the students needed

validation during the first session.

During the second session it became evident that writing was a challenge for

some students and they much preferred to answer verbally. I only adjusted the format by

making a few notes about some answers, encouraging the students instead to write with

key words. The students who preferred to answer verbally sparked a few discussions

about negative teacher experiences and were quick to think about "the opposite" of some

of the questions. This served as a means to clarify some of the questions.

One student-researcher was able to attend part of the second session and made

arrangements to complete the survey at a later time. This was arranged as an adaptation

and to allow the student to fully share ideas.

Figure 4. Dartboard at the beginning of the second session.

Chapter 6: Results and Discussion (Part Three)

Teacher-Student Relationships

Students, like most human beings, want to matter. Even if students behave as if they don't want to matter, school feels worse for them if they perceive that no one cares. Therefore, it is up to teachers to show students that above and beyond the curriculum and the learning, they also value the human being. With some students developing a purposeful relationship happens quickly. With others, it can take months! Investing the time and effort is worth it for both the teacher and the student since the result could mean higher levels of engagement. In Part Three, student-researchers were asked to look at qualities displayed by teachers they really enjoyed to develop purposeful relationships. These qualities are more or less "natural qualities" that make a difference, like getting to know students, and the ability to let go of the precious classroom "control".

Sharing Personal Stories

Much like students, teachers display different levels of comfort when it comes to sharing about themselves. But sharing stories gives students at least a glimpse of the human being that is undertaking their education for the year. Stories allow students to get to know the teacher and make connections with their own lives. Stories need not be elaborate or overly personal, appropriateness always being de mise, but they can be little snapshots. The student-researchers confirmed that enjoyable teachers shared stories and that it allowed them to get to know the teachers better. They specified that teachers shared stories about their own learning experiences and gave "personal examples" to facilitate learning. All student-researchers perceived their enjoyable teacher as sharing stories, with the bulk of the students noticing that this happened on an ongoing basic.

One student-researcher said "I don't know" (IDK). Data for this theme did not overlap any other themes and all of the students' answers were concentrated in the "sounded like" and "felt like" sections. Perhaps that is because students don't "look" at a story being shared, they experience it.

Question for sharing personal stories:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel I knew that teacher better because she/he *shared some stories about himself/herself.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*	*IDK*
8	2	0	0	1

Table 22

Results for Sharing Personal Stories

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher shared stories?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
	• Shared stories about childhood (4) • Shared stories about family (2) • Shared stories about life outside teaching life (3) • Knew my brother from two years before	• Interesting • Fun • Good (2)

Unlike kindergarteners and grade one students who generally think their teachers eat and sleep at school, other students understand well that the teacher is a person with "another" life. Student-researchers noted that the teachers shared about "life outside the teaching life". This, for students, humanizes the person who is teaching the class. No

matter what the story is, it tells the students that their teachers have other interests. Having other interests, in turn, models to students that anything and everything can make someone "special", even if it is as simple as the teacher liking potatoes.

Student-researchers shared that teachers told stories about their "childhood" and their "families". Hearing about these topics is interesting to students because it is right within their frame of reference. The students are *children* and they have families (or safe settings)! Students are therefore able to connect with the teacher at some level and they start seeing the person behind the teacher. A shared story with a student may also help alleviate worries or concerns, or raise awareness about a specific sensitive situation.

One of the student-researchers brought forward an interesting point in highlighting that the teacher knew the "brother from two years before". This is a good example of a connection having been established and continued, hopefully not in the typical comparative mode.

Here, with stories being shared, there exists the caution that the stories shared are intended to develop purposeful relationships. The central focus of the classroom should not become mainly the teachers' stories at the expense of the possibility for students to share their own stories. The teacher sharing stories can become a great catalyst for students to gain the confidence in all areas of their learning, but the focus needs to remain on the students.

Trust

Trust, like respect, is a value that is desired by both students and teachers alike. Trust is essential in building purposeful relationships and is more likely to grow if coming first from the teacher. Student-researchers confirmed in high numbers the

existence of a relationship of trust with an enjoyable teacher. One student-researcher responded that there was no trust. Hence the reappearance of the category: "never". Students who responded associated trust with receiving help and the teacher being able to listen. Students start trusting teachers when they see their attempts at seeking help being met with a favorable response. It is then highly important for teachers to respond appropriately. The same applies with listening, especially when students are trying to share about "problems", no matter the source. This was confirmed and noticed by one student-researcher who expressed that the teacher "always had a solution". Table 24 shows other ways students recognized trust being exchanged.

Question for trust:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher *trusted me, and I trusted the teacher.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*	*Never*
7	3	0	0	1

Table 23

Results for Trust

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher trusted you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Getting to know us •Trusted me with jobs (4) • Let me do things on my own, like jobs without supervision		

To trust someone necessitates having a bit of knowledge about the person. Student-researchers included the teachers' efforts to "know" them as part of being trusted. By the same token student-researchers explain that getting "jobs", especially "jobs without supervision" was a way they know teachers trust them. This forms a circle where as teachers know the students they give them jobs, and through these jobs they get to know the students better and, therefore, are apt to give more jobs. The key here, is to get to know the students. From the students' point of view, getting a job is a mark of trust, and with that comes the opportunity to be trustworthy.

Knowing the Students

Knowing students means possessing a deeper understanding of their personalities and motivations. It is more than just assessing and addressing individual needs, knowing students is also about making connections. In a purposeful relationship knowing the students sends the message that they are important. Student-researchers associated *knowing* the students with caring, a theme within which they expressed they wanted to matter. One student-researcher indicated rarely getting the sense that the teacher *knew* the student. The rest of the group, on the contrary, indicated that they perceived the teacher *knew* them a majority of the time.

Question for knowing students:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher *knew me.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
6	4	0	1

Table 24

Results for Knowing Students

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher knew you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Getting to know my family (3) • Paid attention to my personality	• Asked questions about me • Asked questions about my family, my dog • Teachers didn't go crazy with questions	• Teacher would recognize if I was happy or sad or if I've changed

In getting to know the students, what seems to resonate is the attention to details. For example, student-researchers noticed enjoyable teachers making an effort to get to know their "family". A student's family is an extension of that student. Recognizing the family means acknowledging the student's life surroundings. In this way, *knowing* the student is also possessing somewhat of an understanding of the student's setting. Student-researchers also noticed when teachers were paying attention to their "personality". We teach students that they are all different and that being different is okay but students need to see that we mean it. Paying attention to a student's personality is once again acknowledging finer details such as traits that are typical of one child though perhaps similar to others.

One student-researcher described an enjoyable teacher as noticing changes of mood. This speaks to the ability of the teacher to read students effectively. Although with some students emotional displays leave nothing to uncertainty, with others it requires close observation or *knowing* the student. At times, a change from happy to sad can be

almost imperceptible and the only clue a look, a smile that is not smiling, or shoulder shrugging that nothing is wrong. When teachers know their students, they can "see" those changes.

Student-researchers highlighted that enjoyable teachers asked questions to get to know them. The teachers asked questions about the students themselves, their family, and the pet! By asking questions the teacher is actually making an effort and investing time. That alone demonstrates interest. One student-researcher specified that while asking questions an enjoyable teacher does not go overboard. This perhaps demonstrates an awareness of personal boundaries and *knowing* that students open up at their own pace and in their own way. Teachers also perhaps remember what students have previously shared and make those connections, which allow conversations to progress rather than repeat.

Sense of Belonging

Belonging and feeling accepted bring some relevance and meaning for students in letting them know that they are at the right place. It is not enough to tell students such a message, they need to get the sense that they belong in the classroom or the school. Fostering a sense of belonging is yet another central theme in building purposeful relationships and it ties in with the students' intrinsic motivation. Student-researchers confirmed that feeling welcomed and the teacher being friendly both contributed to creating a sense of belonging. Most student-researchers perceived that their enjoyable teacher created a sense of belonging in the classroom. They identified different aspects of creating that sense of belonging.

Question for sense of belonging:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that *I belonged in*

that classroom with that teacher.

All the time   *Most of the time*   *Some of the time*   *Rarely*

   8   2   1   0

Table 25

Results for Sense of Belonging

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher made you feel like you belonged?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Smile • Teacher was happy • I was happy to come • Teacher took a liking to the students • Extra gym	• She used me for examples in my good subjects	• Made me feel like the classroom was home • Teacher was happy when I came into the classroom • Classroom was warm

There are two larger themes that appear in the results above, happiness and warmth. Student-researchers reported that a teacher who made them feel like they belonged "looked happy" and, more so, "was happy when [the student] came into the classroom". Students notice non-verbal language and internalize those messages as much as words. Maya Angelou once suggested that a mother's face should light up every time her child enters the room. A teacher looking happy when a student comes into the classroom can trigger the same feelings in that student. Along the same lines student-

researchers reported that the teacher "took a liking to the students" and that they were "happy to come [to class/school]".

The feelings that result from getting a sense of belonging have to do with the teacher in the classroom, and the environment. Student-researchers described the classroom as being "warm" and "feeling like home". Granted not all homes are places of warmth. However, the feeling of the classroom environment these student-researchers described is one of comfort.

In relation to learning, one student-researcher expressed that students' strengths were featured, therefore reinforcing successes. Another student-researcher reported getting "extra gym" and feeling a sense of belonging. It is not only who teachers are, or how they set up the class, or how they go about showcasing learning that matters, but also the "perks" that come once in a while. Each comes to school with a different purpose!

Caring about the Family

The topic of families came up a few times throughout this research, each time with the mention that families represent an extension of the students. Working with families and getting to know them affords teachers a better understanding of any particular situation a student might be facing. At the same time, it enables the teacher to gauge what is the most appropriate way to teach or help any student with both academic and non-academic issues. Student-researchers indicated that enjoyable teachers demonstrated care for families by getting to know them and by listening when students wanted to talk. Most student-researchers perceived the teachers as caring "all the time" or "most of the time" while a few students only perceived that "some of the time" or "didn't know".

Question for caring about families:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher *cared about my family.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*	*IDK*
6	2	2	0	1

Table 26

Results for Caring about Families

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher cared about your family?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Asked how my family was (3) • Came for supper • If things were too personal would give me space	• Would offer to talk privately with me • Asked how we are doing (2)	

Student-researchers reported that enjoyable teachers would show interest in families by "asking how the family was". Teachers also showed they cared about the family, or rather *understood* about the families, by respecting students' needs for privacy and space. One student-researcher reported an interesting point by indicating that an enjoyable teacher "came for supper". As much as students are interested in knowing that teachers have another "life" outside of school, they also have their own life after school hours. With that, whether it is coming for supper or saying "Hi!" while shopping, most students and their families appreciate the acknowledgement and it is yet another opportunity for teachers to develop the relationship.

Listening

Listening to students means hearing what is said and what is not said. Throughout this research one of the major theme being repeated is the ability for the teacher to *listen*. It is the teachers' response when students attempt to communicate that is noticed. Student-researchers included caring about the message and helping as indications that enjoyable teachers were listening. Most student-researchers perceived their teachers as listening while one student-researcher responded that this happened "rarely". One student-researcher did not respond.

Question for listening:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher *listened* when I talked.

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
4	5	0	1

Table 27

Results for Listening

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher listened?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Understood and gave responses	• Asked questions after I talked • Listened to my idea and input • Had good advice and answers	

I chose to present the above student responses to show that students put an emphasis on the responses they receive whether they are indeed responses, or questions,

or answers. Even with one student-researcher saying that an enjoyable teacher had "listened to my idea and input" the completion of the listening transaction most likely came from some form of acknowledgement. For students, listening is an interaction, not merely an occasion to express a message and move on.

Empowering Students

Empowering students means having an ability to involve students in their own education by encouraging them to take part in decision making processes. This is yet another way to show how they matter and to create a sense of belonging in the classroom. Empowering students requires teachers to let go of some classroom control without relinquishing all of it. Student-researchers confirmed being included in the classroom decisions in an overwhelming manner. Two student-researchers chose not to respond. In their comments, student-researchers confirmed that they knew they were being included in classroom decisions because the teachers let them "talk" and "listened" to the comments. Four student-researchers added that they were "asked for their opinion" and that their "opinion was valued". One student-researcher mentioned the teacher asking "all the students evenly".

Question for empowering students:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher *included me in the decisions about learning, and the classroom.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
7	2	0	0

Table 28

Results for Empowering Students

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher included you in decisions?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
• Let me be independent • Would vote in class • Would let us "throw out" ideas • Decisions and learning came from web	• Suggested kids' ideas to the class	

Whether teachers are ready for it or not, students already express a range of feelings about their schooling. Sometimes it takes the form of a roaring cheer because it is gym; other times it takes the form of low grunts of discontent for whatever reason. Tied to the cheers and grunts are various levels of engagement. At gym time, students often come up with a vast array of activities that could be done in the gym. However, the gym should not be the only place where students feel they can "throw out " ideas.

The student-researchers recognized being involved in the decision process of the classroom. They reported that decision-making systems such as "webs" and "voting" were in place in their classroom. One student-researcher explained that the teacher would let them "throw out" ideas. There is much to be gained by including the students. First, they get a "say" and getting a say means that their thinking is valued. One student-researcher mentioned that an enjoyable teacher suggested "kids' ideas" to the class. Second, they gain a vested interest in the goings on of the classroom because they have a say. Hence, their engagement is likely to rise. Third, as one of the student-researchers reported, students get to be "independent". Students get the chance to experiment with

making decisions and carrying them through. The classroom then becomes a safe environment in which to evaluate and perhaps deal with the consequences of their decisions.

Being There

This theme refers to the availability of the teacher. Although the students are part of a class, they need to get the feeling that the teacher is there specifically for them, individually. Being there, in this sense, is closely tied to themes such as being involved or knowing the student. Student-researchers associated being there with displaying caring attitudes (also ready with hugs) and getting help with the assurance that problems will be solved. Most of their responses overlapped with these themes. The student-researchers used the word "always" to describe the level of availability of their enjoyable teacher. On the scale, two student-researchers did not to respond. The majority of students felt that their enjoyable teacher was there for them, with most students' perceptions being "all the time".

Question for being there:

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed I feel that teacher *was there for me.*

All the time	*Most of the time*	*Some of the time*	*Rarely*
6	2	1	0

Table 29

Results for Being There

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was there for you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….
		• The teacher liked me

Students perceive and internalize teachers' words and actions on an ongoing basis. Building purposeful relationships sends strong messages that contribute to raising students' self-esteem, confidence and, even more, their engagement in school.

New Ideas

In Part Three, student-researchers looked at their relationships with their enjoyable teachers and pondered the strength of that relationship. How a teacher responds to students is intertwined with students' self-perceptions of being liked, mattering, and being cared for. For some students school can cease to be a necessary evil and becomes more of an acceptable place to be. Furthermore, how the teacher forms those purposeful relationships can alter parents perceptions of school altogether. The examples shared by the students often pertain to the "little things". Over time, all these "little things" accumulate. The sum of these parts makes a difference in students' lives. Figure 5 shows the suggestions students have with regards to developing purposeful relationships.

Tell me about you a little; Trust me; Give me responsibilities; Pay attention to my personality; Get to know <u>me</u>; Talk to <u>me</u>; I want to belong; I care about what my classroom is like; Notice my family; Notice me outside of school; Listen to <u>me</u>; Hear <u>me</u>; Let me have a say; Help me be independent; Be there; Like me

Sharing Personal Stories

Trust

Knowing the Students

Being There

TEACHER/STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Sense of Belonging

Empowering Students

Caring about the Family

Listening

Figure 5. Relationship between teacher-student relationships, themes and students' new ideas.

About the Process

The third session with the student-researchers at Middle School 1 almost mirrored the previous session. Students felt comfortable with the process and were eager to move along with the tasks. Much like the second session, the student-researchers indicated on the dartboard that they were satisfied with "the meeting" and "the food". When asked if they wanted to add to their previous answers, one student-researcher wanted to clarify that in the Engagement part, an enjoyable teacher would also let students go outside to play. Student-researchers used their nicknames to sign the dartboard. The middle of the dartboard expressed satisfaction, and some students decided that the outside of the

dartboard meant that they were "indifferent", not good but not bad either. During the last two sessions the students also used the outside of the dartboard to give suggestions. We did bring more fruits to eat and added comments, but we did not go paintballing.

Students tackled the scale in the same manner as the second session, with the added confidence that they could "adjust" the scales. Hence, in this third part we can note the addition of a new "I don't know" (IDK) category and the return of the "Never" as fifth points on the Likert-type scale. At times, some student-researchers left the answers blank. I wondered about the process and if the students were tired. The blank answers coincided with the end of the surveys, which perhaps indicated fatigue, lack of interest, and not having anything to say among any other number of reasons. The "IDK" and "Never" responses were scattered through the research, which perhaps indicated that students had not really noticed anything about those particular themes or truly perceived no signs of those themes in their most enjoyable teacher. It perhaps also spoke to the range of enjoyable teachers, some displaying all the qualities in this research and some displaying only a certain number. Such an outcome might imply the existence of "categories" of enjoyable teachers.

Some of the student-researchers continued raising negative experiences throughout the third session but to a lesser degree. This was perhaps due to the questions being more about interactions rather than an assessment of qualities or skills. The majority of students confirmed that finer details in building purposeful relationships do matter.

Figure 6. Dartboard at the beginning of the third session.

Chapter 7: Implications and Limitations

In this project I sought to explore the various ways students identify successful attitudes, strategies and skills that lead to purposeful educational relationships. Such relationships are directly linked to student engagement and, consequently, student achievement. For the purpose of the research it was essential to define student engagement as students perceive it, and to identify researched positive teacher attitudes, strategies and skills that are conducive to purposeful educational relationships. As part of an action research team, a group of grade seven students were given the opportunity to reflect on their previous seven years of schooling and describe behaviours and attitudes demonstrated by teachers that they have enjoyed. This research took roots in Appreciative Inquiry and focused solely on students' successful experiences. The goal of the research was to compile a list of tangible strategies for developing purposeful educational relationships that could be shared with interested teachers, parents and students.

The use of students as co-researchers presents some benefits as well as some challenges. It is interesting to notice that the UK has developed policies "that stress the requirement to listen to and to consult with children and young people" (O'Brien & Moules, 2007, p. 385). BC and Alberta have policies regarding the welfare and achievement of students but none that specifies the necessity to involve students in decision processes in a formal manner. Whether in a European or North American context, the involvement of students as active partners brings to forefront the issue of power relationships in research. It is necessitating a paradigm shift from both the adult

and the students' perspective. This was evident during this research, where the student-researchers were tentative at first with their responses, often asking for validation.

Action research can be creative and highly enjoyable for all co-researchers. Kids can be more rigid than adults at imposing rigor yet, when we let them, they are also the ones who will come up with the out of the box ideas that work, and new ways to report. During this study the student-researchers helped each other, readjusted components of the study and gained confidence in expressing their ideas no matter how contradictory. The students at Middle School 2 agreed to work through all three surveys at once and conversed with interest at various moments. The students at Middle School 1 provided a far more appropriate yet equally entertaining rendition of the movie "The Breakfast Club" (1985) where they found themselves grouped in a room with a common goal. Throughout the process they shared nicknames, found commonalities with each other, and exchanged information about their school experiences with each other. At times, they socialized and, at times, they pondered questions. Overall the students made the process what it needed to be for them to be effective.

The ideas each student shared on the scales or in writing provided persuasive evidence that what teachers do, and don't do, matters. The student-researchers put into their words what larger concepts mean –such as paying attention to the family dog- as a way to build teacher-student relationships. The results of this study suggest some implications for practice that require more in-depth considerations seeing as most of what was shared is, in teacher's talk, what we know already.

One implication is to consider more seriously the paradigm shift to listen to students' voices. At times, the messages are literal but there are also many occasions

where a much deeper feeling is expressed. Another implication pertains to the human aspect of education. Teachers are constantly interacting with others, most of them students. Whether we like the term or not, teaching is a people business! Considering ongoing self-reflection is yet another implication. How students perceive their teachers is the result of an accumulation of social and academic experiences over time. It is not only the students whose engagement needs to be tended to but also that of the teachers. One last implication is simply to consider how comfortable teachers are with the notion of *change*, for to apply any of those implications a change is required.

Shifting the Paradigm

Shifting a paradigm involves challenging current schools of thought and actually carrying out the change through concrete actions. This study allowed students to speak up about their school experiences within a context where their opinion was taken into account. A first glance at the raw data for this study showed that students had a lot to say. Although some students were perhaps clumsy with how they go about sharing, verbally or in writing, they got their point across. Once the data was sorted into confirmed ideas and new ideas, there was an indication through the student-researchers' responses that they have an understanding of broader concepts such as caring, respect, trust, and what being encouraging looks like, to name only a few. Furthermore, they expanded on each topic, providing valuable insights into how purposeful relationships contribute to raising engagement. This is very encouraging.

We would likely get similar results at any school if we were to run a safety survey, which allowed students to express how they feel about school in general. In this way, letting the students express themselves is not a revolutionary concept. Shifting the

paradigm is not about asking students for their opinions but rather asking and then carrying out the changes their answers promote. For example at the school level, it may be that the students tell those in charge "there's nothing to do at recess". As a result, things get set up such that games are taught, equipment is purchased and the layout of the schoolyard is perhaps revisited. In all, a concerted effort is put in to create an improvement. The current study looked specifically at how building relationships affect student engagement. The student-researchers confirmed that indeed research about Teacher Attitudes, Engagement, and Teacher-Student Relationships is effectively correct and that the themes within each sub-topic contribute to raising engagement. They also added that to raise student engagement other strategies have been used by teachers, and suggested that trying any of these strategies will likely contribute to raising engagement. But asking a teacher to respond to help in a timely manner because that makes a difference, as student-researchers said, is vastly different than teaching a game so the schoolyard is more appealing. Games can be found in books; responding in a timely manner requires a change of practice. The paradigm shift comes then from teachers' willingness to change practice as a result of allowing students to express themselves.

When the students' responses come too close to this paradigm shift, teachers often retreat into the old adage: "This is all stuff we know and besides we are already doing that". A cursory glance at the results of this study, reveals that all of the student-researchers' answers fall under themes, as we say in teacher talk, we already know. We know to eat better and exercise, but do we all do it? No. With raising engagement, teachers often continue to infer student needs and interpret how they feel. As a result, students sometimes experience series of hits and misses where the overall experience is

satisfactory rather than leaving both the parent and the student with the "happy" feelings student-researchers shared all through this study. One value of this study lies in the source of the data, the students.

The Human Aspect

Considering the human aspect of education implies, among others things, being able to recognize the finer details that make a difference in students' lives. Throughout the study, the examples brought forward by the students exposed some broader themes intertwined into the twenty-four themes that were explored. First, there was strong evidence that enjoyable teachers put the emphasis on students and more specifically, on individuals. Student-researchers expressed numerous times the need to be noticed, acknowledged, considered, and supported, not just at school but everywhere. And not just because they are students but because they are people. A focus on the individuality of the students stood as an important feature in raising student engagement. Students are indeed emotional beings and between the boundaries they set, and the boundaries dictated by what is appropriate, acknowledging their "me" contributes to making a difference in their school life. For each student it is the main relationship at school. For the teacher each relationship should be of equal importance rather than a communal "you" (the class) and "me" (the teacher).

Communication was also highlighted as an overall important theme. The results showed that students are sensitive to communication. It goes without saying that communication forms the basis of any successful organization, including a small operation like a classroom. Considering that the study focused on what qualities and skills "look like, sound like and feel like", it is communication as a whole that came

through. We communicate as much through our actions and reactions as we do through our words. Student-researchers reported in all three sub-topics that they noticed certain actions, demeanors, reactions or emotional states from their enjoyable teachers. They highlighted those as working towards raising engagement but, more importantly, they *noticed*. Just like adults, students feel, receive and interpret messages they perceive all day long, every day. As a result their output of emotions is affected. They are human! In this way, considering that students are human should trigger empathy on the teachers' part. Empathy, if not highly innate in a person, can be learned, much like the Canadian Program *Roots of Empathy*, aimed at developing empathy in young children and prevent bullying.

For most teachers, considering a paradigm shift is slightly more challenging than considering the human aspect of education. Implications of this research are that both should be achieved. While it is easier said than done, there are a few venues where putting emphasis on purposeful relationships to raise engagement may be effectively implemented.

First, programs for pre-service teachers include a bevy of very important classes about various school subjects and pedagogy. The more research advances the more aspiring teachers have to learn it seems. Within the realm of good pedagogy lie most of what there is to know about dealing effectively with students. The rest of it, knowing how to see the little things and how to listen and hear students, leaves pre-service teachers to rely on instinct and sheer personality. Not everyone is a natural but most can begin with a sound set of qualities and skills. Therefore, a paradigm shift could be initiated by

teaching pre-service teachers about purposeful relationships and engagement, or at the very basis, empathy.

Second, School Based Team Meetings (SBTM) are regular weekly meetings where concerns for students are discussed and where solutions are brainstormed by several members of the school community: the administration, support staff if necessary, school counselor, the teacher and the student services teachers. The issues brought up during such meetings are as varied as there are students in the school. However, the school counselor and the principal often seem to collect a surplus of students who feel disengaged with school. There are many instances where having support staff in place is vital for a student's ability to function well. At the same time, there are many instances where being aware of the purposeful relationships with students might make all the differences. Perhaps looking closely at the nature of the relationship between a student and a teacher, and how to improve this relationship, might yield positive results for both parties. Some strategies that are either in place or gaining momentum at the school level are to pay attention to the pairing of teachers and students, staying with students for two consecutive years, and paying attention to transitions. These steps contribute to building and maintaining purposeful relationships.

Third, staff meetings where positive school stories are shared can serve as a catalyst for discussions on engagement and what engagement is. As presented in this research, and as the results illustrate, engagement is viewed differently by teachers and students. Defining engagement within the context of a school is a start. Students are less inclined to work with people they don't enjoy much. They are like us, human! If those people happen to be teachers, it is very unfortunate and it makes for a long school year.

Hence, developing a purposeful relationship is closely tied to engagement. In that relationship there are elements that pertain to both the social and academic realm.

Encouraging Self-Reflection

Having a purpose implies knowing that what we are doing is leading to a desired outcome. Developing a purposeful relationship means that teachers consciously pay attention to the quality of the relationships they establish with students in order to raise those students' self-investment in school. When things go well we often attribute the reasons to a combination of the students being in a good place and the teachers reaching their goals. When things don't go so well or are simply neutral, we tend to look at the students and their lives first, then perhaps defer to the SBTM for support, or attribute the lack of interest to inner motivation of some sort. It might cross our mind that something different should be done, but that's often when the best "umbrella" thinking takes place. Umbrella statements are the generalized statements used to justify inertia (unless the school based team is involved). "We all care"; "We have to think of all the other students"; "There's not enough time in the day...". An implication of this study is that when educators look at the results generated by students, self-reflection may be sparked.

If teachers consciously put in an effort to build purposeful relationships with the intent to raise engagement then they might willingly scrutinize which parts of the relationships need tweaking. Self-reflection might lead to a paradigm shift where becoming aware of the students' internalizations may change the way teachers approach teaching altogether. A good way to initiate a process of self-reflection is to ask students to write a report card for the teacher, although that asks the teachers to a big leap into vulnerability. A safer way is to look at the bulk of the results of this research and deepen

the thinking by questioning the extent to which suggestions are already being used, the philosophies behind the thinking, and the implications for future goals.

The student-researchers seem to have touched on two general ideas with regards to self-reflection. First, that displaying only some attitudes and some skills yields "some of the time" kinds of results, where the perception exists that the teacher and school are okay but nothing more. School *happens* to the students and, sometimes, *with* them. It is a combination of all the skills and qualities embedded in the students' suggestions that contributes to making a noticeable difference. The key, and the second general idea, is in the consistency with which these skills and qualities are used, interchanged and made to flow such that students' perceptions are predominantly positive. Students are inconsistent by nature. They are growing humans. Teachers, on the other hand, are trained professionals.

Limitations and Future Research

Building purposeful relationships requires an investment of the whole person into the goings on of the class. This research looked at the positive experiences of grade seven students in their best school circumstances. Although both engagement and disengagement were explored as a means to explain how to raise engagement, this research did not explore the reverse situation, the effects of student disengagement on teachers. A caution with building purposeful relationships is that they may cause a drain on good teachers who may overextend themselves for the benefit of their students. Chronic disengagement can also affect even the very best teacher adversely. A limitation of this study is that when students answered "rarely" or "blank", or their own "never" or "IDK" there were no probes into the reasons for these answers. Student-researchers were

also not asked to describe themselves as students, which might have shed some light as to the motivation behind some of these answers.

The amount of data gathered contributed to the creation of a lengthy list of suggestions on how to build purposeful relationships. The draw back is that this list, despite having been considerably reduced, still constitutes an overwhelming amount of data. The concern with regrouping the ideas presented by the students is that the flavour of the examples is lost with every new grouping into a larger theme or concept. The limitation here lies in the potential loss of specific examples (such as acknowledging Sparkplug the dog) which, in turn, takes teachers back to using more generalized terms such as "motivation" or "individuality".

Another limitations for this study lay in its format. Throughout the three sessions, it became evident that some student-researchers had more negative experiences with school. The focus on Appreciative Inquiry generated quite a few suggestions on how to go about building purposeful relationships and raising engagement. It may have been probable that some of the student-researchers had few varied positive comments because of having yet to experience a purposeful relationship with a teacher. Although some student-researchers insisted on relating negative experiences, there was no available outlet for them to express what they wanted to share. In this sense, there was no closure for them. With regards to the format, AI is a process that includes several phases. For this research, only the first phase was of relevance.

The writing required of the students became a limitation over time. Although most students worked diligently, it proved difficult for some of them to carry on all the way to the end, especially during the second and third session. As an adaptation, I made

some notes when a few of the students were tired of writing. Changing the format of the session might have given those students less to do but more frequently. Another adaptation could have been to record the sessions and extract data. A result of some of the student-researchers' discouragement with writing is the presence of "blank" answers. However, these could have also meant that the student truly had no point of reference with regards to the question.

A final limitation, though consistent with the format of a reduced sample, is the inability to make broad generalizations. Although most suggestions make sense to most of us, these suggestions are specific to the culture of the district where the study took place. In a highly multicultural setting, the examples the students provide may vary according to cultural influences and the educational belief systems of that particular context. Thus, the implications for future research include the replicability of this study.

Setting aside the limitations associated with format, this research could be replicated in various educational contexts, with specific groups of students according to cultural backgrounds, gender, disabilities, or age. The data could yield purposeful relationships and engagement strategies that work with specific targeted groups within a similar context as well. Just like differentiating instruction, purposeful relationships that work with a particular group of students may not have the same impact with another.

Within the framework of AI, with a focus on positive responses, this research could be furthered by asking students to think about what they would envision a teacher doing to show caring, respect, or other attributes. Another way to explore a similar question would be to ask what the teacher did not do. This could offer students a way to clarify their answers and, perhaps, gain closure from negative experiences. Although the

responses have a negative connotation, answering through in the negative form would be enticing the students to think about the positive they would have liked to see, hear or feel. Perhaps contrasting what the teachers did and did not do together might provide more specific answers.

Considering the mitigated student-researchers' responses about their eagerness to go to school, true correlations between the motivation to come to school and the effect of the purposeful relationships with the teachers could be explored.

In light of the amount of data accumulated, further research could include asking the same students to sort the data in order of importance, or to reflect on what they want teachers most to know and to change.

Finally, a longitudinal study could be set to determine how those same students have experienced High School and how they perceived purposeful relationships and engagement as grade 12 students. It would also be interesting to look into how many teachers they have encountered who build purposeful relationships and how that has influenced their schooling.

In the End

This study provides strong evidence that supports previous research as presented in the literature review. The student-researchers described in "student language" how engagement is indeed cognitive, emotional and behavioral. They longed for *relevance* when working on assignments, they *noticed* their teachers' reactions towards them, and they looked for *hands-on* and *interesting* activities to be presented at school. As a result of a set of attitudes, skills and strategies displayed or used by the teacher, engagement increased. At mid-point during the study, student-researchers provided data indicating

that although engagement can be increased, the reasons why they come to school may be as wide and varied as each and every student. This information raises some questions as to what exactly brings students to school every day, other than the fact that they have to. In this way, student-researchers demonstrated that building purposeful relationships can be *one* component of the motivation to go to school. Further research could explore in depth the underlying reasons motivating students to attend every morning.

In this study, student-researchers contributed to clarifying terms used in previous research. At times, student-researchers boiled those terms down to the simplest form. It is not usually stated during pre-service teachers' education or in research that petting the family dog is important. But it is a little attention that can carry a lot of impact for the students (and sometimes their parents). Student-researchers confirmed previous case studies and used similar examples stated by other students, sometimes, older students. They also added detail to previous studies that concentrated on presenting statements to students. In this way, this study builds on existing literature and probes into students' experiences.

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the impact of building purposeful relationships on student engagement. Students want to matter. They notice little gestures and big reactions, and they hear what teachers say and do not say. Through many examples, students told what makes a difference from day to day. For some students, building purposeful relationships makes school bearable; for others it makes school absolutely enthralling; still, for others, it is the difference they need to help them see who they truly are and what they can truly achieve.

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Appendix A

Students' Perceptions of Teacher Attitudes Survey Questions

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed …

1. I feel that teacher had a *caring* attitude with me.

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher cared about you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

2. I feel that teacher was *respectful* towards me.

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher respected you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

3. I feel that teacher was *helpful* with me and my learning.

All the time   *Most of the time*   *Some of the time*   *Rarely*

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was helpful?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

4. I feel that teacher was *encouraging* me in my learning.

All the time   *Most of the time*   *Some of the time*   *Rarely*

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was encouraging?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

5. I feel that teacher was *fair* with me.

All the time   *Most of the time*   *Some of the time*   *Rarely*

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was fair with you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

6. I feel that teacher was *considerate*.

All the time   *Most of the time*   *Some of the time*   *Rarely*

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was considerate?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

7. I feel that teacher was *welcoming*.

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was welcoming?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

8. I feel that teacher was *enthusiastic*.

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was enthusiastic?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

Reflections

Use a sticker to show how you feel our research project is going. The closer to the center, the more satisfied you are.

- Do you feel you are able to share everything you want?
- Would you like to add details to your thoughts?
- How do you feel the research project is going?
- Do you have suggestions about the process?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix B

Students' Perceptions of Engagement Survey Questions

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed …

1. I was eager to go to school every morning.

All the time *Most of the time* *Some of the time* *Rarely*

Can you think of some examples of what made you go to school?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

2. I feel that teacher made the *classroom* a good place to be.

All the time *Most of the time* *Some of the time* *Rarely*

Can you think of some examples of how the classroom was?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

3. I feel that teacher was *making learning work for me.*

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher made learning work for you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

4. I feel that teacher was *involved with the class*.

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was involved with the class?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

5. I feel that teacher *found ways to make learning interesting*.

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher made learning interesting?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

6. I feel that teacher explained *what* we had to learn and *why*.

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher explained learning?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

7. I feel that teacher encouraged me to take risks with my learning.

All the time   *Most of the time*   *Some of the time*   *Rarely*

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher encourage you to take risks?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

8. I feel that teacher was *easy to talk to*.

All the time   *Most of the time*   *Some of the time*   *Rarely*

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was when you talked?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

Reflections

Use a sticker to show how you feel our research project is going. The closer to the center, the more satisfied you are.

- Do you feel you are able to share everything you want?
- Would you like to add details to your thoughts?
- How do you feel the research project is going?
- Do you have suggestions about the process?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix C

Students' Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships Survey Questions

When I think of my school year with a teacher I really enjoyed …

1. I feel I knew that teacher better because she/he *shared some stories about himself/herself* .

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher shared stories?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

2. I feel that teacher *trusted me, and I trusted the teacher.*

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher trusted you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

3. I feel that teacher *knew* me.

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher knew you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

4. I feel I *belonged in that classroom with that teacher.*

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher made you feel like you belonged?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

5. I feel that teacher *cared about my family.*

All the time Most of the time Some of the time Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher cared about your family?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

6. I feel that teacher *listened* when I talked.

All the time Most of the time Some of the time Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher listened?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

7. I feel that teacher *included me in the decisions about learning, and the classroom.*

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher included you in decisions?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

8. I feel that teacher *was there for me.*

All the time   Most of the time   Some of the time   Rarely

Can you think of some examples of how the teacher was there for you?

Looked like….	Sounded like…	Felt like….

Reflections

Use a sticker to show how you feel our research project is going. The closer to the center, the more satisfied you are.

- Do you feel you are able to share everything you want?
- Would you like to add details to your thoughts?
- How do you feel the research project is going?
- Do you have suggestions about the process?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix D

Letter of Consent

PARTICIPANT (CHILD) CONSENT FORM

Purposeful Educational Relationships: Grade 7 student perception of authentic engagement.

Your child is being invited to participate in a study entitled Purposeful Educational Relationships: Grade 7 student perception of authentic engagement that is being conducted by Madame Sylvie de Grandpré. Madame Sylvie de Grandpré is a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge and you may contact her if you have further questions by e-mail sylvie.degrandpre@uleth.ca or by phone.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Leah Fowler. You may contact my supervisor at leah.fowler@uleth.ca or by phone at (403) 329.2457.

The purpose of this research project is to determine grade 7 students' perceptions of effective teacher attitudes and strategies that contribute to building purposeful educational relationships. This research will add to the growing body of Canadian literature about purposeful educational teacher-student relationships.

Research of this type is important because:
- It will contribute to defining student engagement from the students' perspective.
- It will contribute to generating a list of strategies that foster purposeful relationships with students.
- This list of positive strategies can in turn be used as suggestions to initiate positive purposeful educational relationships between practicing teachers (or pre-service teachers) and their students.
- Purposeful educational teacher-student relationships are an important component of students' lives and affect student engagement, student retention, and student achievement.

Your child is being asked to participate in this study because she or he is in grade 7 and represents one of the seven public Elementary schools feeding into the two Middle Schools in this District.

If you agree to permit your child to participate in this research, his/her participation will include participation in three formal sessions and one celebratory session. Each of the four sessions will last one hour. Participants will attend a total of four hours for the purpose of this research. Participation will take place at the participants' Middle Schools, after school, most likely in the

counselor's room. The school principal will be present in the adjoining school office. Available for assistance but not participating directly in the sessions.

Participation may be inconvenienced because the time of the meeting sessions may take away from homework time or down time. In this way, I will conduct the sessions in the most entertaining yet relaxing way possible. Participants and parents may also be inconvenienced if the sessions require extra time, however, particular attention will be paid to keeping on time.

There are some potential risks to your child by participating in this research. Having to focus on positive experiences in school, some participants and parents might also identify negative experiences internally, and that may foster some levels of anxiety. To prevent or to deal with these risks the following steps will be taken. I will remind participants that we are focusing on a positive aspect of their schooling. I will also remind participants that they can talk to their parents, the school counselor and outside agencies for additional support. Participants will be informed that they can provide suggestions as to the process of the research at any time, and also stop participating if need be. Parents will have the right to know the content of their children's responses. I will communicate any concerns expressed by their children to them, and also that counseling at school and in the community is available.

The potential benefits of your child's participation in this research include seeing teachers in a different light. They might recognize positive strategies/actions on the part of future teachers who are trying to build purposeful educational relationships. They might also regulate their own behaviour to contribute to purposeful educational relationships with their teachers. By having the opportunity to give their input during the research participants might gain a sense of personal value. By being able to participate in the research process (through reflection) the participants will also gain some control over the research, and learn appropriate ways in which to share their ideas with adults.

The benefits to society and the state of knowledge are that a bank of strategies/actions that contribute to purposeful educational relationships will be compiled based on students' perceptions. The bank of strategies can be used by pre-service and practicing teachers as a starting point to develop purposeful educational relationships with students.

As a way to compensate your child for any inconvenience related to his/her participation, he/she will be given some snacks. Seeing as the participants are budding teenagers and the sessions are held after school, I will provide food at each of the sessions. It is my intention to include participants' opinion in that part of the research as well. For the last session, I intend to provide snacks as a mean of celebration. The snacks will conform to the School District nutrition policy, which emphasizes healthy choices (fruits, water, granola bars, etc.). It is important to know that it is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants and, if you agree to having your child be a participant in this study, this form of compensation to him/her must not be coercive. If your child would not otherwise participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline permission**.**

Your child's participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to allow your child to participate, you may withdraw your permission (and your child from the study) at any time without any consequences or any explanation. Withdrawal from this study will not impact your child's academic achievement in any way. If your child does withdraw from the study his/her data will be used only with your consent. If you do not agree, then the data already gathered will be destroyed by shredding the documents.

Your child may know me as a teacher in the School District, and I may have been their previous teacher. For the integrity of this research I will explain and reinforce with participants that teachers' names are irrelevant to the study and that the purpose of this research is to assess what strategies/actions contribute to purposeful educational relationships. Hence, teachers, as well as grades, will remain anonymous through the entire process. I will stress to all participants that even purposeful educational relationships are a matter of personal opinion and that participants' perceptions of a same teacher might differ greatly.

To make sure that you continue to give your consent for your child to participate in this research, I will contact you by phone prior to each session as a reminder that this is a four sessions study. Prior to the first session you will be reminded that you can stop participation of their children at any time during the four sessions.

The results from this study will be used in a thesis project, perhaps in journal articles as well as public presentations. Participants' nicknames will be used however participants' real names will not be disclosed and data collected in relation to particular participants will also not be disclosed at any time.

In terms of protecting your child's anonymity it will be partially protected. I will be conducting group interviews and surveys where participants will be aware of who other participants are. However, each participant will be asked to pick a "nickname" they will keep for the duration of the project. Names will not be used in the interpretations and publishing of the results. Surveys and reflective answers will be kept by me at all times. Nicknames will be used only in the "thank you" portion of the short DVD.

Your child's confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be in my possession at all times, outside of the school property. After 5 years, these documents will be shredded.

Other planned uses of this data include a thesis project and possibly in journal articles and public presentations as well as the creation of a short DVD.

All paper documents will be kept in my possession, at my home, in a file cabinet. This cabinet will be accessible to me and my supervisor will have access to documents on request. In five years this data will be destroyed by shredding. All electronic data will be protected by a password. This password will only be known by me. At the end of the study, all data will be printed off and stored in a file cabinet at my home. The electronic copy will be permanently deleted after printing and the printed documents will be shredded five years after the completion of the study.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in a thesis project and that the
results may also be disseminated in published articles and/or presentations.

In addition to being able to contact me and my supervisor at the above e-mail address and/or phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge (403-329-2425).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to having your child participate in the study.

Name of Student	*Signature*	*Date*

Name of Parent or Guardian	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.