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Exploring Teacher Beliefs of Adolescent Developmental Needs
Through Students' Positive Statements of Teachers

Elizabeth Bowers Hinchcliff

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Exploring Teacher Beliefs of Adolescent Developmental Needs Through Students' Positive Statements of Teachers

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Master of Arts

This study seeks to qualitatively examine the intersection between teachers' practical reasoning and beliefs, adolescent developmental needs, and positive teacher-student relationships. Positive comments about middle school teachers were gathered anonymously from middle school students (grades 6-8; ages 11-14) and coded according to four developmental domains: physical, social, emotional, and physical. Chi square analysis was used to determine statistical significance of which domains students alluded to most often when describing their teachers. The six middle school teachers who were mentioned most frequently in the student comments participated in semi-structured, open-ended interviews in which they were asked about the developmental needs of their students and responded to positive comments that students had made about them. Cross-case analysis was used to compare teacher attitudes and beliefs about teacher-student relationships and adolescent developmental needs, as well as to reveal practices teachers enacted in response to perceived needs. Findings suggest that teachers interpret a majority of student actions as indicative of underlying emotional needs, and that they use emotions as an entry point through which they can attend to the needs of students not just emotionally, but socially and cognitively as well. Teachers revealed in what ways they integrate developmentally appropriate classroom practices into their teaching based on their assumptions of need, including providing students a safe environment and using different types of humor in the classroom. Teacher perspectives on the characteristics of the ideal teacher surfaced, as well as how teachers tend to position themselves against students within the teacher-student relationship. Suggestions for teacher preparation programs as well as practicing teachers to place a greater focus on intentional developmentally appropriate teaching practices are given.

Keywords: teacher-student relationships, adolescent development, teacher beliefs, emotion, social needs

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DESCRIPTION OF THESIS STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

This thesis, *Exploring Teacher Beliefs of Adolescent Developmental Needs through Students' Positive Statements of Teachers*, is written in a hybrid format that integrates journal publication formats into traditional thesis requirements. The body of this text reflects a potential journal article for the *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, the data of which was derived from a larger study conducted in completion of the thesis. This text conforms to the length and style requirements for submitting to the aforementioned journal, which has a primary focus on research in teacher education. Another portion of the data was presented at the Teaching for Learning Conference in March 2020. The presentation at that conference focused on data from the larger study regarding teacher reasoning for developmentally appropriate practices that they enacted in their teaching (Appendix E).

The preliminary pages of this thesis reflect requirements for submission to Brigham Young University. This thesis format contains two reference lists. The first reference list contains all references included in the journal-ready article. The second list includes all citations used throughout the entire thesis, and is included as a separate appendix at the end of the document (Appendix F). Five additional appendices are included, which contain the extended literature review, institutional required forms, interview tools, extended methods, and an extended findings section. These are entitled Appendix A, B, C, D, and E, respectively.

ARTICLE

Teacher Perceptions of Student Developmental Needs: It's all Emotional

Elizabeth Bowers Hinchcliff

Brigham Young University

Abstract

This qualitative study examined how teachers understand the developmental needs of their students. Six middle school teachers participated in interviews in which student comments about them were reflected on and used to discuss the developmental needs teachers perceived of their students. Single and cross- case analysis was used to analyze the transcripts. Research states that the emotional and social developmental domains configure most prominently for this age group. However, the teachers interviewed interpreted nearly all student developmental needs as indicative of underlying emotional need. Findings outline teachers' perceptions of the developmental needs of their students and the ways in which they see emotional needs affecting all areas of development in schools. Teachers' perceptions of the relationship between the cognitive and emotional, as well as the emotional and social domains are explored, and how different teachers acquired their awareness of student emotional needs. Implications for teacher preparation programs are discussed.

Keywords: teacher-student relationships, transition years, developmental needs, teacher beliefs, emotion

Introduction

Students need to be provided with secure, healthy, and age-appropriate environments in which to explore, learn, and grow (Yu, Johnson, Deutsch, & Varga, 2018). In order to provide such an environment, teachers must make judgments about what needs are present in their adolescent students. Students academically perform best when a classroom meets their cultural, developmental, and physiological demands (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). As students advance through the transition years, they are faced with many emotional, social, and cognitive challenges through which they need to be supported and assisted. Teachers are in a position where they can be such a support to their students, but they must first be aware of the needs that their students have and understand how they can intentionally cater to those needs in their classrooms (Eccles et al., 1993; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). This study examined teachers' perspectives of adolescent student needs based on students' comments about those same highly rated teachers with the intention of exploring the ways that teachers understand the developmental needs of their students, how they acquire that understanding, and how it informs their practice.

Adolescent Development in Schools

Research classifies developmental needs as pertaining to social, physical, emotional, and cognitive domains. Much of the research on adolescent development identifies their primary needs as being in the social and emotional domains (Björklund & Ahlskog-Björkman, 2018; Fischer, 2007; Hargreaves, 2000; J-F, Swabey, Pullen, Getenet, & Dowden, 2018; Jennings & Greenburg, 2009; Steinberg, 2008). Many suggest that teachers should incorporate developmentally appropriate practices into their classrooms as a means to best help their students become engaged and academically successful (Daniels & Schumow, 2003; Eccles & Roeser,

2011; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012; Yu et al., 2018). When teachers are able to provide such an environment, gains are seen in student engagement and academic performance (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Yu et al., 2018), motivation to learn (Eccles & Roeser, 2011), and students' social skills (J-F et al., 2018).

One of the great difficulties when discussing students' social and emotional needs is that they very often tend to overlap and play off of one another. Much attention has been given to the two developmental domains of social and emotional; so much so that it has become difficult at times to distinguish between the two, particularly in a middle school setting. Concepts such as social-emotional learning, social-emotional awareness, and the social-emotional climate of a classroom are only a few examples in this growing research field.

Social needs. It is no doubt that peer relationships are at the forefront of the adolescent experience (Baker, 2006; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). One reason why social interactions become so critical in the middle school years is because adolescence is a time of developing one's identity, which is in large part created through social interactions (Baker, 2006; Bottrell, 2007; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Howard, 2008). For a student to feel connected and like they belong to a group is an important element of the social needs that adolescents have (Reyes et al., 2012). Accompanying the need for building positive relationships with peers is the need for adolescents to feel supported by their teachers. This kind of social support, according to Ryan and Patrick (2001), is the extent to which students believe that their teacher values them and feels that she can establish a positive relationship with them.

Reyes and colleagues (2012) have found that the extent to which students feel connected to their peers is related to the success they find during the transition to secondary education. For example, when students have even just one peer who they consider to be a friend in their class,

academic achievement rises (Lessard & Juvonen, 2019). In a classroom where students' social needs are adequately met and they feel as if they belong, students are found to be more engaged (Baker, 2006; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Yu et al., 2018) and have increased likelihood to take personal ownership of their learning (J-F et al., 2018), both of which lead to higher grades.

Emotional needs. Emotionally, students need to feel connected to and understood by others, including their teachers (Hallinan, 2008). Much of the literature on adolescent development in schools speaks of the importance of a positive teacher-student relationship (TSR) as a means to help meet students' emotional needs (Daniels & Shumow, 2003). Students need to feel that they are cared about by their teachers, both in regard to their personal lives (McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace, 2013; Yu et al., 2018) and non-academic interests, as well as in their learning (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009). This feeling of connection is reinforced when teachers are warm and supportive in their interactions with their students (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009), which sends a message to the student that the teacher values and cares about them as individuals (Hallinan, 2008; Yu et al., 2018).

Much the same as when students' social needs are met in the classroom, academic gains are found when students' emotional needs to be cared about, understood by, and emotionally connected to others are being met (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). The combination of both an emotionally supportive and socially positive environment helps students feel related to school or classroom (Wentzel, 2016). A feeling of relatedness to a school or classroom leads to a student's increased interest in a subject, which leads to higher motivation and effort, and therefore better grades (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Hagenauer, Hascher, & Volet, 2015; Wentzel, 2016; Yu et al.,

2018). When teachers are sensitive to the emotional needs of their students, gains are found both academically and socially (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009).

Teacher-Student Relationships

With drastic physical changes accompanying puberty, along with shifting peer relationships, a new school structure, and a myriad of other troubles, middle school can be a most tumultuous time for young adolescents. During this time of so many changes, it is important for young adolescents to find adults outside the traditional family structures to whom they can turn for support and direction (Steinberg, 2008). This adult can be a leader, parent, coach, teacher, or other trusted adult, and their presence can work as a mitigating factor protecting against the difficulties of the transition years for young adolescents (Raufelder, Scherber, & Wood, 2016). In many cases, this kind of adult appears for adolescents in the form of teachers, who can make a significant difference in the lives of their students simply by providing a stable presence from day to day (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Many adults everywhere can think back to a teacher who positively influenced their life during their elementary and secondary years. No doubt the potential influence that a teacher can have on her students can be profound, if not life changing. Though the influence and strength of the teacher-student relationship (TSR) in middle school weakens from those in elementary classrooms (Baker, 2006; Yu et al., 2018), it is during those transition years that students need, perhaps more than ever, an adult to whom they can turn for support, advice, or comfort (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). Strong TSRs are not accomplished through grand, singular acts. Rather, it is through the small, daily interactions that students have with their teachers that drive both learning and development as the relationships are built, negotiated, and maintained (Hamre et al., 2013; Johnson, 2009; Newberry, 2010). These ongoing relationships can be

simultaneously built and strengthened through the teacher verbally praising students (Hallinan, 2008) and engaging in frequent positive interactions with them (Bergin & Bergin, 2009), though the quality of those interactions is more influential than the frequency of them (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Holmes, 1993; Newberry, 2013). A teacher who shows concern for her students' lives, both inside and outside of school, is sending a message to her students that she cares about them, which also strengthens the TSR (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Hallinan, 2008; McHugh et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2018).

Upholding high expectations (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2000) while providing a culture of support and student autonomy also reinforces positive TSRs (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Powell & Marshall, 2011; Telef, Arslan, Mert, & Kalafat, 2015; Wentzel, 2002). The notion of providing an autonomous climate becomes of paramount importance for students throughout the middle and high school years (Eccles et al., 1993; Steinberg, 2008). Kleinfeld (1972) describes the teacher who assumes the role of a warm demander: one who sets clear, high expectations for her students, but who does so with a warm gesture or smile such that her requests are interpreted as supportive to student growth rather than authoritarian.

The relationship between teacher and student has been the subject of much research over the past couple of decades and has been connected to heightened motivation (Montalvo, Mansfield, & Miller, 2007; Raufelder et al., 2016), student achievement (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004), and classroom engagement (McHugh et al., 2013; Wentzel, 2016). The extent to which a student likes their teacher determines in many cases how much they will show interest in a subject and put forth effort in class (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; McHugh et al., 2013; Montalvo et al., 2007; Yu et al., 2018).

Another important factor when considering TSRs is the effect that they have on the emotional needs of adolescent students, much of which appears in the conversation of school and classroom safety. Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004) found that student perception of school safety was the strongest predictor of a positive TSR, and most teachers believe that a strong positive TSR can be established as they provide a safe and caring environment for their students (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015).

Teacher Beliefs

As teachers establish developmentally appropriate environments and create relationships with their students, their decisions and actions are constantly influenced by what they believe will benefit their students (Hargreaves, 2000; Richardson, 1990). Belief systems, under which all individuals operate, help one to both define and make sense of their world (Pajares, 1992) as well influence how they perceive themselves and others in any situation (Guerra & Wubbena, 2017). The belief system under which a teacher operates will supply the lens through which he or she processes information and consequently chooses an action (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010), such as how to best help a struggling student, how to present new information, or where to seat students. Though the influence of teacher beliefs on teaching practices is well understood, currently less research exists pertaining to what teachers believe about the developmental needs of their students. An examination of teacher beliefs regarding adolescent developmental needs could produce understanding of not simply what teachers believe, but how those beliefs influence and inform the decisions they make in their teaching that cater to the developmental needs of their students.

The intention of this study was to uncover teacher understandings of the developmental needs of their adolescent students as they responded to comments that students had made about them. This study was guided by the following two questions:

1. How do teachers understand adolescent developmental needs?
2. In what ways do teachers intentionally and unintentionally attend to adolescents' needs through the relationships they create in their classrooms?

Methods

As the purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore teachers' perceptions of their students' developmental needs, I also hoped to ascertain the ways in which those perceptions align and differ from what research says about those needs. Preliminary data from students was collected and served as the basis for teacher interpretations. However, the data presented here focuses on just the teacher interviews in which teachers' beliefs were explored.

Design

Both teacher-student relationships and the developmental needs of early adolescents were major conceptual components of this study, with TSRs being viewed as a medium through which student needs are being met. The intersection between these two concepts (positive TSRs and adolescent developmental needs) provided the framework for this study and was the lens through which all information was viewed and analyzed.

In order to explore teachers' understandings of developmental needs, all data collected and analyzed throughout this study was approached by using qualitative methods. Interviews conducted with teachers that included their responses to student comments about them allowed for me to move beyond a "superficial look" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 361) at what a teacher does and to reach a depth of understanding regarding a teacher's perspectives, beliefs, and reasoning

that quantitative methods simply cannot attain. Though beliefs are complex and largely inferential (Pajares, 1992), they can be revealed as one examines teachers' stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Richardson (1990) suggests that as teachers provide justification for their reasoning behind teaching or doing an activity a certain way, the beliefs of that teacher are revealed; that beliefs are what drive goals and actions (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). A practice of uncovering teachers' "practical reasoning" (Penlington, 2008) allows for an exploration into the beliefs and perspectives that a teacher has regarding the needs of her students.

The findings presented below are part of a larger study that used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Preliminary student data was collected and analyzed through quantitative means, and served as the impetus for the teacher interviews, but will not be discussed in this paper. Qualitative methods for data gathering and analysis were used for all teacher data. Teachers were interviewed regarding their perspectives on adolescent developmental needs, teacher-student relationships, and student-supportive teaching practices that they used in their teaching. What is presented below focuses on the ways that teachers understood the developmental needs of their students and the ways that those understandings informed their teaching practices.

Context

The charter school where this study took place is located in a middle-class neighborhood in the Intermountain West of the United States. This school was chosen by convenience sampling (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), for it is the school where I currently teach. This school houses grades 6-12, though the focus of this study was on the transition years especially, which focused on grades 6-8. Enrollment of these grades in the 2018-2019 school year was 142

students in 6th grade; 154 in 7th; and 121 in 8th. Students in these grades are ages 11 through 14, which aligns with the years of early adolescence, as defined by McDevitt and Ormrod (2010). Average class size in the middle school is 25 students, with each middle school teacher teaching between three and four classes per day using the A/B block schedule. Ethnic diversity of the student body in these grades was 51.6% White; 40.4% Latino/a; 2.9% Asian; 3.9% mixed ethnicities, and 0.7% American Indian, with 41% of students participating in a free or reduced lunch program. Public records show that the demographic distribution at this school is comparable to that of neighboring schools in the area of the US (School Demographics, 2019), and the perspectives of the teachers in this study are meant to be “applicable to the populations on which the [study was] based” (Tsang, 2014, p. 372). Although generalizability is not meant to be achieved in this study, the assumption that the experience of these teachers can tell use much about teachers in general, working in similar circumstances. Of the 38 teachers at the school who taught middle school students, 85% were female and 95% were White.

Participants

Since the focus of this study was teachers of adolescent students, only teachers of grades 6-8 (ages 11-14) were considered for participation. Teacher recruitment was determined by student nominations for ‘teacher of the month’ that the school conducted monthly. During the five-month collection period, all 38 middle school teachers received at least one nomination for teacher of the month. Of these 38 teachers, the six most frequently nominated teachers were selected to be interviewed. This decision to interview only the six most frequently nominated teachers was made initially with the intent to interview the top two teachers from each of the grade levels. However, as student nominations were not evenly distributed between all grade

levels and as some teachers teach more than one grade, it was decided to interview the top six teachers among all three grade levels rather than the top two from each grade.

Each student nomination spoke to a relationship that he or she had with that teacher. Research suggests that students are more prone to like teachers who are attuned to their needs (Yu et al., 2018), therefore it was assumed that students would nominate teachers who provided relationships or classroom experiences that were indeed attentive to, and affirmative towards, their needs. By selecting the most frequently nominated teachers, I was able to gather perceptions of teachers that students appreciated. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) define this type of participant selection as key informant interviews, in which the key individuals interviewed “have more knowledge... or different perspectives than other members of the defined population” (p. 237). In this study, those key informants were teachers who had in some way connected with or helped students with what they needed.

Of these six teachers, five were White females and one was a White male. The subjects taught by these teachers were science, language arts, math, and home economics. Teaching experience ranged from 2 to 12 years, and age of the teachers interviewed ranged from mid-twenties to early sixties. One of the teachers had just finished her first year of teaching at this school, while all others had taught there for more than one year.

Procedures

Once institutional review board (IRB) approval was granted, the student nominations were gathered from the school as extant data, and then organized by teacher and analyzed. These nomination forms included both students’ comments about the teacher that they were nominating for teacher of the month as well as their rationale for their nomination. The comments were

organized by teacher and compiled into word clouds using a free online word cloud generator, which were created for later use in the interviews.

The six middle school teachers who were nominated most frequently by students were invited to participate in an interview through either an email or text message, to which all six consented. This occurred from June through August, 2019. Each teacher signed a consent form that outlined their rights as participants and assured their anonymity as specified in the protocols approved by the IRB for working with human subjects.

The interviews served two purposes. The first of these was to determine teacher perceptions and understandings of the developmental needs of their students, and the second was to explore teachers' beliefs behind those perceptions. Interviews began with direct questions about what they believed their students needed developmentally. They were then shown word clouds that were created from student comments on the nomination forms and were directed to share their perceptions. They were specifically asked to include examples from their teaching experiences and interactions with students that may have caused students to make those comments. The word clouds remained on display throughout the remainder of the interviews and were referenced throughout as teachers often chose words from the word cloud and shared their interpretation of what the students may have meant when they wrote it. Each interview lasted an average of 33 minutes and was conducted at a location chosen by the teacher being interviewed. All interviews were transcribed within one month of it taking place.

Data Analysis

Analysis happened as each interview underwent a series of four in-depth readings, the focus of each of those passes being 1) perceptions of the developmental needs, 2) teacher beliefs regarding adolescent students and teaching, 3) teaching practices and the supporting practical

reasoning for them, and 4) teacher perceptions of the teacher-student relationship. The first reading of each interview looked specifically for teacher perceptions of adolescent needs, and the four developmental domains (physical, cognitive, social, and emotional) guided the reading (J-F et al., 2018). Findings presented here come largely from the first reading, which focused on teacher perceptions of adolescent developmental needs, though such overlap exists that some of the findings presented below also relate to the other themes. Each of the four readings, or passes, followed the same process. As the transcript was read, memos were made in the margins regarding teacher comments that related to the overall theme of the pass. Upon conclusion of reading the transcript, the memos were taken and grouped into codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

After all six interviews were read in light of teacher perceptions of adolescent developmental needs, cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used to identify common themes and beliefs that all the teachers shared regarding each of the four domains. A “master list of concepts derived from [all] sets of data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206) was created, and the themes on them were verified by an outside coder. Each item recorded onto this master list included notes that showed in which interviews that concept had emerged. All items, or concepts, that were recorded on the master list were spoken of by at least two of the teachers. This master list was organized by dividing the page into four quadrants, each of which was labeled as one of the developmental domains. In cases where multiple teachers spoke of an overlap between two of the domains, notes were written near the border of the quadrants and arrows were drawn to signify a connection between the two.

Findings

Two questions guided this study: how do teachers understand the adolescent developmental needs of their students, and in what ways do teachers intentionally and

unintentionally attend to those needs? Findings related to these questions suggest that of the four domains generally ascribed as adolescent developmental needs (cognitive, social, physical and emotional), teachers seem to interpret most every need through the lens of emotional need. Additionally, analysis of the interviews revealed that teachers use emotion as an entry point to support the cognitive and social needs of their students. This was often done as teachers sought to make their classroom a safe place and showed care and concern for their students. A third finding emerged, that of the development of empathy by teachers in regards to student experiences that adolescents have. All three are outlined below.

An Emotional Lens

The majority of teachers' discussions of the needs of their students revolved around the emotional, cognitive, and social needs of their students. Yet, interestingly, even when the teachers were discussing the cognitive, social, and physical needs of their students, they nearly always connected them back to an underlying emotional need that accompanied those needs. Two teachers explicitly acknowledged how emotionally distressing puberty could be. Since social and cognitive needs were among the most noted by teachers, those are the two presented here that demonstrate how teachers tended to understand those two domains through a framework of underlying emotional needs.

Emotional framing of the cognitive domain. "I think that understanding kids where they are, from an emotional background, helped me to kind of see their cognitive needs a little bit more" (Ms. F.). Like Ms. F., most of the teachers interviewed understood the cognitive needs of their adolescent students through an emotional lens. Teachers described the primary relationship between these two domains as they first identified what they believed to be the students' sense of emotional stability and safety, which they believed preceded cognitive

engagement, risk taking in the classroom, and motivation to put in effort in their coursework. They also saw the ways that learning was impacted by students' emotional responses to perceived academic success or failure. Teachers described the connection between cognition and emotion as a reciprocal relationship due to students' developing identity, where day to day successes and failures can influence how they feel about themselves and the choices they make.

Teachers tended to see student emotions of fear, anxiety, and insecurity as preventing them from succeeding academically. Ms. D., who believes that emotions are the “groundwork for everything,” spoke of how intertwined emotions are to the academic side of the student experience, because she believes that students really do care about their grades. She shared her interpretation of students' emotion when students start to fall behind in her class:

Sometimes if they feel overwhelmed, then they think “I need homework but I don't know how to do the homework. Can you help me? Can you be supportive? Can you listen? Can you care if I [get] a good grade or whatever—can you help me?” And I think it all fits together, it's like [the teacher] reaching a hand out or pushing them away.

Ms. D.'s perception of her seventh graders' yearning to be supported and helped by their teacher indicates an emotional need in relation to a cognitive need. She believes that students want to do well, and when they start to fall behind, emotions such as “overwhelmed” and “afraid” are felt. She perceives unasked questions, questions that are emotionally based, posed by her students in their expression of cognitive or academic concerns, such as, “Am I going to fail?”

In agreement with this belief, Mr. C. sees that his students feel anxiety, “whether it's not knowing if they can do something or just getting anxious about this because they have to perform well.” Teachers in all content areas spoke of how they try to remove the fear that students have of making mistakes by telling them often that they are not expected to get things right on the first

try; that it is okay to make mistakes. Teachers expressed that students' fear of failing prevented students from getting them "where [they] need to be" (Mr. C.). They believed that if they, as teachers, could minimize the fear that students had of failing, the negative attitudes and emotions that students held towards their content, whether it be math, science, or language arts, would also be minimized.

Several of the teachers mentioned ways that emotions can affect student learning, both positively and negatively. As discussed above, many saw that their students' learning was handicapped by their fear of making mistakes. Teachers also spoke of how student learning was negatively impacted when students feared that they would be ridiculed for asking questions or for seeking help when they did not understand what was being taught. In addition to the emotions that negatively impacted student learning, over half of the teachers mentioned a need for students to feel confidence in their cognitive abilities. Ms. B. spoke of the effect that she saw grades could have on both a student's confidence in their own ability and the motivation they felt to work hard in her class. She shared:

They need to feel success. It's not because I want them to get the good grades in my class; it's because I want them to be happy individuals. Of course, you know, the good grades would be wonderful too, but I just... 6th grade is so pivotal to their outlook on life and how they approach their future and the dynamic and that confidence and all of that.

Ms. B.'s belief of how student perceptions of their cognitive ability can have such long-lasting effects for her students in terms of their satisfaction and self-esteem speaks to the connection teachers identify between positive emotional and cognitive success.

Emotional framing of the social domain. That a strong relationship between the social and emotional domains exists is undeniable, both by the teachers interviewed as well as

increasing amounts of research (Allbright, Marsh, Kennedy, Hough, & McKibben, 2019; Rucinski, Brown, & Downer, 2018). The teachers interviewed often identified both domains when asked which of the four developmental domains they perceived most prevalently in their teaching. Mr. C., regarding the social and emotional domains, noted that they “kind of play off of each other. When [students] get together, all of their emotions just transfer from one person to the other.”

Several teachers spoke of the difficulties that adolescents can have during the middle school years because of how unstable some friendships can be from day to day. Many teachers saw how prominently peer relationships could both magnify and even cause intense feelings of vulnerability. Ms. A. shared how she sees peer relationships affecting students’ emotions:

[Adolescents] are having such difficult emotional problems, and some of them do stem from social problems... It’s—it’s very difficult for them, because they are so young, these emotions are extremely powerful, and they don’t know how to handle it. And with their [social] situations, they don't know how to handle themselves. And they don't know how to healthily interact with other people.

As this teacher sees it, the “extremely powerful” emotions and “social problems” that adolescents face are heavily intertwined and influence one another. She believes that this is because students at this age lack emotional awareness and proper social skills to interact with one another healthily. Her perspective that adolescents simply are not fully matured in emotional and social ways helps her to make sense of the interplay between social relationships and student emotions. She and other teachers talked about the importance of being honest and transparent with their students when it comes to how they were emotionally feeling. The teachers did this in

hopes that they could be an example of emotional awareness, control, and stability for their students, who are experiencing “broad swings” in emotion (Ms. F.) from day to day.

Another insight into how teachers saw social needs as emotional needs is shared by Ms. D. She spoke of the worries students carry about fitting in with their peers; how intensely most adolescents long to be accepted by others. Understanding the heartache and intense feelings of sadness that students can carry as a result of hurtful words they receive from their peers, she shared:

It’s easy to have power in your words, but you can’t take [them] back. You can say ‘oh, I’m sorry’ to someone and they can say ‘oh yeah, thank you’ but on a hard day for them, or when they first wake up in the morning, that feeling that they have in their heart that says ‘mmm. Those words really hurt me.’ And they might never tell you or tell anybody else, but they feel it. So be careful with what you say to people because—you know, and I think in 7th grade I saw a few times where it really came back, where they started the year and said some really mean things to each other, and then as the year went on I think they felt for themselves—it’s not good to feel that way.

The lasting pain that can affect students as a result of how others treat them was a primary concern for this teacher, and one that she hoped to prevent in her classroom. Many of the teachers agreed on this point and believed that students need to be supported, accepted, and treated kindly in their social relationships. As students are provided these kinds of positive social relationships, their emotional well-being is bolstered. Teachers saw the emotional damage that can result from social interactions so prominently that they, as in the above example, would view social interactions as emotional experiences for students.

Emotions as an Entry Point

The teachers interviewed in this study interpreted most student actions and needs as relating to an underlying emotional need. Because of this, they tended to view the relationships that they built with their students as an emotional connection that acted as an entry point through which they could access their students' emotions. The ways that teachers used student emotions as an entry point to helping and supporting them in both emotional and non-emotional ways were by showing care, providing an emotionally safe environment for their students, and by creating positive relationships with their students.

Showing care. One way that teachers were able to emotionally connect with their students such that they could access that entry point to helping them in non-emotional ways was by showing care to, and for, their students. Research has described efforts to show this sense of care as actions of talking to the students about life, or asking them what might be going on, rather than by only superficially interacting with them (McHugh et al., 2013). This kind of effort from the teacher to demonstrate genuine care and concern often results in students putting forth more effort and care towards the content area of that teacher (McHugh et al., 2013). Examples of this emerged in a majority of the interviews, and Ms. A. shared her belief of the impact that a teacher's care can have on learning:

It makes learning so much easier to know that your teacher cares about you, and that if you screw up, that there's going to be mercy, and there's going to be kindness, and there's going to be love there... [students] just need... teachers who genuinely care about them, because then they can be free to learn.

In her teaching, Ms. A. clearly saw a relationship between students' feeling that she cared about them and the effort they put forth in class. She shared a memory of when she asked a student

why he misbehaved in other classes but not in hers. His reply: “oh, they don't care [about me].” The teachers interviewed saw that when their students could feel that they were cared about by their teachers, then they would be willing to put forth more effort in class. This understanding of the positive effects of letting their students feel care was one way that teachers used emotions as an entry point through which they could eventually support the cognitive and social development of their students.

As an example of the power of showing care having influence on students' cognitive and social development, two other teachers shared experiences where students refused to exert effort in their class at the beginning of the year. However, as the year progressed, each teacher had the opportunity to work one on one with those students before or after school to help them get caught up. This allowed them to develop at least a small relationship with those students, which they believed to be a turning point for them as both teachers saw improvements from the students, both academically and behaviorally.

Providing a safe environment. Nearly all teachers interviewed spoke to the importance of establishing themselves as a trustworthy and safe source to whom the students could turn if they needed any kind of help. Ms. F. spoke of this when reading that students had described her as “nice” and “kind.” She interpreted these comments as students feeling safe with her, “because they're not afraid to come to me when they've messed up or when they're behind.” These teachers saw that one of their roles as teachers of adolescents was to create a safe learning environment where students can feel safe to ask questions, make mistakes, or seek out help.

These teachers saw a need to get students to an emotionally safe space where they could feel like they can make mistakes and explore. They believed that when students lose the fear of failure, teachers can really work with them. The importance of the classroom being a safe place

was repeatedly stressed as teachers spoke of how they tried to make their classroom a place where “[students] have to know that they cannot shoot each other down for curiosity and for asking questions and not understanding” (Ms. B.). Teachers of all content areas believed that asking questions was a critical element of a successful learning environment, for questions spark curiosity, guide exploration, and provide learning. Language arts teacher Ms. F. believes that her students must feel emotionally safe in her classroom if they are to engage in the coursework, for “we’re sharing our insights into literature, which is really close to sharing your feelings.” She goes on to highlight that successful discussions in language arts must include a “level of comfort” where students are not afraid to either share opinions or to respectfully disagree with others.

In order to get students to this sort of safe space, the teachers did not stress the importance of getting good grades to their students. Rather, they believed that if they could get their students to a place where they were emotionally strong (confident, motivated, willing to make mistakes, etc.), then the teacher could work with them and get them to a place where they could understand the content and therefore start earning good grades, but the students had to get to that emotionally safe space first.

Several teachers saw that given the choice between cognitive engagement and protecting one’s emotions, it appears that students will most frequently err on the side of protecting their emotions, exemplified in Ms. D.’s perception of what a student’s thoughts might be: “I don’t feel comfortable to ask you questions because you’re just going to yell at me or you’re going to tell me ‘why didn’t you pay attention in class?’” She has seen in her teaching that it takes “a good quarter, a good semester” before students start to feel comfortable and safe enough to approach her when they have questions. Hence, teachers saw great value in helping their students feel that

they were safe; that they would not be ridiculed or shot down for engaging in a discussion or by posing a question.

Teacher-student relationships. Though teachers are limited as to the social circles that their students choose, the teachers interviewed stressed the importance of one positive relationship that they could have control over: the relationship they individually have with students. This was not only driven by an inherent belief that all people deserve to be treated kindly, but also because the teachers understood that students behave better and put forth more effort in those classes where they like their teachers. Once the teachers had established an emotional connection with a student, they believed that it led to positive changes in the students' mental engagement as well as social interactions. This aligns with research that highlights the need for adolescent students to have positive and uplifting experiences via relationships with both peers and teachers, as those positive experiences then open the door for students to achieve academically (Montalvo et al., 2007; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011).

Over half of the teachers attributed consistency to being able to gain student trust and build strong, positive relationships. One teacher spoke of how being consistent in how she responded (rather than reacted) to questions that her students had and situations that occurred in the classroom helped her students to feel that they could trust her enough to allow a positive TSR to be established between them. Ms. E. believes in the importance of being a "stable someone" for her students and shared that when students of hers are in the hall crying, they will come to her and ask if they can talk to her. This shows that the efforts she made to establish relationships with her students allowed her to be a safe person that students will turn to when they are having a hard day or are struggling with something, which in turn allowed her to be able to enter into the lives of her students such that she could support them emotionally, socially, and cognitively.

The teachers in this study saw the TSR as a means through which they could help satisfy the emotional needs for encouragement, support, acceptance, and uplifting experiences that they believe adolescents need. Once emotionally connected through the TSR, teachers saw that students would become motivated and willing to put in the effort and risk necessary to learn and grow.

Development of Empathy

All six of the teachers interviewed shared many similar perspectives as to how prominently emotions and students' emotional needs figure into the middle school experience. Their concern over how students were experiencing different needs in terms of emotion showed a developed sense of empathy for the student experience. Despite these similar perspectives, the acquisition of their perceptions varied. Three different means of developing empathy for their students emerged in the interviews: personal experience, motherhood, and teaching experience.

Personal experience. “Think back to your own life. I remember things when I was this age—6th grade and 7th grade—and that changes who you are” (Ms. D.). When it comes to understanding students' emotional experiences, many of the teachers' personal experiences proved to be a most useful tool to understanding students. For example, Ms. A. knew from personal experience what death, mental illness, and difficult home life was like to experience as a middle schooler. Her personal experiences helped her feel empathy towards her students and be sensitive to the emotionally difficult struggles they may go through, regardless of whether she had personally experienced their situation or not.

Another teacher, who appeared throughout the interview to be highly empathetic towards the emotional needs of her students, cited her understanding as the result of years of working in alternative high schools and at mental health treatment centers. This unique professional

experience made her especially sensitive to the needs of her students who other teachers thought were difficult, and those experiences also gave her motivation to help her students get the assistance they needed, whether it came from her or from a school counselor.

Motherhood. Two of the teachers noted that motherhood had prepared them for teaching, and not only in being able to better recognize students' emotional needs. Ms. F. admitted that having adolescents in her home and seeing them progress through puberty and the difficulties that adolescence can bring helped her remember what it is like to be in middle school, which consequently helped her to be more sensitive to and understanding of the emotional needs of her own students. She believed that raising children and adolescents had additionally provided her with "practical smarts of knowing how to interact with the kids" as well as an awareness that "as a general rule... they're really not out to get the teacher."

It should be noted that of the six teachers who were interviewed, one was a male with young children and two were newly married women with no children of their own. Of the three teachers who had raised adolescent children, only two had experienced adolescents in the home within the last five years.

Teaching experience. Three of the teachers noted how their sensitivity to student emotional needs had increased with teaching experience. One teacher in particular spoke of the surprise he felt when realizing the prevalence of emotions in a middle school classroom. He shared that all the anxieties that students are plagued with are something that was largely foreign to him; that were it not for nearly a decade of teaching experience, he would still be unaware of them.

Regardless of their understanding of adolescents' emotional experiences prior to beginning teaching, all teachers openly agreed that their awareness of emotions in middle school

had increased with years of teaching experience. As Ms. D. shared, emotional needs were by far the most prevalent in her classes, “and more so as the years have gone on.” This shows that as teachers interact with students and see what adolescents go through each year, they are better able to recognize the difficulties students may face and be sensitive to those emotions that their students experience.

Discussion

Research identifies the social and emotional domains as those that appear most prevalently in adolescence, but in this study, practitioners tended to identify the emotional domain as the one that they saw most frequently. This discrepancy that exists between researcher and practitioner perspectives on adolescent development is addressed in this study by sharing the ways that teachers understand the role that they have not just to teach, but to also show care to and provide an emotionally safe environment for their students. Although research has shown time and time again that both social and emotional experiences are most prevalent and formative for adolescents, these teachers who are in the trenches working with adolescents day after day see the prevalence that emotions take throughout the middle school experience, as well as how those emotions transfer into and affect every other area of development.

Although much research has centered on developmentally appropriate practices (Eccles et al., 1993; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Hallinan, 2008; Reyes et al., 2012; Steinberg, 2008), Daniels and Shumow (2003) note that what practicing teachers understand about the developmental needs of their adolescent students is “often simple, inaccurate, and become[s] more stereotyped and pessimistic with experience” (p. 510). Contrary to this statement, the data from this study suggests that the teachers saw student needs as optimistic, complex, and insightful, and more so as they gained teaching experience. This understanding led to deeper connections with students

as students were drawn to those teachers who had an empathetic view of the needs of their students. It also highlights that perhaps teachers understand a reciprocal relationship that exists between the developmental domains in how academic success or failure plays into personal confidence or discouragement regarding one's academic ability. These relationships can spiral towards positive effects—success building confidence, which leads to more success—as easily as it can lead to negative effects on one's academic experience—a lack of confidence leading to low grades, which feeds the lack of confidence. Understanding the emotional effects that cognitive successes or failures can have on a student can help teachers to be more sensitive to the ways that they approach grading styles, especially considering the long-term effects that giving up in a class can have on a student's academic career. If teachers are especially attentive to the emotional effects that academic failure can have on a student, they can provide support and encouragement for the student to continue putting in effort, which can lead to building long-term successful academic habits. Contrarily, if a teacher does not step in and help mitigate the emotional consequences of grades, students could develop negative habits, such as not putting in effort or not asking questions, that could be detrimental to their long-term academic success. Teachers must be aware of the ways that emotions can negatively affect a student's learning experience and work to build confidence in their students' sense of self efficacy.

The teachers interviewed used student emotions as an entry point through which they could access and support not just their students' emotional needs, but also their cognitive and social needs. Given that they were most commonly able to arrive at that entry point through establishing positive TSRs, creating a safe classroom environment, and showing care, pre-service and practicing teachers should be prepared to interact with students in ways that they can create positive relationships, spaces, and interactions when working with students.

A valuable conversation for researchers from this data relates to how teachers frame social interactions as emotional experiences. How some teachers attended to this framing revolves around the ways that teachers strive to actively model emotional awareness and transparency to their students. This, combined with teachers' acknowledgement that students at this age are not fully mature and still learning to how to interact with others in healthy ways, raises the question: to what extent should it be the teacher's responsibility to model emotional awareness or teach healthy social skills?

The unique subset of teachers used in this study were, in essence, teachers who did something to connect in some way with their students; who in some way helped their students feel something positive about them. There is an important story to share, as it can be assumed that all teachers who were interviewed would be those teachers to whom students felt they could connect the most easily and that their practices were seen as beneficial by students. Practicing and pre-service teachers alike should receive explicit training on how to recognize and be more empathetic towards the emotional experiences of their students. Resources for empathy training are already in place in many preservice programs in the form of multicultural education and development courses, as well as counselling psychology courses. The focus on empathy training in programs must be deliberate if teachers are to be prepared to connect with their students on an emotional level. As they do so, teachers will be in a better position to be a support to their students not just emotionally, but also socially and cognitively.

In the interviews, teachers revealed their belief that the more experience they had teaching adolescents, the more they became adept at recognizing and addressing the emotional needs that their students had. However, it could also be argued that as teachers age, they become more emotionally inclined. Either way, this could influence them to recognize more emotionality

in the cognitive or other domains of students, which is persuaded by life or teaching experience. Further research would be needed to explore whether life experiences as a teacher ages affect sensitivity to the emotional needs of students or if emotionally attuned individuals tend to go into teaching.

Given what is known about the benefits of teacher-student relationships and how attending to the different developmental domains support student success, teachers would do well to provide their students with environments that are best suited to their developmental needs. Teacher preparation programs should teach pre-service teachers how to recognize student emotions as an entry point through which they can connect with, motivate, encourage, and potentially change the lives of their students.

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APPENDIX A

Extended Review of the Literature

Students enter middle school during the years of early adolescence; a time characterized by many physical, cognitive, and social-emotional changes (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). This literature review is meant to situate the study in an understanding of adolescent developmental needs and teacher-student relationships preparatory to turning to how teacher beliefs influence actions in the classroom, particularly in regards to the reasoning behind how teachers intentionally and unintentionally create environments and relationships that are aligned to the developmental needs of their students. In exploring how adolescent developmental needs relate to the teacher-student relationship, I explore literature on the characteristics of the transition years, adolescent developmental needs within the context of school, positive teacher-student relationships, and teacher beliefs.

Transition Years

Middle school in the US, often referred to as the transition years, is filled with young adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14, and are usually in grades 6-8 (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). The transition from elementary to middle school is characterized by many changes, not only in the structure of the schools, but also in the emotional and social realms of the adolescents' lives. This setting is often described as maintaining great order, discipline, individualization, and competition of and between students (Eccles et al., 1993; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). However, grades, motivation, and self-efficacy drop while test anxiety, competition, evaluation, and learned helplessness escalate at a time when students are developing an increasingly keen sense of self-perception and are starting to question their self-efficacy (Eccles et al., 1993). This may contribute to work by Ryan and Deci (2016) that

suggests that whereas elementary children are generally rather optimistic about their ability to perform a task, heightened realism and pessimism enter in the middle school years, thus lowering their self-perceived competence.

In most middle schools, adolescents are provided less decision-making power in the classroom and are disciplined more by their teachers than they were in their elementary school classes (Eccles et al., 1993). With lecture-style classes being a prominent feature of most secondary teaching styles, teacher control and discipline are tightened in the middle school and students are given little opportunity to contribute to the learning environment. In this kind of environment, adolescents are less likely to feel connected to either the teacher or the content and may consequently disengage from learning (Reyes et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2016; Yu, Johnson, Deutsch, & Varga, 2018).

Adolescent Development in Schools

Individuals of any age do not perform at their best in environments that are not aligned with their developmental needs, whether those be social, physical, cognitive, emotional, or sexual (Eccles et al., 1993). Yu and colleagues (2018) state that “adolescents have specific developmental needs that require special care and attention” (p. 354) and that focusing on developmentally appropriate practices in school can be a powerful way to support healthy development in adolescents in more than one of the developmental domains. Maslow (1943) stated that “any motivated behavior... must be understood to be a channel through which many basic needs may be simultaneously expressed or satisfied” (p. 370). With this in mind, student actions should be understood as a means to satisfy a need, whether that be for connection, autonomy, or to feel competent (Ryan & Deci, 2016). Understanding this, teachers should strive

to regulate their interactions with students so they are reacting to underlying student needs rather than behavioral stimuli (Newberry, 2013).

Research suggests that teachers should adopt developmentally appropriate practices that are adapted to the age, characteristics, and developmental progress of the children they teach (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). When teachers are sensitive toward and consciously cater to their students' academic, social, and emotional needs, increases are found in student engagement, academic performance (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Yu et al., 2018), learning motivation (Eccles & Roeser, 2011), and social skills (J-F, Swabey, Pullen, Getenet, & Dowden, 2018).

Adolescent cognitive needs. Grades are reported to drop during the transition years, even though students at this age are developing the cognitive ability required to grapple with concepts that are logical, far-reaching, and abstract (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). At this time of life, students should be challenged to think critically and be held to high expectations by their teachers (McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace, 2013; Steinberg, 2008). However, many middle school students report being bored in classes and on homework (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Steinberg, 2008), in part because the depth of cognitive processing required of students in middle school is not matched to their capabilities (Eccles et al., 1993). This gap between students' cognitive abilities and the (sometimes) mindless work expected of them causes engagement to decline during the transition years between elementary and upper secondary ages (Eccles et al., 1993; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Reyes et al., 2012).

Adolescent social needs. In a study by J-F and colleagues (2018), it was found that the most important developmental needs as voiced by students through comments about their teachers, were in the emotional and social domains. Teachers who cater to student developmental

needs in the social and positive emotional domains, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are likely to find increases in student engagement, performance, and democratic social behavior in their classrooms (J-F et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2018).

Peer relationships become increasingly important in the early adolescent years (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010), and the interpersonal relationships developed within the school environment are a critical key to early adolescents finding success during the transition years (Reyes et al., 2012). Classrooms that are well suited to early adolescents' social needs are characterized as ones in which the teacher is supportive of her students and promotes peer interaction and mutual respect among students (Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

Adolescents create their identities through social interactions, which is perhaps one reason why social interactions take such precedence in middle school years (Baker, 2006; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Students are found to be more engaged in classrooms where teachers help them develop their identities (Yu et al., 2018), which may lead to increased social and emotional capability and later to personal ownership of learning (J-F et al., 2018). Teachers who cater to social and emotional needs in their class structures and instruction assist their students in developing their identities in healthy ways.

Adolescent emotional needs. As children develop and mature, their needs change in focus and priority. While young children seek maternal-like attachment in the classroom (Holmes, 1993), high school students expect their teachers to maintain boundaries as they show interest in their learning goals, but keep a distance between those goals and their personal histories (McHugh et al., 2013). High school students yearn to be respected and treated fairly by their teachers (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013), just as adolescents seek support and praise from their teachers (Steinberg, 2008). For middle school students in particular, connection, belonging,

and social acceptance become an increasingly important and even necessary prerequisite for classroom engagement (Baker, 2006; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). The need to belong is an especially pertinent need of early adolescents, and having that need met has been linked to benefits that extend beyond academic engagement, including higher life satisfaction, good health, and resilience (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

Teacher-Student Relationships

Through a Vygotskian lens, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) state that all learning is a result of an interpersonal relationship; that the zone of proximal development is successful because of the relationship that exists between student and teacher throughout the learning experience. Bullough (2005) similarly states that at its very core, teaching is all about relationships. These relationships involve teachers, students, and certainly peers, and they influence learning from the early elementary and throughout the high school years. Positive teacher-student relationships have been found by many to affect academic engagement and achievement (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Roorda et al., 2011; Suldo, McMahan, Chappel, & Bateman, 2014).

One of the most effective ways a teacher of any grade can successfully provide such an atmosphere of both challenge and support is through the relationships that she develops and nurtures with her students. Middle school students benefit when teachers are emotionally supportive of them (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000) through showing understanding, caring, dependability, and friendliness to their students (Johnson, 2009; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Though TSRs do not equate to learning relationships (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013) and TSRs alone cannot change learning behaviors, (Roorda et al., 2011), the relationships between students and

teacher certainly play a key role in any classroom learning environment. According to Yu and colleagues (2018), positive teacher-student relationships in a classroom lead to heightened respect and trust, increased academic skills, a heightened sense of well-being, engagement in learning, and motivation to work harder.

Positive teacher-student relationships. Students as young as ten are able to gauge the sincerity and character of their teacher (J-F et al., 2018), for as Bullough (2005) warns teachers, children can “see the condition of our souls” (p. 143). When a teacher is warm, caring, fair, and courteous with her students, it increases the likelihood that higher regard for her will be reciprocated, which benefits the TSR (Hallinan, 2008; Kleinfeld, 1972; Wentzel, 2002). This is not to say that teachers care about their students only because respect and care will be given in return; rather, students who know their teachers care about them are more likely to experience a stronger TSR than those who feel their teachers do not genuinely care about them. Feeling genuine care about them individuals and not just as students, they tend to be more likely to actively engage in the work asked of by that teacher (Cooper & Miness, 2014; McHugh et al., 2013) and less likely to exhibit disruptive behaviors (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Tobbell and O’Donnell (2013) further found that when a teacher respects her students, it similarly leads to higher student responsiveness to the classroom content.

Teacher authenticity is another factor that contributes to positive TSRs, which generates a greater sense of relatedness for the students (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Powell & Marshall, 2011; Wentzel, 2016). Hargreaves (2001) explored the notion that there exist different emotional geographies which can act as barriers in relationship formation between two people. The professional geography is one type of these geographies and becomes apparent when a teacher does not connect with her students because the professional “mask” demands that

teachers be somewhat detached and emotionally distant from their students (p. 1069). One way teachers can minimize the effect of the professional geography is by engaging in non-academic conversations with their students. Using student perspectives of TSRs, Yu and colleagues (2018) identify these types of teacher-student interactions as “same-level” (p. 348) conversations, in which the teacher and student interact in such a way that professional geographies are momentarily suspended and both parties converse with one another as if on the same social plane. They go on to state that students who experience this type of interaction with a teacher tend to have higher feelings of respect for and closeness to that teacher as well as an increased interest in the content matter of that teacher’s class.

The extent to which a student feels connected to a teacher through a positive TSR can affect how interested he or she is in the subject matter that particular teacher presents (Yu et al., 2018), even to the point of putting forth more effort in classes where they like their teachers, thus attaining higher grades in those classes than in ones where the TSR may not have been as strong (Montalvo, Mansfield, & Miller, 2007). Relatedness in the classroom (manifest in emotional security and being socially connected to others) leads to students adopting the goals and interests of their teacher as well as an increased desire to contribute to the social atmosphere of the classroom structure in positive ways (Wentzel, 2016). Additionally, Furrer and Skinner (2003) suggest that children’s enthusiasm, interest, and engagement in routine academic tasks are largely dependent on their sense of relatedness to the others in the classroom. While TSRs do not affect learning behaviors (Roorda et al., 2011), it was found that warm teachers with high expectations led to students being more socially adept (Kleinfeld, 1972; Wentzel, 2002); an adeptness that, when absent, can quickly undermine any student’s ability to succeed in an academic environment (Barton-Arwood, Morrow, Lane, & Jolivette, 2005).

Teacher-student relationships in transition years. The nature of the TSR shifts as students advance from elementary to middle school. For many students, middle school is the first time they are not with one teacher for the entire day, but rotate between teachers who specialize in one subject area. With students' time being divided by multiple teachers and teachers' attention being demanded of from over a hundred students, it makes sense that the amount of emotional support adolescents receive from their teachers decreases as they transition from elementary school into middle school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013; Yu et al., 2018). The effects and importance of TSRs does not diminish during this stage, however, especially for students who are at greater risk of dropping out of school (Eccles et al., 1993; Powell & Marshall, 2011; Roorda et al., 2011).

As children develop into adolescents, they begin to seek support and direction from adults outside of the family structure (Steinberg, 2008), such as teachers. It is perhaps for this reason that McDevitt and Ormrod (2010) suggest that all middle school students should be assigned an advisor, a teacher who should be there to mentor them as they navigate the challenges of the transition years and the stresses that accompany them.

Conclusion

As is true with students of all ages, adolescents have specific developmental needs that should be attended to if the classroom is to become an engaging and active learning environment. When students do not feel in control of, connected to, or capable of success in their learning environment, motivation diminishes and learning similarly slows. Between the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical changes that young adolescents undergo during the transition years, it is no debate that it is a grueling time of self-discovery and social survival. Teachers can help their students navigate this difficult time by providing environments, relationships, and learning

experiences that cater to the developmental capabilities and needs of their students. Teachers, as a professional group, who work with young adolescents in the transition years could benefit from knowing the needs of their students and adapting their teaching accordingly. Such adoption of developmentally appropriate practices will directly and positively influence adolescent students.

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval

To: Professor Melissa Newberry
Department: TED
College: EDUC
From: Sandee Aina, MPA, IRB Administrator
Bob Ridge, PhD, IRB Chair
Date: June 5, 2019
IRB#: E19156

Title: "Exploring Teacher Beliefs of Adolescent Development Needs Through Positive Teacher-Student Relationships"

Brigham Young University's IRB has approved the research study referenced in the subject heading as exempt level, category 2. This category does not require an annual continuing review. Each year near the anniversary of the approval date, you will receive an email reminding you of your obligations as a researcher and to check on the status of the study. You will receive this email each year until you close the study.

The study is approved as of June 5, 2019. Please reference your assigned IRB identification number in any correspondence with the IRB.

Continued approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements:

1. A copy of the informed consent statement is attached. No other consent statement should be used. Each research subject must be provided with a copy or a way to access the consent statement.
2. Any modifications to the approved protocol must be submitted, reviewed, and approved by the IRB before modifications are incorporated in the study.
3. All recruiting tools must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to use.
4. In addition, serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately, with a written report by the PI within 24 hours of the PI's becoming aware of the event. Serious adverse events are (1) death of a research participant; or (2) serious injury to a research participant.
5. All other non-serious unanticipated problems should be reported to the IRB within 2 weeks of the first awareness of the problem by the PI. Prompt reporting is important, as unanticipated problems often require some modification of study procedures, protocols, and/or informed consent processes. Such modifications require the review and approval of the IRB. Please refer to the [IRB website](#) for more information.

IRB Secretary
A 285 ASB
Brigham Young University
(801)422-3606

APPENDIX C

Interview Tools**Materials:**

- Recording device
- Paper & pen for field notes
- Student comment papers

Part One: Accessing teacher beliefs

Read: Throughout this interview as you answer questions, think about the adolescents you teach. When possible, share memories or experiences that support your reasoning.

Ask: What do you believe students need?

Read: All people have needs, yet they differ for different age groups and maturity levels. These needs are categorized by research as belonging to any of four developmental domains: social, cognitive, physical, and emotional. The physical and cognitive domains pertain to the developmental capabilities of the body and mind. The social domain refers to how people interact with one another, and the emotional domain relates to matters such as connection, emotional security, and validation.

Ask: Which of these domains (social, cognitive, physical, and emotional) show up in your classes the most?

After teachers identify which need(s) show up most in their classroom, ask the following sub questions:

- How are those needs manifest in your classroom and with your students?*
- What experiences come to mind when thinking about adolescents' _____ needs?*
- How have you come to have that belief?*

Part Two: Discussion on student comments

Read: You are about to be shown comments that students made about you when nominating you for teacher of the month during the winter and spring of last school year. The larger the word, the more frequently that word was written by students. As you look through the student responses, you will be asked to describe why you believe students said that about you as well as your intentional involvement with that behavior/trait.

Place the word cloud in front of the teacher. Allow the teacher to read through the comments.

Potential questions to ask: *What surprises you/is striking to you? Most ring true? Most identify with?*

Have the teacher select a trait and ask: *Why do you believe students said that about you? What experiences can you think of that exemplify that trait? Is this something you intentionally work to do/be?*

- As teachers answer, probe for details, more experiences, and examples

Repeat with additional traits until discussion ends or until an hour has been reached.

*Italicized text should be read aloud

Example Word Cloud



APPENDIX D

Extended Methods

This study was inspired in part by previous research that indicated social needs as the greatest developmental need displayed by adolescents in the classroom (J-F, Swabey, Pullen, Getenet, & Dowden, 2018). This study began with a partial replication of that work in regards to collection and analysis of student data. Additional data collection and analysis extends that work by a comparison of student and teacher data, exploring teacher beliefs about adolescent development, as well as identifying ways teachers attend to those needs in the classroom. The content of this appendix explains how this study was carried out as well as provides justification for the methods used in this study.

Design

In a study by J-F and colleagues (2018), students ages 13 to 15 were asked to answer an open-ended, one question survey in which they described what they liked about their teachers. Student responses were coded according to the developmental domain(s) that they alluded to, after which a chi-square statistical test was performed to evaluate differences between the domains identified in the student comments when compared to the expected results of all domains being mentioned an equal amount of times by students. Results showed statistically significant differences between the domains referenced in the students' comments about their teachers, with social and positive emotional characteristics of, and experiences with, their teachers being mentioned by far the most often.

Their analysis of the comments supported existing research that adolescent students need to be provided environments in which they can socially interact with others (Ryan & Patrick, 2001) as well as feel positively supported by their teacher through praise or small, daily

interactions (Steinberg, 2008). However, J-F and colleagues (2018) did not explore what the students were saying about their teachers in their study, nor was any attention given to recurring themes that arose from those student comments. Looking more closely at not just the frequency of the comments, but the content they contained could shed light on what qualities teachers possess, and perhaps lead to an understanding of the link between the developmental needs of students in the way that teachers understand and enact teaching adolescents.

Through this study, I sought to explore the intersection between TSRs, teacher beliefs, and adolescent developmental needs. To do this, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used as student comments were quantitatively examined to determine a relationship between developmental domains, and as teacher interviews were conducted and analyzed qualitatively.

Participants

All students and teachers involved, whether directly through interviews or indirectly through teacher nomination comments, either attended or taught at the secondary campus of the school during the time that the study took place. Students in grades 6-8 acted as indirect participants in this study as their anonymous comments on teacher nomination forms are what reflect the statistical data on student developmental needs and provided the content that was presented to teachers during the interviews.

Data Sources

There were two main sources of data for this study. The first data source was used to statistically identify student developmental needs, similar to the work of J-F and colleagues (2018), as well as to provide students' perspectives about their teachers. This data source came from teacher of the month nomination forms that the students filled out. The second data source, the teacher interviews, served to explore teacher beliefs and practices that came through teacher

interviews in which teachers had the opportunity to respond to the comments that students made about them on the nomination forms as well as answer questions regarding their practice.

Student perspectives. At the time of the study, the school at which this study took place had a practice of administering a teacher of the month nomination form monthly to students. On the nomination form, students were asked to identify one teacher they wished to nominate for teacher of the month, then they were asked to describe that teacher in 2-3 positive words and explain how that teacher had had a positive influence on him or her. These nomination forms were administered at the end of each month, and responses are used as votes that counted toward choosing the middle school “teachers of the month” for the upcoming month.

Students filled these nomination forms out each month anonymously, so student names and any other personally identifiable information were not collected as any part of the form. As the school regularly administered and collected these data sources independent of this particular study, student and parental permissions were not required in order to use the nomination forms as data for analysis. Permission to analyze surveys as extant data from January through May of the 2019 school year was granted by the school administration in the fall of 2018.

The nomination forms were used to first, determine developmental needs as expressed by students by way of confirming the previous work done by J-F and colleagues (2018). Comments that students made about their teachers on the nomination forms were also used to create artifacts in the form of word clouds that were used during the teacher interviews. These word clouds were created via a generic free online word cloud generator and were presented to the teachers as discussion pieces during the interviews.

Procedures

Data collection began with the retrieval of the teacher nomination forms. As many of these were collected by the school administration prior to the approval of this project, my study really began with the analysis of previously collected student data. As the collection and analysis of the teacher interviews was addressed previously, below I expand only on the time frame that was followed as the nomination forms were collected and analyzed for this study.

The nomination forms used in this study were administered monthly by the school, as it does each year. These forms were generally handed out during the last week of the month in order to have the new teacher of the month selected by the first week of the upcoming month. Students completed the surveys during their advisory period and returned them to their teacher, who then was required to deliver the forms to the office. The school secretaries tallied the nominations to determine the teacher of the month who was to be selected for the coming month. After surveys had been counted by the office secretaries, they were retrieved by me for analysis. For this study, the nomination forms collected by school administration from January to May of 2019 were analyzed. Analysis began early in the summer, after IRB approval was granted at the beginning of June. This analysis was done by coding student comments according to the developmental domains used by J-F and colleagues (2018), as a means to replicate and verify the findings of their study. Coding patterns for student comments were patterned after that of J-F et al. (2018) and were negotiated between two researchers to ensure reliability of the codes. Until approval to carry out the study was approved, data was organized by month and stored in a locked filing cabinet.

After student comments had been coded and classified according to developmental needs, the student comments were used to create the word clouds that were used during the interviews.

These were created using a free online word cloud generator and were completed in early June, between the time of analyzing student comments and interviewing teachers.

Data Analysis

As mentioned above, data analysis began early in the study, as soon as IRB approval was granted. A priori methods of data analysis were used when analyzing the two data sources. Analysis of the student responses followed the same a priori codes used by J-F and colleagues (2018) understood to represent developmental needs. These categories are the four developmental domains and were coded simply as social, emotional, physical, and cognitive. The survey responses from January through May 2019 were organized by teacher, after which student responses were typed into a chart format similar to the one used by J-F and colleagues (2018). Their chart included six columns: one for each of the five domains listed above (though they used two for emotional: emotional positive and emotional negative) and one for the student comment. As student responses were entered, the domain(s) that they alluded to had an X put into the appropriate column on the same row as the student comment. Responses that were indicative of more than one need were dually coded for each domain it pertains to (e.g. “she is nice and teaches me lots” was coded as both emotional and cognitive).

When going through student responses on the teacher of the month nominations, intercoder reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) was established by including one of my committee members who is well studied in adolescent development and in the coding process. We went through twenty student responses and categorized them individually, then compared and negotiated our codes until an understanding and agreement has been reached. Using 20 student comments each time, this procedure was repeated until an agreement of at least 75%

regarding domain classification was reached between us (Soper, 2015). At this point, I continued to code the remainder of the student responses on my own.

As responses were entered into the chart, the most frequently marked domains provide an understanding as to what the needs are of adolescent students as expressed through their comments about their teachers. J-F and colleagues (2018) found that when student comments and developmental domains were aligned, the social and positive emotional domains were the most commonly identified by students. The chi-square test of validity was used on the student comments to compare the findings with those of J-F and his colleagues (2018).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was first, to replicate the study of J-F and colleagues (2018) in order to validate their findings that early adolescents most value teachers who allow for socially promotive and emotionally positive experiences in their classes. The second purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which the middle school teachers most frequently nominated by students intentionally and unintentionally attend to those needs. Analysis of student perspectives of a positive TSR led to a greater understanding of the underlying developmental needs that students have as they describe how a teacher of their choice had had a positive impact on them. The teacher interviews allowed for an exploration into whether teachers recognize what the needs of their students are as well as how they attend to them both intentionally and unintentionally through the relationships they create.

Are teachers that students like aware of the needs of their students, and are their teaching practices aligned to what research has identified as developmentally appropriate environments for adolescents? Findings from this study provide examples of what students in this middle school admire about their teachers. It also provides an understanding of what teachers believe to

be the needs of their students and the experiences that factored into creating those beliefs. Examination of the intersection between teacher beliefs, adolescent needs, and positive TSRs throughout this study leads to a heightened understanding of how teachers can create developmentally appropriate environments for adolescents.

APPENDIX E

Additional Findings

This thesis studied the relationship between student comments about their teachers and adolescent developmental needs, and it also examined the intersection between teacher beliefs, adolescent developmental needs, and teacher practices in light of those needs. Detailed below are quantitative and qualitative findings that emerged throughout the study. First is a report of the statistical findings that emerged when the developmental domains that were connected to student comments were compared to one another via a c

Statistical Findings

Initially inspired by the work of J-F, Swabey, Pullen, Getenet, & Dowden (2018), this study began with a statistical replication of their work. When student comments were coded according to developmental domains by the researcher, there was significant overall deviance from expected counts when all cells were expected to be equal [$\chi^2(3)=680, p<0.0001$]. Chi-square residual analysis showed that all categories were discrepant from expectations. Social and emotional categories were higher than expected, while cognitive and physical categories were lower than expected. Like the findings of J-F and his colleagues (2018), this shows that the social and emotional domains were by far the most frequently reported domains as found in the student comments.

The remainder of the study extended those findings by qualitatively interviewing teachers as a means to gain insights as to how they understand the developmental needs of their students, beliefs they have regarding students and their role as teachers, developmentally supportive practices and the guiding reasoning for those practices, and teacher perceptions of TSRs.

Teacher Perceptions of Adolescent Developmental Needs

At the beginning of each interview, teachers were asked what they saw their adolescent students needed. They were later provided the four developmental domains and asked which of those needs appeared the most in their classroom, and in what ways they saw those needs coming forth. What follows are the perceptions that teachers have of adolescents' physical, cognitive, social, and emotional developmental needs.

Physical needs. Of the four developmental domains, the physical needs of adolescent students were of teachers' least concern. As Ms. D. put it, the needs that she saw in her adolescent students were "not so much physical." The physical need that was mentioned most by teachers related to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which states that physical needs for shelter, food, and clothing must be met before cognitive, social, or emotional needs can be considered.

Of those needs mentioned in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, only two of the teachers mentioned that they saw in their students was pertaining to hunger. They shared that students coming to school hungry is the most commonly unmet physical need that they notice, and they observed that, in line with research, hunger negatively affects student learning (Jirout et al., 2019). Ms. A. believed so strongly that her students should not have to go hungry that she bought one of her student's lunch one day because she had found her crying in the hall without any food because she was out of lunch money.

It should be noted that while 41% of students at this school were participating in a free and reduced lunch program during the 2018-19 school year, threats to students' physical safety such as homelessness or gang violence are not a prevalent school-wide concern to students or teachers at this school. This may be different from other schools where threats to students' food,

shelter, and clothing are a more active and necessary conversation. Because these needs are in large part met for the students at this school prior to coming to school, the teachers at this school are able to focus more heavily on other needs that their students have.

Apart from physical hunger that students may experience, the only physical need that teachers mentioned was regarding the difficulties that adolescents face physically as they go through puberty. However, the primary concern that teachers had for their adolescent students relating to their physically changing bodies was the emotional insecurities and confusion that accompanies these changes. It is interesting to note that teachers' perceptions of the physical needs of their students, in the cases when teachers even did point out physical needs, were often linked to the emotional difficulties that accompany those physical changes.

Cognitive needs. When referring to the cognitive needs of their students, teacher comments centered around two themes: grades and confidence in academic ability. A third theme arose during cross-case analysis, which highlights the relationship between the emotional and cognitive domains and how they affect one another in different aspects. Each of these four themes will be discussed below.

Grades. In light of the fact that grades decline when students enter middle school (Eccles et al., 1993), perhaps the most surprising finding regarding teachers' perceptions of adolescent students' cognitive needs was the beliefs that surrounded the purpose and meaning of a grade. Teachers talked about grades and the ways that grades can help students, but the conversation was never pointed towards a teacher's effort or desire for students to actually attain or maintain high grades in their classes. Instead, teachers spoke of grades primarily as a means by which students can feel successful and therefore build confidence in their academic abilities.

Multiple teachers related how they intentionally strive to help their students learn in their class for the sake of learning, rather than simply to obtain a desired grade in the course. Ms. F., for example, shared how she will sometimes stop and apologize to her students for becoming too focused on a grade rather than student learning, stating that “I don’t want [a grade] to handicap your learning.” Two of the teachers interviewed both recognized the necessity of grades to record student progress, yet they placed their primary focus on student understanding and growth rather than on grades. They do this in part because they believe that their role as a teacher is to help students learn the content of a subject rather than to produce straight A students. A future study would add to this conversation by exploring the attitudes and beliefs towards grades that elementary, middle, and high school teachers hold and the ways in which those perceptions differ throughout grade levels.

Confidence. As mentioned previously, teacher concerns about student successes in their classrooms were not centered around students achieving high grades. Rather, teachers saw grades as a means through which students can feel successful in their academic abilities as they receive high grades for the effort they put forth in class. Supporting this point, Ms. B. believes for her 6th grade science students, “they need to feel success.” She saw in her teaching that students would often give up if they saw that they were failing in her class, even if pulling their grade up was possible.

In short, these teachers interviewed tended to position grades not as a measure of student competence, but as an opportunity for students to feel successful. These findings align with Ryan and Deci’s (2016) Self Determination Theory, which posits that student motivation is in part determined by a student’s perceived level of competence in a content area or specific task.

According to this theory, once a student believes that he or she can succeed, then effort will be put in and consequent success will be attained.

Social needs. Being able to create a classroom environment in which students feel safe, respected, and interact in positive and healthy ways was important to the teachers interviewed because they understand the destructive effect that negative words can have on a young adolescent. Some teachers shared experiences from when they were in middle school and a student or teacher said something negative to them. Years later and well into adulthood, they still remember those words, and though the wounds had long since healed for those teachers, the memories of the damage caused remains. The personal experiences of those teachers being wounded by the words of another during their middle school years strengthened their personal conviction to treat all of their students with kindness and respect, because they could remember how fragile and impressionable they were as adolescents.

Adolescence is a turbulent time for students, both emotionally and socially, and the instability that students have in their peer groups from day to day adds to that turbulence. Ms. A. made it a point to model healthy ways of interacting with others as well as controlling emotions such that she responds to students rather than reacts. “I try to be a healthy role model for them, and that hey, it’s okay to be angry, and it’s okay to be sad.” She does this because she believes that students need a healthy role model for how to positively interact with others as well as skills in managing and controlling their own emotions. In so doing, this benefits both students and teachers as students learn to have healthy, positive interactions with their peers.

Emotional needs. As has been noted in the previous paragraphs, the primary concern that all teachers interviewed had regarding the developmental needs of their students was related to students’ emotional well-being. Emotions are especially prevalent in middle school, a time

that all teachers recognized as a difficult phase of life for most of their students. This awareness came as the teachers learned about the difficult home lives of some of their students, the rampant hormones delivered by puberty, unstable peer relationships, anxieties, low confidence, and several other things that their students go through. In response to these things, teachers felt a responsibility to create emotionally safe spaces in their classrooms where they provided uplifting experiences for their students.

Cognitive and social anxieties. Teachers identified two different sources of anxieties that adolescent students face in middle school: succeeding academically and fitting in with their peers. The clear ties to the cognitive (academic success) and social (fitting in) domains are interesting to note, but teachers' interpretation of these fears as an emotional need that students for emotionally positive experiences with academics and peers, which would mitigate those fears.

Two of the teachers spoke of the emphasis they intentionally place on student learning rather than students' grades, which they do in hopes that students will realize that they are valued more highly than the grades that they achieved in a class. The teachers saw that students often perceive their grades as a reflection of their personal worth, so efforts were taken to help students objectify grades and view them as separate from their cognitive ability. When teachers are able to help students view academic success as a result of effort rather than inherent ability, they are less discouraged by academic failures and are more likely to take risks and make multiple attempts until they find success (Yeager & Walton, 2011). The teachers interviewed strove to help their students see beyond grades and focus on learning, in part to mitigate their anxieties that centered around their cognitive abilities.

Another source of student anxiety that teachers identified was centered around fitting in with their peers as well as the fear of not being enough. While teachers' definitions of this label of being enough were never explicitly stated, contextual clues suggested that they were referring to student concerns about not being enough—whatever that may mean—for their friends, teachers, families, or even for themselves. For this reason, student fears of not being “enough” are being classified as a socially centered anxiety. These two anxieties were grouped together because of their inherently social connections. The social structure of middle school is vastly different from that of elementary school (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010), so it is understandable that students experience anxiety over socially based anxieties, especially during the transition year from elementary to middle school.

Student difficulties. Extending the conversation of student need for emotional safety is the realization that teachers need to have that students, even young adolescents in middle school, have difficult lives. This is the result of a culmination of several factors that were brought up during the teacher interviews, including insecurities, anxieties, hormonal changes, and internal wounds that students carry from both thoughtless and intentional words that hurt them deeply. The broad emotional swings that students experience in their lives leave them with a great deal of confusion. Multiple teachers viewed middle school as a time of great distress and confusion for students, especially with the powerful emotions that they experience day to day, but do not know how to cope with. Even in middle school, the teachers interviewed have had multiple students who have attempted suicide and several more who have struggled with mental health such as anxiety and depression. Among other difficulties, students taught by the teachers interviewed have been plagued with sickness, family financial crises, deaths, mental health, abuse, and a myriad of other struggles.

Positive emotions. The presence of positive, uplifting emotions in the classroom was something that all six of the interviewed teachers mentioned as something that young adolescents need. The biggest reason for this, that four of the six teachers identified, was because if students feel positive emotions, then they will be more likely to like being in school; and idea supported by research (Hallinan, 2008; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). Students liking school has been shown to lead to higher grades, increased engagement, and greater levels of social competence (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011; Wentzel, 2002). This also leads to heightened confidence in a student's sense of self efficacy (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010), which was another point that teachers emphasized.

Liking school was not the only reason that these teachers wanted their students to experience positive emotions in their classrooms. Ms. F. hoped that when her students reminisce on their time in her class, they would look back and think "that education was a positive thing. And so that as their maturity develops, they can appreciate education for what it is and seek it." The foresight supporting her desire for her students to have positive experiences in her class shows forth in this example, and it is apparent that she places a high value on learning throughout the lifetime, and not just in formal education settings.

Safety. The importance for students to feel emotionally safe in school was perhaps the most surprising finding, as much of the discussion on school safety has in recent years been focused on violence, threat assessments, and reinforcing building safety (Adams & Mrug, 2019; Cuellar & Mason, 2019; Cornell et al., 2018). When talking about safety, the teachers interviewed never mentioned physical threats to student safety such as gun violence or physical bullying. Rather, all mentions of safety were in light of how emotionally safe students feel in their classrooms and at school.

Ms. F., a language arts teacher, spoke of how the comments students share in her subject are “very close to sharing one’s feelings”, so establishing an environment where students feel safe enough to share those comments is a priority for her. Science teacher Ms. B. similarly believes that in her classes, for students to feel a sense of emotional safety is a priority. This is because when that feeling of safety is not present, she sees that students will not ask questions, engage in discussions, or get engaged in the content. Her classroom has no place for criticism and putting students down, for such activity would diminish student willingness to comment, ask questions, and engage in the lesson.

This need for respect and acceptance of student comments and questions must be present from both the students and the teacher in the classroom, for students must be able to trust that their teachers will not shoot them down when they engage in the lesson. When a classroom environment is one in which students feel comfortable sharing their insights, engaging in debate, or asking questions, then students will feel safe enough to take risks, seek out help, and begin to learn.

Teachers do not see safety as a priority simply because of the cognitive benefits, though. Middle school is a notoriously scary and unstable time for adolescents, who are going through so many physical, social, and emotional developments in their lives that they need a place where they can feel safe and stable. This is especially when they are experiencing difficulties at home and have no other place for support (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). The teachers interviewed described students as “fragile,” “scared,” and susceptible to receiving wounds during middle school that will carry with them into adulthood. The teachers seemed to feel a level of responsibility to provide their students with a safe space where they can not only learn, but also have healthy

social interactions, maturely feel and express a range of emotions, and feel positive emotions through connection, laughter, and minimized stress.

Developmentally Supportive Teaching Practices

As teachers discussed their perceptions of the developmental needs that they saw their adolescent students having, they shared practices that they enacted in their classrooms that were meant to support the developmental needs of their students. Practices emerged that support students' cognitive, social, and emotional needs. and how they as teachers strive to create developmentally supportive social environments.

Cognitively supportive practices. When it comes to planning instruction, at the forefront of teachers' priorities is to find ways to teach to the individual students, rather than teaching to a full class. Teachers repeatedly mentioned how they seek to fill the gaps that students have, to slow down instruction when needed so students do not get lost, and to work with individual students when needed. This theme arose as teachers shared stories and experiences of ways in which they try to help their students, and was therefore coded as a cognitive need that teachers recognize students as having, even if that interpretation was never explicitly stated.

Ms. F., who had just completed her third year of teaching, spoke of how in the past year, she was able to, for the first time, plan and modify instruction based on individual student needs that she saw in her classroom, as opposed to planning whole-class instruction based on a curriculum. Modifying instruction, reteaching, pausing instruction to clarify concepts, and intentionally adjusting pacing according to student needs were all mentioned by teachers as ways that they attend to the individual needs of their students to cognitively grasp information and therefore find the success that all teachers want their students to have.

Socially supportive practices. As teachers shared socially supportive practices that they use in their teaching, several themes emerged. Teachers saw that they could support their students socially by establishing a culture of respect, maintaining high expectations for student behavior, creating positive TSRs, and being authentic with their students through admitting mistakes and showing emotional transparency.

Respect. Respect was a word that appeared many times throughout the teacher interviews as teachers expressed the importance of creating a classroom environment in which students feel safe and supported in their learning and questions. As 8th grade teacher Mr. C. tells his students, “I don’t expect you to be friends with everybody in the class, but you need to respect everybody.” This he does to help create a classroom feel of teamwork, where all of the students are working together and helping one another so they can experience group success.

Other teachers viewed respect as necessary because of their desire to make their classroom a safe space where students can ask questions, take risks, discuss and respectfully debate with each other, and help each other learn. When students are teased or put down for a comment they make in class, the likelihood of them engaging again decreases (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012) so learning consequently decreases. Ms. B. emphasized strongly this desire to make sure her students respected one another, as shown in her example.

[A student] felt safe enough to ask a question, but immediately was shot down by a harrumph or you know, a negative comment about the question by another student... bullying her for asking a question. And so for me to be the science teacher that I want to be, ...they have to know that they *cannot* shoot each other down for curiosity and for asking questions and not understanding.

Her example displays the responsibility Ms. B. feels as an instructor to ensure that her classroom is a place where all students know that they will be respected, even if they have questions that others may not share. Establishing a norm of respecting others opens the door for student learning because they will feel safe enough to take risks, engage, discuss, ask questions, and learn. Practices that teachers used to establish such a norm included a zero-tolerance policy for shooting down others' comments, having students help one another, and adopting a team mentality where all students were expected to work together towards success.

Modeling expectations for student behavior. Nearly all teachers interviewed spoke of the importance of establishing clear expectations for student behavior and interactions, and then holding students to that expectation. Norms included helping others in the class succeed by having a team mentality, being respectful, and how to appropriately work together with groups. When asked what she believed her students needed in a general sense, Ms. B. responded, "I think they need respect and I think that they need, um, correct behavior modeled for them. So respect, acceptance, and correct behavior modeled. But none of that is academic, but I think that's what they need the most." The teachers felt a responsibility to model and teach their middle school students healthy ways to interact with all of their classmates, regardless of if they are friends or not.

Positive TSRs. One interesting finding was the prevalence of the teacher-student relationship when teachers were discussing the social needs of their adolescent students. Though aware of the influence that peers have on adolescents, the teachers were equally aware of the sometimes life-changing influence that teachers can have on students, both for good and for bad. With this understanding comes a sense of responsibility that these teachers feel to create and maintain positive relationships with their students.

Multiple teachers reminisced on when they were students and how much they learned from the teachers with whom they had a positive relationship, as well as the diminished desire to learn from teachers that they did not like. Teachers built positive relationships through several small practices, including greeting students at the door, sharing personal stories with them, and engaging in informal, non-academic conversations with them.

Being authentic. Five of the six teachers interviewed spoke to the importance of being “real” in the interactions they had with their students because of the effect they saw it had on the TSR. By being “real” with their students through admitting mistakes and being emotionally transparent, these teachers were able to be approachable to their students and made it possible for students to feel that they had a close TSR with them. Practices that teachers used to be authentic with their students included being transparent about one’s emotions, admitting mistakes, sharing personal stories, and being sincere when interacting with students. The value of admitting mistakes and emotional transparency will be expounded below.

Three teachers talked about their intentional practice of admitting mistakes in front of their students, regardless of whether the teacher or students recognize the mistake first. Being able to admit mistakes and then laugh about them with one’s students is something that the teachers saw a valuable opportunity to model to their students that teachers are human too, and that there is no harm in making or admitting mistakes. The teachers believed that this is especially important to model for their middle school students, who are so afraid of making mistakes, especially in front of their peers.

The teachers who spoke of the importance of admitting and laughing about mistakes believed that students benefit as teachers showcase the fact that they are imperfect humans, just like their students are. As Ms. D. shared, “I’m not perfect! I’m learning myself! And I think they

just need to know that we're all people, and that we all feel, and that we all get sad and happy. I think that's important for them to know." Ms. D.'s desire for her students to understand that she was just as human as they were shows forth in this quote. As she did so, she believed that it helped her appear more authentic to her students.

The concept of teachers showcasing emotional transparency was an interesting theme that emerged throughout the interviews, in part because of the different reasons why teachers chose to be honest with their students about when they were having hard days. Most teachers who brought this up shared that they try to be honest with their students about the emotions they were feeling as a means to model healthy emotional coping strategies as well as to let their students see that everybody has hard days once in a while. Teachers believed that this is especially valuable for middle school students, who need to be exposed to the fact that even adults experience a broad range of emotions and see how they manage those emotions.

In the interviews, one negative case did appear in which the teacher tried to be transparent with her emotions in hopes that students would feel bad for her and exhibit desirable behaviors as they tried to be sensitive to her hard day. It would be interesting to conduct a more extensive exploration on teacher motivations in cases when they exhibit emotional transparency; whether as a way to set an example or as a manipulation strategy.

Emotionally supportive practices. With a greater understanding of what middle school students might be going through even in their younger years, teachers can be more sensitive to the need that students have for their teachers to be understanding, caring, helpful, and a stable presence for them. Students need to feel that their teachers care about them and for their well-being, which was consistently brought up by the teachers interviewed as an emotional need that

middle school students have. Teachers identified ways that they as teachers showed in their teaching that they cared about their students, which are discussed below.

Attributes of care. Several attributes were discussed by teachers as things that are interpreted by students as a caring sentiment. Traits such as empathy, kindness, and patience were all mentioned by teachers as manifestations of care, which they try to portray to their students. Patience and kindness were meaningful to teachers, particularly because of the message those traits send to students that they are in a safe environment where they will not be shot down, judged, or ridiculed by their teacher. Empathy came up more often in conjunction with how teachers can help students feel like they belong in the classroom because there is a teacher there who truly cares about them. These traits all contribute to a student's sense of emotional safety in and belonging to a classroom, which, as has been previously mentioned, are precursors to engagement and academic gains (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015).

Noticing students. One specific way that teachers saw students' need to be cared about being fulfilled was through the quality relationships that teachers build with their students. Teaching is centered around teachers' ability to find ways of helping their students get to a higher plane of performance, and teachers find many ways to help their students cognitively, socially, and emotionally. This could look like Ms. D. helping students create new friendships with others, Ms. A. lending a listening ear as a student comes in after school to 'spill the tea,' or Ms. F. adjusting lessons to better address the gaps she sees her students needing help with. Each of these small practices send a message to students that their teachers notice them as individuals.

Even when caring is difficult. While in theory teachers care about all of their students, the reality is that some students manage to be a constant nuisance their teachers. Three of the teachers highlighted these kinds of students during the interviews, and expounded on their

perception of the increased responsibility that they as teachers have to care about students, even when they are difficult to manage. Ms. A. shares:

I try to go out of my way to let my students know that “I care about you, and even if you drive me nuts, I still care about you.” And even if you think “oh, she doesn’t like me” that’s bull crap. So I want to be that--I want to be that teacher. Like, if they’re having a hard time and they feel like no one cares about them, there’s at least one person who does.

This teacher saw caring about her students almost as a duty of hers; that part of being a teacher means that she must be somebody to her students that they know cares about them. Perhaps the most important and overarching aspect of teacher care that teachers wanted their students to understand was that even if a student drove her nuts, she was still rooting for that student to have success.

Role of the Teacher in the TSR

Part of this study was to examine teacher beliefs about their students through the lens of the TSR. Several comments and beliefs were shared throughout the interviews that revealed the ways these teachers perceived their role as teacher within the TSR; how they as teachers were expected to create positive relationships with their students. Two distinct themes emerged as teachers spoke of the TSR: the role of the teacher within the TSR and how they established positive relationships with their students.

Ms. F. stated it nicely when she shared that “I have always felt like relationships were 90% of what I did.” This opinion should not come as a surprise to any educator, as teaching is entirely built around the teacher’s ability to connect with, support, and help her students. The six teachers interviewed all shared their beliefs regarding their role as the teacher within the TSR;

what it means to them to be a teacher of adolescents. Two themes related to TSRs emerged as teachers' perceptions of their role within the TSR were shared: characteristics of the ideal teacher, and how they positioned themselves as teachers within the TSR. It should be noted that many of the comments that the teachers shared regarding the role of the teacher within the TSR were referring to their assumption of the ideal teacher. This is to say that these teachers believed that good teachers should live up to these things, even if they themselves did not feel that they were perfect examples of the very things that they shared.

Teacher characteristics. As teachers responded to student comments during the interviews, many shared the ways in which they hoped they could live up to the characteristics mentioned by their students. A great number of characteristics surfaced during the interviews, some of which were responses to characteristics that students had used to describe their teacher. Others were revealed as teachers spoke about the needs of their students and how certain personalities and characteristics in a teacher might help them attend to those needs. Twenty-one characteristics of the ideal teacher emerged throughout the interviews, five of which were spoken of by at least three of the six teachers interviewed: caring, nice, patient, consistent, helpful, and trustworthy. These themes and the ways in which teachers perceived them are discussed below.

Caring. This theme centers around teachers' ability to be genuinely kind and caring to their students. Ms. B. showcases how this care resonates from within her when she reminisced, "I really value each individual... even the real stinkers... I still am so fond of them." Teachers spoke of the importance of students seeing this care from their teachers and believing that it was real, because if they perceived it as superficial, the TSR would not be effective. As Ms. A. explains, "I feel that if they know that you care about them and they know that you love them and that you want to help them, then they're more likely to open up. They're more likely to be

vulnerable with you.” The teachers saw that students must believe that their teachers have their best interest in mind; otherwise their teachers’ actions to help them would be accepted or valued to the extent that they should have.

As teachers spoke of the importance of caring about their students, it became evident that teachers cared about multiple areas of their students’ well-being. Ms. D. shows the care that she has for her students to find positive social relationships:

I think that they also need to know that we care; that we really care what happens every day. Not just care that they get a good grade or whatever, but we care that they are really finding a place here, and if not, what can we do to help? Help them get involved in a club, help them to find a friend, help them to find themselves.

Other teachers spoke of how important it was to care about students’ cognitive development and to do what they could to help their students “grow just a little bit further” (Ms. F.) and “truly learn science content” (Ms. B.), for example. The desire that these teachers had for their students to have positive experiences and excel socially, cognitively, and emotionally all speak of a genuine care that they have for the students they teach.

Nice. Similar to the concept of care, but manifest more through actions than concern is that of being nice and kind to students. Mr. C., a naturally easygoing and kind teacher, shares reasoning for why students might perceive him as nice.

I don’t necessarily try to be nice, but I—I guess just the fact that I don’t know what these kids do at home, you know. I don’t know what their life is like. But uh, [the principal]’s always saying “oh, you never know—you might be the only person to say hi or be a friend to them” so I guess I try to be [nice] because of that.

Thanks to a principal who helped him be aware of those things that teachers cannot see about the lives of some of their students, Mr. C. was provided a more tangible reason to be nice than he would have otherwise had.

Ms. D. also learned a powerful lesson about being nice to all students when a former principal instructed her faculty that “you have to remember that this [student] is somebody's baby, whether the parents want them or not, and we need to treat them like they're the most important thing.” She learned from this experience that she needed to be kind to her students, no matter what.

Consistent. Consistency in one's teaching was related by the teachers to cognitive and emotional benefits for students. Ms. E. reflected on how unstable friendships can be in middle school, particularly for some of her female students. Recognizing this, she remarked on the value students found in her being “a constant someone” that they could always go and talk to.

Thinking about how she can provide a cognitively and emotionally supportive classroom environment, Ms. F. speaks of how she strives to remain consistent in her expectations for student performance as well as in her own grading practices. “It's stability and security, that they know what to expect from me; that I'm not going to swing. And I think that stability is really important when they don't feel so stable at this time in their life.” As she remains consistent in her expectations, her hope is that students will benefit as they learn and grow in her classroom.

Patient. Patience was an important characteristic that teachers thought all who teach children should have, which teachers connected to being consistent in their interactions and responses to students. Ms. F. explains that when students know that their teachers will be patient with them, “they can share without fear of, um, being treated harshly or with impatience or things like that.” This insight from Ms. F. shows how a teacher's level of patience with her

students may affect how safe students feel in a classroom, which in turn affects the level to which students will share comments or seek help. It makes sense that consistency and patience were characteristics that teachers believed were important aspects of being a teacher.

Some teachers found it much easier to be patient with their students than others. Compare, for example, Mr. C.'s comment that "I try to be patient, but I think that's just how I am. I don't let too much bother me" with Ms. A.'s statement: "I try to be patient with them. I try to be very patient." Whether teachers were naturally patient and easygoing or whether it took more of an effort for them to be patient with their students, teachers recognized it as an important characteristic that teachers should have.

Helpful. As a math teacher, Mr. C. found this to be an important aspect of his teaching as he shared that "I'm willing to take the time, because if somebody wants the help, I want to be there." A practice that Ms. D. adopted in her classroom to increase her own ability to help her students was by conferencing one on one with her students on a regular basis. This practice allowed her to effectively help her students as they were provided a time when they could ask her questions without fear of their peers seeing that they were confused about something. "It starts off [as] you're coming up to me about your paper, but often it turns into 'I need your help.'" As teachers, they felt a responsibility to provide help to their students in order to get them to the level of understanding and performance that they needed to be.

Trustworthy. "Only time will tell if I'm worthy of that trust. I try to be! I try to be very worthy of that trust and like, build healthy, happy relationships with them that they feel that they can be supported in school" (Ms. A.). The final characteristic that most of the teachers interviewed spoke of was that of being somebody that their students could trust. For Ms. E. and

Ms. A., this trust became evident as students came to them to “spill the tea” because “she’s someone I can talk to.” This trust takes time to establish, as Ms. D. explains,

It takes you a good quarter, a good semester, where they think “are you going to call me out if I raise my hand and ask a dumb question or I don’t know what I’m doing?” You know, so once they get to the [sense that] “Whew! I’m okay in here,” then they’ll start saying, “hey Ms. D., can I talk to you?”

In order for students to feel that they could trust their teachers, the teachers saw that they had to first feel safe enough to approach them. If students were afraid of being ridiculed by their teachers for asking for help, the teachers believed that they would not seek assistance.

Other characteristics mentioned by the teachers included sympathy, empathy, love, introspective, calm, relatable, respectful of the students, compassionate, maternal, merciful, and sensitive to the students’ experiences. Of the six that were commented on most frequently by teachers (caring, nice, patient, consistent, helpful, and trustworthy), a frequently appearing theme in the teacher perspectives was the importance of teachers creating a sense of safety in their classroom, where students felt they could seek help from their teachers because they trusted that the teacher would not respond them in a demeaning way. As teachers spoke of these characteristics, it was shown how they can benefit students socially, academically, and emotionally.

Positioning of teacher within TSR. How teachers positioned themselves within the TSR was an interesting theme to discover as perceptions of teachers’ role in the relationships with their students emerged. While Ms. F. recognized that “I’m not the final stop” and that her presence in her students’ lives was temporary, all teachers understood that the impact that they could have on a student’s life during the short time that they taught them could be immense. Of

the six teachers interviewed, positioned themselves as an educator of children, and the other three positioned themselves primarily as somebody who the students could approach if they needed to talk to someone; as a mentor of sorts. The clear divide between the teachers is interesting, yet it would be incorrect to state that each of these teachers positioned themselves as only an educator or as only a mentor. Each of the teachers felt the responsibility to fill both roles, though the way they prioritized these roles was perceived differently.

Educator. The teachers who saw their role as primarily that of an educator were, understandably, those whose goal was to get their students to a deeper level of understanding, displayed clearly in Ms. F.'s comment that "I think that my job is to help them grow just a little bit further." Ms. B. repeatedly spoke of the importance of creating a safe space in her classroom because she believed that if her students could feel safe enough to ask questions and explore in her science class, then they would be able to truly learn. Mr. C. shares this desire to help his students get to a place where they are willing to make mistakes. He tells his students, "I'm willing to help you. Just try and get it wrong. I don't care [if you get it wrong], but you need to be willing to do your part, and then I can get you to where you need to be." The primary goal of this set of teachers was to help their students learn and grow in their content area.

Mentor. The role of the teacher as a mentor ties directly into the discussion of students feeling that their teacher is someone that they can approach with concerns or questions; somebody that they can talk to. These teachers' understanding of their relationship with their students can best be explained through Andy Hargreaves's (2001) conception of emotional geographies: boundaries and barriers that teachers put up to distance themselves from their students in order to maintain a professional distance. For these teachers, in order to develop the relationship that they wanted to have with their students, they had to momentarily suspend that

professional barrier at times in order to act as a friend for their students. This understanding of teachers' positioning of themselves within the TSR can be seen through Ms. F.'s comment that "I try to be like, their friend; someone that they can talk to" as well as Ms. D.'s belief that her students at times need her to be "a friend, not just always a teacher, but a friend."

When teachers suspend the professional geography in order to speak with their students, they allow for the kind of discourse that Friere (1998) calls for in which two persons speak "with" rather than speaking "to" one another (p. 103). The teachers who positioned themselves as a mentor (and therefore sometimes as a friend) within the teacher-student relationship, aimed to help their students be listened to and understood in hopes that it would help them socially and emotionally. Ms. A. shares why she tries to listen to and support her students:

One of the big things that I work really hard to have my kids know is that I care about them because I had a really horrible childhood growing up... And school was the only place that I had stability. School was the only place that I had like, support... I feel that if they know that you care about them and they know that you love them and that you want to help them, then they're more likely to open up.

Because of the stability that she needed as well as the support that she received in her middle school years, this teacher strives to be the kind of teacher that she needed at that age. Especially considering her background and how "it was really, really difficult for me to even articulate what was happening in my life," this teacher's focus on providing safe relationships where students can come and talk to her is understandable.

Establishing TSRs

Compared to how teachers positioned themselves within the TSR is how teachers worked to establish positive TSRs in their classrooms with their students. Three themes emerged within how teachers establish positive TSRs: teacher actions, classroom environment, and laughter.

Teacher actions. This theme emerged as teachers spoke of interactions with former students as well as actions that teachers took to help support or uplift their students, which resulted in a stronger TSR. These teacher actions were divided into two sub themes: treating students kindly and engaging with their students in same-level conversations.

Treating students kindly. Similar to the previously discussed characteristic of *nice*, teachers saw that as they treated their students with kindness and respect, those feelings were reciprocated back to them. Ms. D. establishes this as a top priority in her teaching, for she believes that “it’s easy to say words. It’s easy to say mean words. It’s easy to have power in your words, but you can’t take back.” Remembering the pain that unkind words caused her during adolescence motivates her to always say kind things to her students. Ms. A. saw a difference when her students knew that she cared about them and would treat them kindly. She shared an interaction she had with a student in which she found that he misbehaved in his other classes because he believed that those teachers did not care about him. Through this interaction, she saw the impact that being kind to her students and letting them know that she cared about them had on their behavior in her class. As it turns out, the positive relationship that she had built with her students benefited her teaching as well as the learning of the students. Ms. B. saw similar results as she shared that after 12 years of teaching, “the best classroom management is building a relationship with your students.” Like Ms. A., she also sought to build positive relationships with her students by treating her students with kindness.

Same-level conversations. Yu, Johnson, Deutsch, and Varga (2018) introduce the concept of same-level conversations, in which teachers suspend the professional geography (Hargreaves, 2001) and converse with their students as if they were peers. Ms. F. wants her students to know that “I’m interested in them as people, not just as my students,” so she tries to share some of her interests with her students in hopes that she can learn some of theirs.

In an attempt to make it through the demanding amount of content she had to cover that year, Ms. B. chose to sacrifice the time that she usually took to share personal stories with her students and hear stories from them. She shares the impact that it had on her teaching.

So one thing that I cut out was time where they got to share more, and you know they really love to talk about themselves, and they love to make a connection to what we’re discussing or learning about with sharing with the class personal experiences, and I cut that out and I do think it [laughs] actually um, hurt me... because cutting that out made it so I didn’t build those personal relationships as quick... If they don’t feel that emotional connection and feel like they are being heard, they’re not going to listen as well to what you have to teach.

This experience that Ms. B. had shows not just the importance of getting to know one’s students, and allowing them to get to know the teacher in turn. It also provides a case of the negative impact that it can have on students and teachers when those relationships and that understanding of who the other is are not established.

Classroom environment. Along with actions that teachers did to help establish positive TSRs, they also recognized elements of classroom environments that aided positive TSR formation. Teachers identified three necessary concepts: safe space, providing help, and autonomy.

Safe space. The importance of establishing the classroom as a place where students felt safe was mentioned by all six of the teachers interviewed. A safe classroom was identified by three teachers as one in which students they could share comments and ask questions without the fear of being ridiculed or judged. Two teachers saw their class being perceived by the students as a safe space when they stopped being afraid to make mistakes as they tried to learn a new concept. Mr. L. saw this willingness to make mistakes as a precursor to showing improvement in his math class, for he saw that once his students were willing to put in the effort, even with the risk of doing it wrong, “then I can get you to where you need to be.”

The last element of a safe classroom that two of the teachers mentioned was an expectation for support and respect between all students and teachers. These tie into both of the previous two characteristics of a safe classroom, namely, feeling safe enough to ask questions without fear of being ridiculed (respect) and not being afraid to make mistakes because those mistakes will not be final (support).

Providing help. Four of the teachers interviewed believed that strong TSRs could be established in a classroom where students knew they would receive help if they needed it. This responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of the teacher, who must make it clear to her students that they can ask for help without fear of being criticized. Ms. F. shares an experience she had with a student whose phone had been taken away on account of her poor grades.

She came to me and said, “How can I get my grade up?” And I said, “Well, let’s do the assignments!” And she started coming in the mornings so she could work on it, and at first I was just going to sit at my desk and do my thing, but I realized she’s putting forth the effort, so I need to make sure she has what she needs. And so I sat down with her so she could ask questions of me or clarify things when she

needed it... I did see a lot of improvement. She did get her phone back, but even after that, she was doing things and correcting things when she needed to.

This example shows how lessons were learned for both the student and the teacher as Ms. F. realized the responsibility that she had to put in effort to help her students when they were seeking that help. The student in the story was able to get the help that she needed to in the moment, but her behaviors changed for the remainder of the year as she continued to get help and make corrections when needed.

Autonomy. For adolescents especially, some level of student autonomy in a classroom can go a long way in establishing a positive TSR. Ms. E. shares how she will often seek the opinions of her students in making class-wide decisions, though it sometimes comes at the expense of her classroom management in the moment. Ms. D. stresses that adolescents need “places that they can ask many questions and explore. You know, hands-on, not ‘sit down, be quiet, and don’t ask me any questions.’” Her description of the detrimental classroom environment is one in which the teacher practices authoritarian teaching styles. Rather, she believes that students should be allowed to ask questions and find ways to express themselves.

Ms. A. shares a scenario depicting how she provides her students with choice when she sees that they are having a particularly difficult time with their emotions.

If I have a student who’s crying in class, I’ll go up to them and I’m like “Hey, is everything okay? You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.”... I give them the option of “I can just leave you here, or you can go sit in the hall for a sec by yourself.”

And then they usually try to tell me what they want, and I try to follow through with it. By allowing her students autonomy in emotionally distressing moments, Ms. A. sends them a message that she cares about them and that she trusts them to make the right decision for what

they need at that moment. This message to students that a teacher trusts and values the opinions that they have can go a long way in gaining student trust and respect.

Laughter. The last element of a TSR-supportive classroom that teachers spoke of was that of having positive experiences in the classroom, which was mostly obtained through humor. The kind of humor that teachers used was categorized into four types: sarcasm, funny stories, teasing students, and enjoyment.

Sarcasm. Sarcasm generally came in the form of dark humor, as teachers interacted with students, such as Ms. F.'s experience:

I had a student that was on student council last year, and he was supposed to check in with me every time before going to student council. And in Impact, almost every time, I'd go 'where is this kid? Has anyone seen him today?' And one day, I went "[sigh] I am going to wring that kid's neck!" And a few minutes later, he comes knocking at the door, and one of the kids says "don't let him in! Mrs. A. will kill him!" So things like that, like, maybe it's not an okay thing to say, but it was funny!

While one teacher identified dark humor as a coping mechanism she used throughout her life to deal with difficult challenges, in each interview, any story involving sarcasm was generally prefaced by the teacher acknowledging that she probably should not have used it in the moment. However, after telling the story, she would acknowledge that the students knew she was joking and that it was a relationship strengthening experience.

The tension between a teacher's expectations for professional behavior and teacher-student interactions dealing with sarcasm appeared to be present for all teachers who spoke of it. Further research may be needed to explore the intersection between sarcasm in the classroom,

how it affects teacher-student relationships, and teacher feelings of guilt for using sarcasm and its proposed place in the classroom.

Funny stories. Two of the teachers interviewed shared funny personal stories with their students as a means to both connect with their students and to bring humor into the classroom. Sometimes these stories were used to teach content, though they more often came up spontaneously during the class. By sharing humorous personal stories with their students, the teachers noted that they feel more connected to their students and that it helps put their students at ease in their class.

Teasing. Several teachers spoke of “messaging with” students as a means of incorporating humor into the classroom. This is in no way related to bullying or harmful teasing that damages students, but is exemplified by Ms. B.’s practice of assigning something to students, only to have them crumple them up and throw it away, or by Ms. A. sharing a video with her students that she knows will make them cringe. This kind of humor appears to be more for the enjoyment of the teacher, though Ms. B. expressed that this occurs more frequently in her teaching when she feels connected and has a strong TSR with her students. It is interesting to note that a strong TSR seems to be a precursor to teachers being able to “mess with” their students, though the practice of it strengthens the teacher’s perception of the relationship she has with her students, thus lending itself to a recursive process for maintaining a positive relationship between a teacher and her students.

Enjoyment. The final type of humor that emerged in the teacher interviews was not spurred by any particular practice or situation, but rather came from the simple pleasures that happen in one’s daily teaching life. Just as joy in teaching is not context-specific, but comes from a teacher’s overall attitude towards the profession (Hagenauer, Hascher, & Volet, 2015), this

form of laughter comes from a teacher's enjoyment in teaching. This kind of enjoyment induced laughter, according to the teachers interviewed, helps students feel more relaxed in class.

Whatever type of laughter appears in the classroom (sarcasm, "messaging with" students, sharing funny personal stories, or pure enjoyment), it was valuable. Teachers see laughter as a means to build, as well as strengthen, the relationships they have with their students. They also believed that it helped both students and teachers feel more relaxed in the classroom and appeared to be a reflection of how much teachers enjoyed their job. More research is needed to uncover the relationships between laughter in the classroom and both student and teacher perceptions of the TSR, as well as its relationship to teacher contentment.

APPENDIX F

References of Appendices

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