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PERSPECTIVES ON THE QUALITY OF THE STUDENT-TEACHER REALATIONSHIP BETWEEN
STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY AND TYPICALLY DEVELOPING STUDENTS AND
DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES

A MASTER'S THESIS
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BY
HANNAH BAST

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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

PERSPECTIVES ON THE QUALITY OF THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY AND TYPICALLY DEVELOPING STUDENTS AND
DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES

Hannah Bast

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APPROVED

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Abstract

Little research has compared the student-teacher relationship between students with a disability and students with typical development. More specifically, the quality of the relationship between the student and the teacher. Measuring the amount of conflict, closeness, and how dependent the student is on their teacher within that relationship. Most relationships were viewed as negative by the teacher for students with a disability while most relationships with typically developing students were viewed as positive. These relationships showed less conflict, dependency, and higher levels of closeness. Developmental outcomes are examined in the present research in the areas of academic performance, behavior, and social/socioemotional affects. Outcomes differed across students with multiple disabilities due to the characteristics of their disability versus typically developing students. Overall, the general findings eluded to the idea that teachers have a crucial impact in the development of their students whether their relationship is positive or negative. A teacher training guidebook on how to create positive student-teacher relationships was created to help educate teachers to implement and form better relationships in their classrooms with all students.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Context

Relationships have been a critical component of healthy living as far as humans came into existence. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs shows five levels of needs that need to be met theoretically. Beginning at the bottom of the five-tiered pyramid working upward. The first need being basics such as air, water, and food. The second being after needs and the third, love and belonging such as friendship and relationships.

Relationships are crucial and are a basic need for humans to thrive in life. In the early 1800's, relationships between students and teachers were non-existent as teachers were seen as disciplinary educators in a small schoolhouse room full of students of all ages. Things started to shift in the early 1980's. Schools were much larger and teachers were being more educated on the importance of relationships. More psychologically disorders were coming to light during this time such as anxiety, depression, and many others in which teachers were realizing the impact and help they can provide for their students in the classroom.

Students spend on average of more than 1,000 hours with their teacher during a typical school year which is much greater compared to the time spent with their families and caregivers at home. This makes student-teacher relationships (STR) pivotal for students as they are around teachers so often. The amount of interaction between a student and a teacher is far greater than the amount of interaction students have with their parents during the school year, especially for students in their teenage years. Children's relationships with their teachers during the school year can be essential in

their subsequent academic, behavior, and social adjustment in school (Alexander & Entwistle, 1988). The school year that is a good amount of time to build a relationship that can both hinder and grow the students' development in many areas such as; academic performance, behavior, and social and emotional development. Having positive relationships between students and teachers has also been shown to have an effect on creating a comfortable and safe classroom environment. As mentioned previously, student and teacher relationships can be detrimental to a student's development and success in many areas of life.

Theoretical Framework

Relationships between teachers and students with special needs for years has been one that can be both complicated to navigate as well as critical in many aspects. Teachers often don't understand how to build relationships with students with special needs and therefore struggle to form bonds with them. The relationships between the student with a disability and the teacher can be hostile, due to the characteristics of the student or the teacher unable to navigate how to deal and better understand these students.

Rationale

This thesis attempts to address the issue within the relationships between students with a disability and teachers such as how their attitude towards the student may hinder or grow students in different areas of development. It also addresses what specific areas the teacher can improve in, in order to change their attitudes as well as better understand the student to grow their relationship. Students with typical

development are also researched to compare relationships between typical developing students and students with a disability.

Definition of Terms

The main term that is used in the present thesis is STR, meaning student-teacher relationship. Along with acronyms used in the realm of special education to describe a specific disability such as ASD- Autism Spectrum Disorder, EBD- Emotional Behavioral Disorder, DCD- Developmentally Cognitively Delayed, SLD- Specific Learning Disability, ADHD- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and OHD- Other Health disorder.

Research Focus

Research reviewed for this thesis compares both the student-teacher relationship quality between both the teacher and students with disabilities and the teacher with students with typical development. The majority of research has been conducted comparing the student-teacher relationship quality between teachers and students with typical development. Relationships from current research showed that students who had a disability were more conflictual which was negatively associated with the students' perception of a high-quality relationship with their teacher (Prewett et al., 2019). Relationships were also viewed by the students and teachers as less close when students with a disability had higher levels of behavior (Eisenhower et al., 2015). Academic achievement was also closely related to student-teacher views on the quality of their relationship. Students who showed more dependability upon their teachers had less close relationships. Teachers prosocial behaviors were also related to positive or negative STR's. Views of a negative or positive relationship effected the students

development in areas such as academics, behaviors, and socioemotional development (Demirkaya., 2015; Fischer et al., 2016; Hamre et al., 2005).

The research reviewed in this thesis also examines the quality of relationship between teachers and students with multiple disabilities. These disabilities include students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), learning disability/intellectual disability (LD/ID), and attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder (ADHD). The varying disabilities and characteristics of disabilities effected the overall quality of their relationships. For students with autism, current research shows more conflict and less closeness due to the characteristics of ASD, while other research showed more dependency and less conflict for students with an ID/LD. Students who had more frequent behaviors had less closeness and high conflict relationships with their teachers (Caplan et al., 2016; Poulou, 2017; Prino et al., 2016). Although research has individually looked at the difference between STR's across multiple disabilities, not much has compared the relationships with typically developing students along with the developmental outcome effects. The effects of a positive student-teacher relationship has been shown to increase academic performance, decrease behaviors, and neutralize social/socioemotional skills. Based upon the disability, one can assume that the characteristics of a specific ability will have a larger impact on developmental areas than others while still other may be effected negatively. For example, characteristics of a student with ASD may have the challenge of socializing and picking up social ques from others but may be gifted in academic areas showing less dependency on their teachers. This can contribute to whether the student and the teacher have a positive relationship

and the impact that relationships has on the long term developmental outcomes for that student (Sucuoglu et al., 2019). Not only can STR's be effected by the characteristics and development of the student, but research has shown that language and classroom climate also plays an important role in the effects of development and relationships (Feldman et al., 2019; Poulou, 2018). STR's have been shown to vary across multiple disabilities. They also vary in how they affect the developmental outcomes of these students across time.

Research Questions

There has been little research on the impact of student-teacher relationships on students with disabilities. More specifically, in the areas of how strong those relationships are and the developmental outcomes that might come with having these relationships. I am wondering if student-teacher relationships impact development in students with disabilities. How do teachers and students perceive those relationships? Are they positive or negative? If so, how does that impact student development in the areas of academic performance, behaviors, and socioemotional? How does this relate to students with typical development? I would like to compare the student-teacher relationship quality between students with disabilities and students with typical development, taking into account the impact on academic performance, behavior, and social/socioemotional relationships long term for these students. Finding the answers and research to these questions will help teachers see the effect their relationships with their students can daily hinder or better the development in many areas for the years to come. This will be beneficial for both general education teachers and special education

teachers and serve as a tool for them to look to for guidance in promoting and maintain good healthy relationships and what that looks like for them.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

Chapter II reviews the published literature on student-teacher relationships. It will examine the teacher's perception on the quality of student-teacher relationships across multiple disabilities as compared to students with typical development and how that affects student's development in the areas of academics, behaviors, and social/socioemotional. This information should help in determining the effects a positive student-teacher relationship has on students with disabilities. The literature that is used in this thesis was located through searches such as ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and EBSCO with publication dates of 2005-2019. The key words that were used in these searches included "student-teacher relationship and disability", "student-teacher relationship and typical development", "student-teacher relationship and special education", and "STR quality". The structure of this chapter is to review the literature on teacher's perceptions on student-teacher relationship quality in typical developing students, and students with varying disabilities, followed by the effects of the relationship on development in the areas of Academic, Behavioral, and Social/Socioemotional in students with typical development and varying disabilities.

Quality of Student-Teacher Relationship

Previous research has mentioned that teacher and student relationships can affect multiple areas in a student's life. Research has also shown that the quality of the relationship can make both a positive or negative impact in multiple areas of development. In this section, the quality of that relationship between students and

teachers is examined, looking at closeness, conflict, and dependency in students with typical development and students with various disabilities and how they differ based on the student's developmental status.

Students with Typical Development

Bryce et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal study looking at the indirect relationships between parents' and teachers' academic influences and students' concurrent reading and math achievement in first and fifth grade students. Bryce and his colleagues studied 8,986 children and their parents. They were recruited from hospitals across the United States at birth and were followed until 5th grade. Data was collected each year in January-May through various methods such as assessments, observations and questionnaires. The researchers were evaluating direct parental involvement, student-teacher relationship, instructional support, behavioral engagement, and reading and math achievement. Bryce and his colleagues found that direct parental involvement was positively related to achievement through behavioral engagement in 1st grade but not in 5th grade. Teachers reported that direct parents' involvement was not associated with behavioral engagement at either grade. It was also found that relationships between students and teachers that are more conflictual were associated with lower behavioral engagement in 1st and 5th grade. Overall, the study concluded that low conflictual student-teacher relationships and teachers' supportive instructional practices promote engagement in both early and late elementary school in students with typical development (Bryce et al., 2019).

Prewett, Bergin, and Huang (2019) set out to study the aspects of classroom experiences, using both teachers' and students' reports, that may be associated with emerging adolescent students' perceptions of their relationship with their teachers. 336 students who were predominately Caucasian males in grades 5-6 were examined and their ten math teachers in a Midwestern middle school. Students and teacher's perceptions were assessed through surveys administered. Results from the study showed that all students who perceived their relationship as close with their math teacher had a teacher who also reported having a close relationship with their students. Students with typical development had mutual perceptions of closeness between them and their teachers. Relationships perceived with high conflict by students influenced the quality of student-teacher relationships in a negative way, making student-teacher relationships more conflictual and less close. Overall, teacher's prosocial classroom behavior and social-emotional support were the main predictors of students' views on the quality of relationship with their teachers (Prewett, Bergin, & Huang., 2019)

Some students in the general education setting and have typical development and are students who have not qualified for special education but are at a risk for referral. Decker, Dona, and Christenson (2007) examined the student teacher relationship quality from a sample of African American students who were considered behaviorally at-risk by their teachers and were bring considered for referral to special education. They looked at both the teachers' and students' perspective on the relationship as well as how these relationships were predictive of the students social, behavioral, and academic outcomes. The sample was a group of 44, all African American

students (26 male, 18 female) and their 25 teachers from in suburban and urban elementary schools (kindergarten-6th grade). Students and teachers were administered a series of assessments and questionnaires such as the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS), Relatedness Scale, Social-Skills Rating System: Teacher-Report (SSRS-TR), Social-Skills Rating System Child-Report (SSRS-CR), and a disciplinary infractions survey. Other assessments looking at engagement and academic performance were also used. Looking at the quality of the relationships, the results showed that students who rated themselves as wanting a closer relationship with their teacher had a positive view on the relationship. Teachers tended to rate their relationships with students and view them negatively. As for outcomes in the areas of academics, behaviors, and social, results showed that kindergarteners who reported of wanting to be closer to their teachers had an increase in letter naming fluency. As student reports of positive emotional quality in relationships between the teacher and student increased, the amount of behavioral referrals decreased and the amount of time a student spent on a task increased. From the teachers' perspective, when teachers reported positive student-teacher relationships (STR), students' social competence and engagement increased and the number of suspensions students received decreased. The researchers concluded that the quality of the STR can either support or hinder resiliency for at-risk students (Decker et al., 2007)

Looking at research assessing STR quality and developmental outcomes in students with typical development is a study conducted by Rucinski, Brown, and Downer (2018). The purpose of this study was to examine STR quality and its association with

social-emotional and academic outcomes and how it relates to the quality of classroom emotional climate. Five hundred and twenty-six children (53% female) in grades 3-5 with diverse backgrounds were used in this sample along with their 35 teachers in New York City. The study was conducted through a series of observations, assessments, and questionnaires looking at relationship quality, demographic characteristics, classroom emotional climate, academic achievement, attendance rate, and an assortment of mental disabilities such as anxiety, depression, and aggression. As it relates to STR quality, higher conflict reports correlated with higher reports of aggression for both teachers and students. Furthermore, classroom emotional support was not related to teacher-reported closeness or conflict but was related to child-reported relationship quality. Looking at the developmental outcomes, results showed that academic achievement, child-social-emotional outcomes, and teacher-child relationship quality measures changed significantly from fall to spring. It differed by child gender, receipt of free or reduced-priced lunch, and race/ethnicity. Boys had lower levels of self-reported depression/anxiety, ELA achievement, and teacher-child relationship quality but higher teacher reported aggression. Students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch had higher levels of behaviors such as depression, aggression, and conflict with teachers along with lower academic achievement scores. The researchers concluded that teachers' abilities to form positive relationships with each individual child and communicate personal caring and support is crucial for positive social-emotional and academic development for upper elementary children (Rucinski et al., 2018).

Research comparing students with typical development (TD) and special needs based on the impact of classroom placement was assessed by Jones and Hensley (2012). The main purpose of this study was to take a closer look at the impact of classroom placement on student outcomes and relationships. Jones and Hensley studied 51 students in grades 7-12. The sample consisted of a mix of typical developing students in the general education setting, students with an intellectual disability (ID) in a self-contained special education classroom or a resource room setting, and their 12 special education teachers. Students in this study completed the Arc's Self-determination Scale, and reported their perceptions of teacher and classmate support using the Social Support Scale for Children and Adolescents. Teachers were asked to complete the Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) based on their perceptions of the students in the areas of conflict, closeness, and dependency within the classroom. Results showed that students with typical development reported lower self-determination scores than students with an intellectual disability in a self-contained special education classroom. It was found that interactions between TD students and students with an ID influenced the development of self-determination. As for teachers, they reported that students with an ID needed more dependency and students with TD were more dependent according to their STRS. Jones and Hensley (2012) found that students with an ID in a self-contained classroom reported lower self-determination than their peers with an ID in a resource room setting.

Students with a Disability

The quality of student-teacher relationships among students with typical development was looked at in the previous section. It showed many aspects such as closeness and conflict within a positive or negative relationship. This section further looks at those qualities but across multiple disabilities.

Eisenhower, Blacher, and Bush (2015) studied the long-term associations between students externalizing problems and the quality of student-teacher relationships specifically for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The research sample consisted of 166 students with ASD, ages 4-7 and their teachers. The study was conducted through a series of observations, assessments, and questionnaires looking at cognitive functioning, demographics, behaviors, and relationship quality. The results showed that student-teacher relationship problems were elevated with their students who have autism compared to students with typical development (TD), showing less closeness and more conflict. Conflict between students and teachers were more closely associated with externalizing problems than closeness. Students with higher behavior problems had a decline in student-teacher quality over time. To conclude, Eisenhower et al. (2015) found that the students' cognitive abilities did not affect STR quality and externalizing behaviors.

Caplan and his colleagues (2016) conducted research to identify potential risk or protective factors for STR quality over time in students with ASD. One hundred sixty-two children with ASD ages 4-7 and their teachers were used. All children who participated were identified with high functioning ASD category and were mainly male. The study was conducted through a series of observations, assessments, and questionnaires

looking at intelligence, diagnosis of ASD, the student-teacher relationship, and behavior. All participants were recruited through online and in-print advertisements. The researchers found many interesting facts. They noted that students with ASD had poor quality STR that were composed of high levels of conflict and low levels of closeness as compared to students with TD. Students who demonstrated risk factors such as behavior problems, psychopathology, and autism severity, demonstrated higher levels of conflict while protective factors such as social skills, IQ, and language ability relate to high levels of closeness. Specifically, for students with ASD, social skills and IQ had an effect on conflict and closeness in the student-teacher relationship. Researchers also found that behavior problems in students with ASD were closely related to student-teacher conflict perceptions. As for students with an intellectual disability, student teacher relationship quality was steady across one school year. To conclude, Caplan and colleagues found that, “child oppositional behavior, autism severity and teacher degree predicted changes in student-teacher conflict over a 1-year period, while child social skills and IQ positively predicted change in student-teacher closeness” (Caplan et al., 2016., p.3653).

Another research article tried to identify and evaluate the representation of relationship between teachers and special needs (SN) students while looking at the STRS and the level of peer acceptance and rejection in the classroom and recreation. Santos and his colleagues (2016) took a sample of students with autism (ASD), cerebral palsy (CP), multiple disabilities (MD), and attention-deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) and their special and general education teachers. All students were between the ages of 6

and 12 years old and attended public Portuguese schools. Data was collected through administering the STRS to teachers, and observation using the Sociometric technique. Results showed that general education teachers perceived all students with SN as more dependent on the teachers compared to those without SN. Furthermore, relationships between teachers and children with ASD were more conflictual and dependent and less close compared to their relationships to those without SN. For students used in the sample with a diagnosis of ADHD, relationships between the teachers and students were more conflicted. Special education teachers also perceived relationships with students with ADHD and ASD as less dependent. In general, 50% of children with ADHD had significant problems in their social relationships according to the data received. The researchers concluded that relationships between teacher and the student with SN is a factor that influences the development of SN students in facilitating inclusion and future positive relationships between all students (Santos, Sardinha, & Reis., 2016).

This next study also compared student-teacher relationships across students with ASD, ID, and TD. Blacher et al (2014) set out “to examine the relations among behavior problems, social skills, and student teacher relationships among children with autism spectrum disorder as compared to those with typical development or an intellectual disability” (Blacher et al., 2014, p.324). This study took 165 students and their teachers. Thirty-six students were diagnosed with ASD, 38 with ID, and 91 with typical development and all from public schools. Teachers completed the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) in the spring based on their perception of conflict, closeness, and dependency with their students. They were also administered the Social

Responsiveness Scale (SRS) about their students with autisms social impairment as perceived in the classroom setting. Surveys and questionnaires were administered to the students and parents such as the Child-Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and Social Skills Rating System (SSRS). Results showed that the perceived student-teacher relationship between students with autism and their teachers were much lower than both students with ID and TD. Relationships were perceived as not as strong between teachers and students with autism. The STR scores for children with autism were significantly lower, showing less closeness and more conflict than those with ID or TD. This study showed that the characteristics and mannerisms negatively affect the teacher's perception of closeness with the student (Blacher, Howell, Littin, Reed, & Laugeson, 2014).

Gastaldi et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study using a total of 424 students with varying disabilities such as autism, down syndrome, learning disorder, and attention-deficit and hyperactivity disorders. All participants were in Italy and were taken from various classrooms. Teachers and teachers' assistants of each classroom involved were involved in the study. The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) was administered to teachers and teaching assistants of each classroom. Questions were based on their perceptions of their relationship with their students who had varying disabilities. More specifically, their perception in the areas of conflict, closeness, and dependency. Results were compared from the STRS across all disability areas. Based on the three areas the STRS examined, closeness, conflict, and dependency, there are differences among quality of relationships between students with disabilities and students who have typical development as perceived by the teachers. The main findings

indicate that there are significant differences in one of the three relational aspects compared between students with disabilities and those of typical development. The most significant findings were the relationships between teachers and students with autism and ADHD which were perceived as more conflictual and dependent. This may have to do with the social characteristics of students with autism and ADHD. Relationships perceived by teachers with students with a learning disability had lower levels of closeness and higher levels of conflict. The researchers concluded that students' performance influence the levels of closeness and conflict perceived. Teachers are more affectionate and less hostile with students who have better academic performance. Teacher's perceptions of relationships with their students varies across multiple disabilities and the characteristics of the disabilities effect the quality of the relationship (Gastaldi, Longobardi, Pasta, & Prino, 2016).

Many different factors have been considered when assessing the quality of the relationship between students with a disability and their teachers. What has not been looked at so far is how language plays a role in the quality of the relationship. Feldman and colleagues (2019) conducted a study to address the distinct contributions of language domains to STR quality in students with autism. 191 preschool-2nd grade autism and typical developing students along with their teachers were examined both in the general and special education setting. Researchers assess students and teacher's perception of relationships through the STRS, cognitive functioning, and child language ability. Scores reported indicate that students with autism had relationships that were less close and more conflictual than their typically developing peers. This may be due to

the fact that pragmatic language skills were associated with student-teacher closeness. The lower the pragmatic language speech score, the lower ratings of student-teacher closeness. But, language ability did not contribute to teachers' perception of conflict. In general, the study showed that young children with autism had lower quality student-teacher relationships than their peers. Children with ASD's language skills may shape their ability to form connections with their peers and teachers (Feldman et al., 2019).

Demirkaya and Bakkaloglu (2015) conducted a study to examine the relationships of preschool teachers working in mainstream classrooms with their special needs and non-special needs students. Just as this thesis is setting out to examine, they are looking to see if relationships of students with and without special needs differs among teachers and what factors are related. This study took place in Turkey with 40 teachers, 54 special needs students, and 54 non-special needs students. Questionnaires and surveys were administered to the teachers based on their student's behavior and their perception of the quality of the relationship. Results concluded that students with special needs had more conflictual relationships with their teachers than students without special needs. Closeness was much higher for students without special needs compared to students with special needs. There were no significant differences in scores for dependency for all students. The researchers concluded that social skills was a key factor in predicting closeness, problem behaviors predicted conflict, and dependency was predicted by the teachers experience and classroom size (Demirkaya & Bakkaloglu, 2015).

Relationship Effects on Development

After looking at the quality of relationships in the areas of conflict, closeness, and dependency among teachers and students with and without special needs, we are now going to examine the effects of the student-teacher relationship between students with and without special needs. Research has shown that the relationship between the students and teacher, whether it is negative or positive, can affect the development of the students. This next section aims to assess the developmental outcomes of the relationship and its effects on academic, behavior, and socioemotional development among students with typical development and students with a disability.

Students with Typical Development

In 2016, Fisher, Reynolds, and Sheehan conducted a study to examine the effects of developmental strengths such as adaptability, social skills, and study skills on teacher-student relationships among children with externalizing behaviors. The subjects were 418 1st-5th grade students in the United States who were predominately African American males and their 44 teachers. Two questionnaires were filled out by the teachers referring to their students about the quality of the relationship and behaviors. Results showed that overall the developmental strengths of adaptability, social skills, and study skills are all related to the development of positive relationships for all students. The students who are better able to adapt and adjust well in all situations are looked at more favorably by their teachers thus forming positive teacher relationships. Teachers also looked more favorably upon students who follow directions, complete assignments and work on time, and are attentive to classroom expectations regardless of behavior problem. Teachers viewed students who had strong social skills positively

which contributed to positive student-teacher relationships. The researchers concluded that a student's social skills, and adaptability skills have the greatest impact on teacher-student relationships for students who externalize behaviors more than it does for average children.

As mentioned previously by Rucinski et al. (2018), the study showed that students who exhibited higher aggression, depression, and conflict with teachers had lower academic achievement scores. Academic achievement was influenced by the quality of student-teacher relationship.

Bryce et al. (2019) research that was also mentioned previously looking at the parent, teacher influences on academic achievement found that direct parental involvement was positively related to achievement via behavioral engagement in grade 1 but not in grade 5. But on the other end, conflictual relationships between students and teachers were associated with lower behavioral engagement. One-hundred and seventeen CWD and CWOD in 53 inclusive classrooms in 13 public schools in Turkey were used. Children with a disability were diagnosed and qualified under the special education labels of autism spectrum disorder, other health disorders, speech and language disorders, and mild intellectual disabilities. Data was gathered at two point in time, Fall and Spring during the school year. Results showed that both children with and without a disability made significant improvements from Fall to Spring in the areas of psychomotor, cognitive, language, and socioemotional development. The scores for CWD were higher in all four areas of development than their peers, CWOD in the inclusive classroom. Researchers concluded that the main finding of this study was that

social skills and school adjustment levels were major predictors of developmental gains (Sucuoglu, Bakkaloglu, Demir, & Atalan., 2019).

Students with a Disability

Previously, we examined the relationship quality between teachers and students with disabilities. This section will look at previous research that looks at the developmental outcomes of student teacher relationships among students with disabilities.

The first research article by Poulou (2018) aimed to investigate how teachers' perceptions of their own Emotional Intelligence (EI), and their own competence in implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) relate to their perceptions of teacher-student relationships and students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. And secondly, whether teachers' EI and their competence in implementing SEL relate to teacher-student relationships and students' behavior, as reported by students themselves. The sample consisted of 98 elementary school teachers from Greece. And 308 students ages 6-11 years old with a diagnosis of EBD. Of the 308 volunteers, 35 of those students were selected to complete a questionnaire about their emotional behavioral difficulties during school hours. The STRS and other assessments were administered to both teachers and their students. The results showed that from the teacher's perspective, teacher's emotional intelligence was related to teachers' perceptions of closeness to students. This means that a positive climate of relations within the classroom is more likely to occur when the teacher has high EI. The teachers comfort in implementing SEL was related to closeness in student-teacher relationships. Teachers perceptions of

conflict was the main predictor of students emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Conflict in teacher-student relationships was a contributor to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties when teacher's perceptions of EI and SEL were analyzed. To conclude, "the studies indicated that teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence, social and emotional skills implementation, and teaching efficacy were indirectly linked to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, through teacher-student relationships" (Poulou, 2018, p.72).

In 2005, Hamre and Pianta conducted a study that aimed to extend work related to school effects by following children identified in kindergarten as being at risk of school failure and examining whether the classroom environment to which they were exposed during the first grade moderated these risks by the end of their first-grade year. Nine hundred and ten predominately white female students in kindergarten-first grade were used in this sample. They were placed into two categories, the "at-risk" category meaning they were at risk for two or more factors including attention, externalizing behavior, social skills, and academic competence. The second group was the "not at risk" group meaning they qualified under 0-1 risk factors. Students were administered a series of questionnaires. Results showed that in the area of academic achievement, children who were identified as at-risk and had mothers who had less than a 4-year college degree had lower levels of achievement at the end of first grade than their low-risk peers. Children whose mothers had less than a 4-year college degree and were placed in high to moderate instructional support classrooms had similar levels of achievement at the end of first grade as their peers with more educated mothers.

Children with less educated mothers who were placed in classrooms with low instructional support displayed significantly lower achievement scores at the end of first grade than their low-risk peers. Academic achievement was highest for students placed in classrooms with high emotional support. Furthermore, high-risk students in classrooms with low or moderate emotional support displayed significantly lower levels of achievement than their low-risk peers. Children who struggled in kindergarten, were at risk for developing conflictual relationships with teachers in first grade, but was moderated by the amount of emotional support they received in their first-grade classroom. The research concluded from their study that, "By the end of first grade, at-risk students placed in first-grade classrooms offering strong instructional and emotional support had achievement scores and student – teacher relationships commensurate with their low-risk peers; at-risk students placed in less supportive classrooms had lower achievement and more conflict with teachers" (Hamre & Pianta, 2005, p.949).

Al-Yagon (2012) conducted research with the main purpose of examining the major objectives among adolescents with learning disability (LD) in comparison to adolescents with typical development (TD). This includes socioemotional adjustment that compromises positive/negative affect, peer-network/peer-dyadic loneliness, and externalizing/internalizing problems. They also investigated adolescents' attachment relationships with parents and teachers. Three-hundred and sixty-nine Jewish adolescents in 10-11th grade were examined. Of the 369, 181 had a learning disability, and 188 were typically developing, ages 15-17. The two groups were compared, students with a LD and TD students. They were administered questionnaires and surveys

looking at attachment, loneliness, affect, and externalizing/internalizing behavior. This study resulted in Adolescents with a learning disability had more socioemotional difficulties than their typically developing peers.

These students with a learning disability reported higher levels of negative affect, peer-network and peer-dyadic loneliness, and externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. Students with a learning disability reported less secure attachment relationships with their mothers compared to their typically developing peers.

Adolescents with a learning disability viewed their teachers as more rejecting figures, compared to their typically developing peers views. To conclude, Al-Yagon found that adolescents with a LD demonstrated academic dysfunction as well as socioemotional difficulties such as high level of negative affect, externalizing/internalizing behavior problems, and peer-network and peer-dyadic loneliness. Attachment relationships affected socioemotional difficulties (Al-Yagon., 2005).

This next research study conducted by Hopman et al. (2019) aimed to investigate the developmental links between externalizing behavior and teacher-student interactions in adolescent males placed in special secondary education due to psychiatric disabilities. They used 584 male Dutch students ages 15-16 with 116 of them diagnosed with ADHD, conduct disorder, or defiant disorder. Their teachers were also used in this study. Researchers collected observational data on externalizing behaviors, interactions between students and teachers, and the duration of the contact, along with student age. This data was collected in both the Fall and Spring of the school year. Results showed that for students with special needs, there was no evidence showing a

link between student-teacher interactions, either supportively or negatively, on the development of students' externalizing behavior. It was less likely that teachers would interact supportively with their students who exhibited externalizing behavior in the second half of the school year. Externalizing behavior did not increase the likelihood that teachers would interact with their students in a negative manner. To conclude, researchers believe that student-teacher interactions did not show influence on externalizing behavior in students with ADHD, conduct or defiant disorder (Hopman et al., 2019).

Pham and Murray's (2016) research examined the cumulative and unique associations between social relationships with adults and peers and the emotional, behavioral, and school-related adjustment of adolescents with disabilities. They used 228 high school students across ten public schools in this sample. The students had special education labels due to diagnoses of ASD, EBD, LD, ID, or OHD. Many self-reports, surveys, and questionnaires were administered to the students assessing perceptions of relationships, life satisfaction, behavior, and school bonding. Results showed that that students relationships with peers, parents, and teachers have influence on their emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment. Parent-child relationships were related to students' life satisfaction and perceptions of school bonding. Teacher-student relationships influenced all three adjustment indicators; emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment. Student-teacher relationships were the only relationship that showed influence in all three areas. When teachers alienated their students, it had significant effects on students' life satisfaction, school bonding, and

communication in the relationship. The importance of student-teacher relationships extends beyond childhood. Teacher-student relationships were important for all students regardless of their disability. Relationships with parents and peers were not associated with any adjustment outcomes after taking into account relationships with mentors and teachers. In conclusion, Pham and Murray found that adults that are unfamiliar significantly contributed to the overall well-being of youth with disabilities (Pham & Murray, 2016).

The final research article was conducted by Al-Yagon in 2016. He researched “adolescents’ attachment-based factors aimed to investigate a model that included four exogenous, independent factors: adolescents’ global attachment relationships with both primary caregivers, mother and father, and their specific attachment relationships with two extra familial figures, the teacher and friend” (Al-Yagon, 2016., p.600). The sample contained 280 high school students across three public schools in Israel. Ninety had a learning disability (LD), 91 had a LD and attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder (ADHD). The rest of the sample was considered typically developing (TD). Students were administered a series of questionnaires. Students with LD/ADHD reported less secure attachment relationships with their mothers and fathers compared to their TD peers and peers with LD. Adolescents with LD and LD/ADHD had more socioemotional/behavioral difficulties than did their peers with TD. Adolescents with LD/ADHD had higher levels of negative affect, peer-network loneliness, peer-dyadic loneliness, externalizing behavior problems, and internalizing behavior problems, compared to their peers with TD (Al-Yagon, 2016).

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH APPLICATION

For the research application portion of this thesis, with extensive research and thorough analysis of the student and teacher relationship, I concluded that a teacher educational pamphlet to be implemented at the beginning of each school year was the best way to implement the research accumulated. Prino et al. (2016) concluded that relationships between teachers and students differed across multiple disabilities and their typically developing peers. With that in mind, the researchers thought further research should include training and educating teachers on how to handle relationships and behaviors across multiple disabilities.

The educational pamphlet (Appendix A) aims to help teachers reflect, educate, and implement practices and procedures that are useful in changing and diversifying the way teachers approach their relationships with their students in the classroom. More importantly, this educational training pamphlet can be useful for both students in a general education setting and a special education setting. Along with the educational pamphlet is a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix B) to be used to present the pamphlet information in a group setting.

The student-teacher relationship educational pamphlet begins with a short ten question self-reflection quiz. It is administered first, and gives teachers the opportunity to reflect on their approach and thoughts on the importance of a student-teacher relationship. Both Al-Yagon (2012) and Hopman et al. (2019) influenced the creating of the self-reflection quiz. These studies examined behaviors and how they affect the student-teacher relationship. They concluded that further research is needed to help

teachers investigate their personal characteristics, teaching styles, and relationship attachment patterns. Questions from the reflection quiz such as “a student’s negative behaviors do not dictate my relationship with them”, “I create a positive learning environment in my classroom”, and “I pursue positive relationships with my students daily” are a few examples that help teachers investigate and reflect on their personal characteristics, teaching styles and relationship attachment patterns.

The informational section of the pamphlet (“student-teacher relationships are different across multiple disabilities”) integrates facts and research conducted by Caplan et al. (2016), Jones and Hensley (2012), and Blacher et al. (2014). This section was strictly informational and was based on the conclusion and results of these studies. Not only did Caplan et al. (2016), Jones and Hensley (2012) and Blacher et al. (2014) examine the quality of the student-teacher relationship but they compared the relationship quality as perceived by teachers across multiple disabilities and compared it to the relationship quality of their typically developing peers. These studies give information as to how the relationship differs for students with a disability and students without.

Informing teachers of the importance of a positive student-teacher relationship (STR) is seen in the next section of the educational pamphlet. Most of the facts and information was taken from research conducted by Blacher et al. (2014), Decker et al. (2007), and Pham and Murray (2016). The facts and information shows teachers the positive outcomes for students that take place when there is a healthy, high quality relationship between them and their students. For example, Blacher et al. (2014)

concluded in his research that a close relationship between students and their teachers can serve as a protective factor for students at risk of social and/or academic problems. Decker et al. (2007) found that positive student-teacher relationships increased social engagement in the classroom. Further research indicated that teachers need to be educated on the effects of a positive STR. Pham and Murray (2016) found that these relationships influenced students positively in the areas of emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment and was the only relationship that influenced these specific areas of development. After reading through all research articles mentioned in this thesis, it was found that more often, STR's influenced student's developmental outcomes in the areas of academic, behaviors, and their social relationships.

The next section in the informational pamphlet gives teachers facts from studies conducted by Hamre and Pianta (2005) and Prino et al. (2016). These studies gave important information for teachers to be aware of when looking at the developmental effects of a positive STR in both students with a disability and students without a disability. For typically developing students, the academic achievement was highest for these students who were in an emotionally supportive classroom. Prino et al. discovered that teachers were much more affectionate and less hostile towards students who had high academic achievement. This created a more positive learning environment and student-teacher relationship. Both facts from these studies inform teachers to see how big of a role academic achievement plays in the student teacher relationship. It also touches a little bit on the importance of a positive learning environment as well as an

emotionally supportive classroom which is mentioned later in the pamphlet as a way to improve the student teacher relationship.

Behaviors was another common factor that was seen in the developmental outcomes of a positive STR. Students with a disability and without who exhibited behaviors in the classroom coincided with the student-teacher relationship as well as the environment of the classroom. All three facts were used to help inform and educate teachers on the effects of the teacher being less positive and more hostile towards students with behaviors and the students having behaviors that created for a less positive relationship. Eisenhower et al. (2015), found that students with high levels of behaviors had a less positive STR overall which effects relationship quality across multiple years of life for these students. Not only did this effect students daily but can affect students' well-being in the future. Rucinski et al. (2018) found that emotional support from the teachers caused a decrease in behaviors for students. Decker et al. (2007) also found that emotional support from teachers caused a decrease in behavior as well as the amount of time a student would spend off-task while in class. Bryce et al.'s (2019) research showed that the lower behavioral engagement between teachers and students, the more conflictual the relationship. Not only do these studies give facts to educate teachers on how behavior effects student-teacher relationships but it also is linked to emotionally supportive classrooms and the amount of time a student spends being attentive in class.

Another key factor in the developmental outcomes of the STR that was seen consistently throughout research articles was the social aspect of a positive STR. Not

only do some of these articles look at the outcomes of positive social interaction between students and teachers but also among peers (Jones & Hensley, 2012). This is intended to help teachers see the importance of building in times for students with disabilities and students without to interact with their peers. Social interactions between students with a disability and those without influenced the development of self-determination. Fischer et al. (2016) also found that the social status among peers for students with a disability predicted the support given from teachers and the STR quality. Relationships among peers effect the relationship between students and teachers. Another consistent finding from research was the influence of social skills on students with a disability. Social skills and teaching strategies according to Sucuoglu et al. (2019) was crucial in the development of psychomotor, cognitive, language, and socioemotional for students with a disability. Social skills have the greatest impact on the STR. Especially for student who struggle with positive social interactions and behavioral difficulties. These facts were important to mention in hopes that teachers would understand that social skills effect development in many areas and that social skills lessons are crucial for students with disabilities.

The next section in the educational pamphlet was created to help teachers build positive relationships in their classrooms. More importantly, based on the research, it gives five ideas and specific areas teachers can work on in order to build positive STR's with their students.

Poulou (2018) researched teacher's emotional intelligence and the role it plays in students' lives with behavioral and emotional difficulties. One of the key findings that

affected students behavioral and emotional difficulties as well as the relationship students had with their teachers was the learning environment they were in. The more positive the learning environment, the more close the students were to their teachers. The three ways listed to create a positive learning environment were taken from personal experience and research studies that are not mentioned in this thesis.

Research has also found that language can play a key role in STR quality over time. After Rucinski et al. (2018) conducted their research on relationships, classroom climate, and development, the main idea they had for further research based on their results was that teachers need further training and support in purposefully communicating their affection and support to their student's and to let them know they are cared about as an individual. Thus, the advice of being educated about language difficulties, and using positive and encouraging language when speaking with your students. On page 7 of the pamphlet I created a poster that can be displayed by the teachers desk to help them implement more positive language in their classrooms. Feldman et al. (2019) researched language domains of students with autism and the STR. The main finding was that the students with autism who struggled with pragmatic (social) language skills had less close relationships with their teachers. Further research from the study indicated that teachers educate themselves on the use of language for students with autism and their areas of struggle. Seeking the wisdom and knowledge of a speech and language pathologist for helpful tips and tricks on understanding and working with these students would be so beneficial in connecting a bridge between understanding students with autism and the STR.

Feldman et al. (2019) also influenced the third piece of advice for creating a positive student-teacher relationship. Quality time was shown to increase STR quality. Positive interactions between both the teacher and student by having set one-on-one time where teachers could get to know the students at an individual level using positive language as mentioned previously, would help increase positive STR's. On page 8 of the pamphlet is a poster to hang in the classroom with a list of activities for teachers to do with their students that will help students and teachers get to know each other outside of academic time. Students can choose an activity off of the list and spend personal one on one time with their teacher. This will create closer bonds for both the teachers and students and will affect positive development in many areas for the student in the years to come.

Social skills were consistently shown throughout the research articles read as a positive contributor to creating STR's. As mentioned previously, Jones and Hensley's (2012) research resulted in positive development of relationships for students with disabilities. The main idea that came out of this research being that students need access to positive role models and a time in their day to be able to socialize with peers. Implementing these in a teacher's schedule can help improve student's social skills. Social skills lesson ideas are mentioned on page 9 of the pamphlet. Two main areas that need to be targeted for these students that inhibit their relationships with others is their behavior and their lack of social interactions skills which are mentioned on page 9. Facts taken from Santos (2016) was used to inform teachers about how many students struggle with social relationships. Demirkaya and Bakkaloglu (2015) found that students

with a disability had more conflictual and fewer close relationships with their teachers compared to typically developing students. This was a key factor in the reasoning behind the idea of implementing good social skills lessons for these students to teach them how expected behaviors and language when socializing.

Educating teachers on interventions and ways to implement prosocial behaviors for teachers in the classroom was a common idea for researchers that would increase positive STR. Prewett et al. (2019) researched in depth the perception STR quality. They concluded that for STR quality to increase for both students and teachers, the most proactive way would be to create an intervention program that trains teachers in how to implement prosocial behaviors such as sharing their behaviors, modeling good humor, and identifying and praising students for their positive prosocial behavior. Each key point under prosocial behavior has to do with Prewett's research. Al-Yagon (2016) also thought that based on his results from his research that the best way to improve STR was through creating an intervention program for teachers to be able to be warm towards students while also giving them positive praise and feedback when behaviors arise as is a key point under the tip of implementing prosocial behavior. Hamre and Pianta's (2005) research resulted in students who had an emotionally supportive teacher, had an increase in academic achievement. With these research articles in mind, facts and ideas for further research were used when creating the section of the pamphlet for teachers on how to implement prosocial behaviors in their classroom.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

Many researchers examined the quality of the relationship between teachers and students. Using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) examining quality of the relationship, researchers found the levels of conflict, closeness, and dependency. More specifically, some research compared the STR quality between teachers and students without a disability (Al-Yagon., 2016; Bryce et al., 2019; Caplan et al., 2016; Demirkaya et al., 2015; Eisenhower et al., 2015; Hamre et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2012; Poulou., 2018; Prewett., 2019; Rucinski et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2016). Along with examining the relationship quality between teachers and typically developing students, there was one piece of research that examined relationships as well, except that the students were at risk for special education referral due to behaviors (Decker et al., 2007). In typically developing students, the relationship quality showed more conflict and less closeness within the relationship (Caplan et al., 2016; Demirkaya et al., 2015; Eisenhower et al., 2015; Rucinski et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2016). Lower levels of dependency was also seen in typically developing student-teacher relationships (Jones et al., 2012; Santos et al., 2016;) while other research found that dependency levels were similar for both students with special needs and without (Blacher et al., 2014).

Along with research that looked at the STR quality among typically developing students, much of the same research also made connections and compared that relationship among students with a disability (Blacher et al., 2014; Caplan et al., 2016; Demirkaya et al., 2015; Eisenhower et al., 2015; Feldman et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2012;

Poulou., 2018; Prino et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2016). All research showed variations of conflict, closeness, and dependency across multiple disabilities such as students with autism spectrum disorder, learning disability, attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder, and emotional-behavioral disorder. There were not many consistent findings as far as levels of closeness, conflict, and dependency since disabilities varied and the qualities and characteristics of those disabilities were all different.

A second area that the research showed consistent findings in is the effects of the student-teacher relationship on specific areas of development such as academics, behaviors, and social/socioemotional. The first heading examining these developmental effects in students without special needs. The STR had positive effects in students' academic performance if the STR was perceived as positive by both the students and teachers (Bryce et al., 2019; Decker et al., 2007; Demirkaya et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Hamre et al., 2005; Rucinski et al., 2018). Students' social and socioemotional was also impacted either negatively or positively (Rucinski et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2012; Demirkaya et al., 2015).

There were also consistent findings when examining the developmental affects of relationships on students with disabilities in the areas of academics, behaviors, and social/socioemotional. Students with multiple disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder, learning disability, attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder, and emotional-behavioral disorder were mentioned in these articles examining these developmental effects. Students with autism had a positive increase in academic performance, a decrease in behaviors, and an increase or no change in their social/socioemotional

abilities with teachers and peers (Caplan et al., 2016; Eisenhower et al., 2015; Feldman et al., 2019; Sucuoglu et al., 2019). Limited research only examined the social and behavioral aspect across multiple disabilities and concluded that the STR impacted students, making them more social and less behavioral (Demirkaya et al., 2015; Pham et al., 2016). None of the present research found the STR's impact on developmental effects for students with a learning disability on academic performance but behavior in students with a learning disability was positively impacted (Sucuoglu et al., 2019). These students showed they did not have good relationships with peers and teachers which may be contributed to their characteristics of their disability (Al-Yagon., 2012; Al-Yagon., 2016; Jones et al., 2012; Sucuoglu et al., 2019). Students with a diagnosis of attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder (ADHD) had no research showing the developmental effects of a positive STR on academic performance. Behaviors were unaffected in students with ADHD who had positive relationships with their teachers (Hopman et al., 2019). Students' social skills increased when interacting with peers and teachers and more consistent interactions would occur for these students who had positive relationships (Al-Yagon., 2016; Hopman et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2016).

Limitations of the Research

To limit the research presented, through the EBSCO and Academic Search Premier and ERIC search engines, keywords such as included "student-teacher relationship and disability", "student-teacher relationship and typical development", "student-teacher relationship and special education", and "STR quality". Research was chosen based on topic and limited to articles that conducted research on the quality of

the student-teacher relationship using the student-teacher relationship scale in both typically developing and students with any disability. Research was also narrowed by developmental effects of the student-teacher relationship for both students with and without a disability. All research must've been conducted on primary or secondary school-aged students (preschool-12th grade).

Research was limited when looking at the developmental effects on academics for students with learning disabilities and ADHD. Assuming that research would exist in this area was non-existent and research has yet to be published looking at this specific area. Otherwise, research was available for all key components present.

Implications for Future Research

Future research should more specifically look at the qualities and characteristics of each disability such as autism, ADHD, and learning disabilities and how they affect the teacher's perception of these students in the areas of conflict and closeness. More specifically, how that plays a role in students' self-perception of autonomy. For example, a student with ADHD may exhibit characteristics such as inattentiveness, hyperactivity, impulsiveness, and limited social skills. How do these specific characteristics of a student with ADHD affect the perception of the teacher of that student based on conflict and closeness to one another? Then, research would look at how autonomous the student feels based on the positive or negative perception of the relationship with the teacher.

Implications for Professional Application

The present research has helped me think about my future personal and professional impact as well as some other areas for further application that can be

addressed. The first implication being the professional impact this research has had for myself and other educators in the field of special education. The biggest implication professionals can take away from the research above is the idea of being self-aware. Self-awareness in the areas of how you create your classroom environment and what constitutes a positive classroom environment for all. Self-awareness of one's teaching style is important when considering the impact, it has on the student-teacher relationship. Also, being self-aware of the language you use and how that can affect negatively or positively your relationship with students. Lastly, making sure you are making an effort in getting to know your students personally and implementing positive prosocial behaviors. With these points in mind, seeking further education and professional development to improve in these areas is critical for obtaining positive relationships with students.

The present research has impacted me personally in a way that helps me to self-assess my own biases towards students with multiple disabilities. I can see how my stigmas and reactions towards students can affect them either negatively or positively and how valuable these relationships with these students are. Personally, I know that I can struggle with establishing positive mindsets and relationships with students who have higher behavior incidences. Just by looking at the present research helps me to realize how important it is in not letting my bias and stigma towards these students affect our relationships and how I build relationship with them. Changing my mindset and continually learning and seeking education and professional development is so

important in building better more positive relationships. With this in mind, I hope to continually be evaluating my professional life and my personal mindset.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teachers' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their students varies between typically developing students and students with a disability. Whether it is a positive or negative relationship, the student-teacher relationship affects students with disabilities in many areas of life and this relationship is crucial for development in academic performance, behavior, and social/socioemotional skills. In the future, teacher need to continually be improving their relationship building skills and practices as well as persistently show kindness and grace to their students.

Appendix A

Personal Reflection

Fill out the following questionnaire below based on your personal teaching experience.

Does not apply to me 1	Not really 2	Neutral, not sure 3	Somewhat applies 4	Definitely applies 5
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1. Relationships with my students are important to me.
2. I pursue positive relationships with my students daily.
3. I know each of my students as an individual.
4. I create a positive learning environment in my classroom.
5. Quality time is important for me to get to know my students.
6. I show students I am supportive of their hopes and dreams.
7. Students know I am here to help them learn.
8. I enjoy being with my students.
9. I am able to identify when a student needs academic and emotional support.
10. A student's negative behaviors do not dictate my relationship with them.

The Student and Teacher Relationship

An Educational Guide for Teachers Working with Students with Disabilities.

This manual aims to educate teachers on the developmental effects of a positive student-teacher relationship and how as teachers, they can best implement positive relationship practices into their classrooms.

Author: Hannah Bast

The Student-Teacher Relationship

What is a Student-Teacher Relationship?

"The relationship between a student and a teacher is ESSENTIAL! Students need a connection and to know how valued they are before they can succeed to their full potential. In education, relationships comes first and set the stage for authentic learning to take place."

– Alyssa Barnes (M. EdD), Kindergarten Teacher

"The relationship of a student and their teacher is most successful when a foundation is built around trust, instilling confidence and providing them with the necessary tools and strategies to be independently successful in their education and life. Teachers play a pivotal role in their students' social and emotional development through providing encouragement, creating a safe, supportive and inclusive environment, and holding them to high, fair and consistent standards."

–Sarah Gaertner, Special Education Teacher

Student-Teacher Relationships are Different Across Multiple Disabilities

Research has shown that students and teachers perceptions of their student-teacher relationship vary based upon the student's disability. For example, teachers perceive relationships with students with autism as more conflictual due to the behavioral characteristics of autism and less close than their typically developing peers (Blacher et al., 2014). This creates for a lower student-teacher relationship quality in students with special needs which can affect student development in multiple areas of life. Another example from research shows that students with a learning disability show more dependency on teachers, high levels of conflict, and less closeness to their teachers compared to their typically developing peers (Jones & Hensley, 2012). Student-teacher relationships are different for students with autism compared to those with an intellectual disability or typically developing. The quality of the relationships between teachers and students vary across multiple disabilities compared to their typically developing peers.

Why is a Positive Student-Teacher Relationship Important?

"A close relationship with one's teacher can serve as a protective factor for children at risk of social and/or academic problems" (Blacher et al., 2014). Research has shown that a positive student-teacher relationship increases students' social competence and engagement in the classroom (Decker et al., 2007). It has also shown that the relationship between students and teachers influenced students positively in the areas of emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment (Pham & Murray., 2016). This was the only relationship to show influence in these three specific areas that are crucial for development. Some of the major themes of positive student-teacher relationships that research has shown are the outcomes in the areas of academics, behaviors, and social.

Developmental Effects of a Positive Student-Teacher Relationship

Academics

- For students with typical development, academic achievement was increased for students who were in emotionally supportive classrooms (Hamre, Pianta, 2005)
- Teachers tend to be more affectionate and less hostile towards students who had high academic achievement, creating a positive classroom environment and student-teacher relationship (Pring et al., 2016)

Behaviors

- Students with high levels of behavior had a less positive student-teacher relationship, which effects student behaviors and relationship quality across multiple years of life (Eisenhower et al., 2015).
- Classroom emotional support from the teachers, was closely related to decrease in behaviors and an increase in student-teacher relationship quality (Rucinski et al., 2018)
- The lower the behavioral engagement between students and teachers, the more conflict within the student-teacher relationship (Bryce et al., 2019)
- Overall, students who reported having high emotional support in the classroom from teachers had lower behavioral reports and a decrease in the amount of time students spent off-task in class (Decker et al., 2007).

Social

- Social interactions between students with typical development and students with and intellectual disability influence the development of self-determination in students with a disability (Jones & Hensley, 2012)
- Social skills have shown to have the greatest impact on student-teacher relationships for students with behavior difficulties.
- A student's social status among peers in students with a disability can predict student-teacher relationship quality and the amount of teacher support given to them by their teachers (Fisher et al., 2016)

- Social skills and teaching strategies were crucial for development in the areas of psychomotor, cognitive, language, and socioemotional for students with disabilities (Sucuoglu et al., 2019).

How Can I Build Positive Relationships in my Classroom?

1. Creating a Positive Learning Environment

- GREET your students at the door as they enter the classroom by their name and with a smile daily! 😊
- Create ORDER within the classroom. Students need structure and clear expectations to be able to feel safe and able to learn in your classroom. This helps build trust between the student and the teacher and creates for a more positive student-teacher relationship.
- Have a STUDENT-CENTERED classroom environment meaning that the classroom is catered to student's needs, wants, and desires for the coming year. This lets the student know that you are aware of their goals and likes as an individual and are putting your best foot forward as their teacher to create a positive learning environment. This creates for a more positive student-teacher relationship.

2. Language

- Be EDUCATED about the language difficulties for children with autism. Research has shown that teachers are unaware of the language barriers for students with autism and they need to be educated about their pragmatic (social) language skills as they interact with others around them. It has also been discovered that language skills in students with autism can shape their ability to form connections with teachers and peers. A higher education on language skills has shown to positively affect student-teacher relationships and creating a closer bond.
- Use POSTIVE and ENCOURAGING language. Let the students know that they are valued and understood as an individual. Giving them praise and words of encouragement throughout the day can help the student gain trust and feel safe while learning in your classroom. See below (p. 7) for suggested language alternatives.
- SEEK the KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM of Speech and Language Pathologists. Ask for tips and tricks when understanding and working with students who struggle with language. Be

educated on the students you are working with so you can better understand their way of thinking and language used.

3. Quality Time

Designate quality ONE-ON-ONE time with each of your students. Allow the students to get to know you and you to know them by playing a game, doing an activity, or simply just talking. This is a great time for students to choose an activity they are interested whether or not that is academic related. It is advised that this be a time where technology is not used as it can be distracting and only allow for one person to use the piece of technology at a time. Getting to know your students through giving them quality time helps the student feel seen and known as an individual and creates a closer bond for the teacher and student. Below is a list of quality time activities you can do with your students (p.8).

4. Social Skills

The lack of social skills has been found to contribute to more conflicting and less close relationships for students with a disability, especially for children with autism. For students with attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder (ADHD), 50% have problems in their social relationships (Santos et al., 2016). For teachers, it is critical to teach and implement the appropriate social skills lesson for students with disabilities (see list of social skills lesson ideas below on page 9). TEACHING and IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL SKILLS lessons that target specific needs in the areas such as social interactions and behavior management as mentioned on the list below has shown to reduce behavior and conflict and increase student-teacher relationships as well as peer relationships for students with a disability.

Another idea that research has shown to help improve social skills in students with a disability is giving them access to a ROLE MODEL, and the time of day to SOCIALIZE with PEERS. This is a great way for students to be able to see positive socialization and what that looks like as well as be able to copy what they are seeing from those positive role models in their interactions with others, giving them specific times during the week to practice those positive social interactions.

5. Prosocial Behavior

Prosocial behavior is the act of showing concern for the rights, welfare, and feelings of others. An example of this would be showing empathy towards others while acting in a way that shows you care about and want to help other people. There are many ways to increase your prosocial behavior in your classroom.

1. **IDENTIFY and PRAISE** students' prosocial behavior - This may look like stating in a positive manner, the good behavior your student had while performing a task or interacting with another student.
2. **MODEL GOOD HUMOR**- showing your students how to be silly with one another in an appropriate way.
3. Give students **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**- make sure to show students you empathize with their feelings, are compassionate towards them, and genuine when speaking with them. Always offer a listening ear when a student is going through a tough time and would like to speak to someone. Effectively communicate to them that you are here to walk alongside them and help them succeed.

Positive Language Alternatives

Calm Down

How can I help you?

Don't get upset

Its ok to feel sad

Be Quiet!

Can you use a softer voice?

You're ok

Are you ok?

Stop Talking

Please wait until I finish talking

That's enough!

What can I do to help you?

Quality Time Activities

- Charades
- Hangman
- H.O.R.S.E.-basketball
- Color a picture
- Take a walk (inside/outside)
- Play a board game
- Sing a song
- Do a "Just Dance" YouTube Video
- Make a fortune teller
- Do a puzzle
- BINGO
- ISPY
- Make slime
- Do a science experiment
- Go on a scavenger hunt

Social Skills Lesson Ideas

Social Interactions:

- How to have a conversation
- How to make eye contact when the speaker is speaking
- How to have a "social smile" when speaking with others
- How to ask a question

Behavior Management:

- What is the size of my problem?
- What is an appropriate reaction for that problem?
- How do I fix my problem?
- What strategies can I use when I am angry.

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Appendix B

POSITIVE & EFFECTIVE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

An Educational Guide for Teachers Working with Students with Disabilities.

This manual aims to educate teachers on the developmental effects of a positive student-teacher relationship and how as teachers, they can best implement positive relationship practices into their classrooms.

Hannah Bast

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- Please fill out the Personal Reflection worksheet accordingly.

Personal Reflection				
Fill out the following questionnaire below based on your personal teaching experience.				
Does not apply to me 1	Not really 2	Neutral, not sure 3	Somewhat applies 4	Definitely applies 5
1. Relationships with my students are important to me. <input type="checkbox"/>				
2. I pursue positive relationships with my students daily. <input type="checkbox"/>				
3. I know each of my students as an individual. <input type="checkbox"/>				
4. I create a positive learning environment in my classroom. <input type="checkbox"/>				
5. Quality time is important for me to get to know my students. <input type="checkbox"/>				
6. I show students I am supportive of their hopes and dreams. <input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Students know I am here to help them learn. <input type="checkbox"/>				
8. I enjoy being with my students. <input type="checkbox"/>				
9. I am able to identify when a student needs academic and emotional support. <input type="checkbox"/>				
10. A student's negative behaviors do not dictate my relationship with them. <input type="checkbox"/>				

WHAT IS A STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP?

Discussion:

- Are student-teacher relationships different across multiple disabilities?
- Why are positive student-teacher relationships important?

DEVELOPMENTAL EFFECTS OF POSITIVE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

- Academics
- Behaviors
- Social/Socioemotional

HOW I CAN EFFECTIVELY BUILD POSITIVE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON STUDENT NEEDS

1. Creating a Positive Learning Environment
2. Language
 1. Positive Language Alternatives Poster (p.8)
3. Spending Quality Time with Students
 1. Quality Time Activities Poster (p.9)
4. Teaching and Modeling Social Skills
 1. Social Skills Lesson Ideas (p.10)
5. Modeling and Identifying Prosocial Behaviors

CLOSING THOUGHTS

"Great teachers not only focus on compliance, but on connections and relationships."

-PJ Caposey

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