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Impacts and Strategies in Positive Student-teacher Relationships

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IMPACTS AND STRATEGIES IN POSITIVE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

Researchers, educational professionals, and classroom teachers consistently seek out ways to engage students in the classroom. For some students, engagement comes naturally. They connect easily with people and are by nature, curious and active learners. For these students, traditionally taught textbook engagement strategies are often very effective and lead to a vibrant classroom experience. Conversely, in almost every classroom there are one, or two students. The one who the classroom teacher struggles to connect with. The student is disengaged in the classroom, does not complete work or participate in class lectures and discussions. Though well educated in engagement strategies, classroom teachers often find it challenging, and frequently, fail, in building relationships and engaging these students. Research has demonstrated that students' engagement improves as their relationship with their teachers improves. Often students who are struggling in the classroom are also students who are struggling with mental health concerns, which frequently present in internalizing or externalizing behaviors. Given this, it is highly relevant to explore and determine strategies that show positive impacts related to student-teacher relationships. Intentionally implementing relationship-building strategies and better incorporating ways to connect are likely to show positive impacts in students with mental health concerns, who have previously had challenges in the classroom.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Foundational Research

Relationship building, and investigation of the educational benefits for students, has become a present-day interdisciplinary area of inquiry. Much of the current research is a catalyst from the foundational study completed by Ahlstrom and Havighust in 1971. In this study, titled *400 Losers* researchers followed at-risk youth through a six-year-long intensive intervention program. The program was designed to help this group of youth find success. Alhstrom and Havighust found that the program did not help all of the students succeed, but what they did find out has been instrumental in setting the foundation for the importance of students' relationships with adults. They found that some participants did succeed, and they had something significant in common, each of the students who succeeded had developed a significant relationship with a teacher or work supervisor during the treatment program. The adults demonstrated value in the student, treated them as individuals, and communicated belief that the student could succeed. These findings set the stage for decades of research, across many disciplines, further exploring the immense significance that adult relationships have on young people.

Societal Importance and Impacts

The research completed by Ahlstrom and Havighust in 1971, may be considered historical in nature at this point however, after drawing attention to the impacts that significant relationships can have on the future success of struggling teens, educational researchers have spent years and countless hours of research exploring the impacts of student-teacher relationships in a wide variety of contexts. However, incidence data would indicate that in the present students

continue to struggle significantly. A staggering number of children have life experiences,

diagnoses, and challenges that indicate they are at-risk in classrooms.

According to the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), 47.9% of children score

at least 1 on the Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale (ACES), and 22.6% of children score two

or more (NSCH ACES inventory, 2012). The ACES inventory scores a variety of adverse

experiences a child may have including experiences such as neglect, abuse, substance abuse,

familial incarceration, and many other factors that indicate trauma or challenges a child is facing.

According to the study published by the Center for Disease Control- Kaiser Permanente in 1998

the more ACES a child experiences the more at risk the child is for short and long-term adverse

impacts, including increased risk of challenges in school. These ACES can also be significant

factors impacting the mental health of students.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, as of March 2021, 1 in 6 U.S.

youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year, and suicide is the second leading

cause of death among people aged 10-34. Among high school students in the US, 18.8% have

had serious thoughts of suicide, and 46.8% of gay, lesbian, or bisexual high school students have

had serious thoughts of suicide. The effect of mental health is observed clearly in classrooms and

through data. In a few examples, high school students with significant symptoms of depression

are twice as likely to drop out as their peers, and students aged 6-17 with mental, emotional, or

behavioral concerns are 3x more likely to repeat a grade (National Institute of Mental Health,

2021).

Current emphasis for ongoing teacher training often focuses on evidence-based practices

for improving student literacy, core area skill or knowledge development, incorporation of digital

learning, and sometimes includes topics related to social-emotional learning. While these are important topics, foundational aspects of classroom atmosphere and relationships between students and teachers are missed in ongoing training, leaving educators with limited opportunity to gain new knowledge in student-teacher relationship development.

Educators are charged with creating learning environments where all students can succeed to their highest potential. The foundational research completed by Ahlstrom and Havighust continues to be true, but school systems and educators continue to struggle in meeting the needs of our increasing population of students with trauma and mental health concerns. Systematic changes both in school and in society as a whole will be necessary to make a large-scale impact, however, as research asserts, educators can affect change on an individual basis by fostering a classroom environment based on building significant and impactful relationships.

Thesis Question

The following questions will be addressed in this thesis:

1. What impacts are observed in students who have experienced positive student-teacher relationships?

2. Which strategies build student-teacher relationships with students receiving mental health treatment?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

To locate literature necessary for this research, searches included multiple interdisciplinary databases including EBSCO MegaFILE, ERIC, APA Psych INFO, Academic Search Premier. Results were narrowed to identify studies published from 2010-2020 in peer-reviewed journals. Keyword(s) used in these searches included, "student-teacher relationships, building relationships with students, student-teacher relationships and student outcomes, student-teacher relationships and special education, student-teacher relationships and mental health, student-teacher relationships and strategies." The search was narrowed by including literature that addresses the guiding question. The structure of this chapter is to review literature pertaining to building relationships between students and teachers, with a particular interest in literature that hones in on students that fall into a variety of at-risk categories. Additionally, literature that specifically identifies direct classroom practice strategies will be reviewed for consideration and application.

Current Research Findings

Across many empirical studies and meta-analyses, many researchers continue to analyze and explore the impacts that the relationship between students and teachers has on a variety of measures. Studies have indicated that positive student-teacher relationships are associated with higher academic achievement as well as higher student engagement. A recent meta-analysis (Roorda et al., 2017) found significant associations related to the impacts of student-teacher relationships on student achievement and engagement. In this meta-analysis, researchers used 179 articles that include 189 studies from 1990-2016 to explore the interactions between student-

teacher relationships, student achievement, and student engagement. Through this, empirical evidence is presented to support the commonly accepted idea, or hypothesis, that positive student-teacher relationships positively impact student achievement, and this is done through increased student engagement that occurs when student-teacher relationships are positive. Also of note, this is consistent across age groups spanning primary and secondary school, although the association becomes more powerful during secondary school.

The findings of Roorda et al. (2017) demonstrated the importance of teachers building positive relationships with students as a means to positively impact student engagement and achievement. These findings provide a cumulative review of a broad spectrum of research all related to the distinct achievement and engagement impacts associated with positive student-teacher relationships. This study offered data and findings as they relate to the general student population. This extensive review provided broad empirical evidence to support placing significant effort and emphasis by teachers, administrators, and others in the school community to consider what practices can be put in place to ensure students are developing positive relationships with their teachers.

Martin and Collie (2019) explored the extent to which student-teacher relationships matter regarding positive and negative interactions between high school students and their teachers. Results of this study indicated a significant association between an increase in positive teacher relationships predicting greater school engagement. As the relational balance becomes more predominantly positive, students' engagement increases as the positive to negative relationship ratio increases. Additionally, when relationship balance became predominantly negative, student engagement was lower but did not continue to dip lower with an increasing

number of negative relationships. This demonstrated that student-teacher relationships matter, both in positive and negative relationships (Martin & Collie, 2019).

These findings presented empirical evidence that students who are in predominantly positive relationships with teachers are more engaged, but when negative outweighs positive, no matter how much, students begin to disengage. Because no two people, and therefore students, are the same, researchers further explored by asking, with which students are teachers most likely to build positive relationships.

Kosir and Tement (2014) presented evidence in the longitudinal study that across age groups (middle childhood through middle adolescence) student-teacher relationships have precipitating factors that impact who is most likely to have positive relationships with teachers and why. Researchers sought to explore the interaction between student-teacher relationships and academic outcomes, specifically, hypothesizing that teachers' acceptance of students influences students' academic outcomes. This study sought to determine if a positive student-teacher relationship improved academic outcomes, or conversely, if teachers tended to develop more positive relationships with students who were already experiencing positive academic outcomes. Therefore, researchers sought to explore three possible hypotheses:

"1. Teacher acceptance and students' academic achievement are reciprocally related in all three age groups included in the study. 2. Student-perceived teacher support mediates the link between teacher acceptance and academic achievement. 3. The strength of the direct and mediated effect of teacher acceptance on academic achievement and the reversed direct and mediated effect of academic achievement on teacher acceptance are independent of students' age: these effects are

constant in all three age groups (late childhood, early adolescence, and middle adolescence)"
(Kosir & Tement, 2014, p. 413).

Findings demonstrated that teachers may have a natural tendency to form positive relationships with students who are already doing well, and reciprocally, the positive relationship with those students contributes to them continuing a trajectory of positive academic outcomes. This study is of particular importance when considering the impact of leveraging the relationships between students and teachers in an effort to impact the academic outcomes of students who are struggling.

Student-Teacher Relationships with At-Risk Student Populations

Researchers have identified and examined various demographic groups, including those that are considered to be at-risk (students living in poverty, students with special needs, students with behavioral concerns), to explore student-teacher relationships in more specific groups of students.

In one example, Murray and Zvoch (2011) found that students with clinically significant externalizing behaviors rated their trust in teachers as lower than similarly matched students. Additionally, teachers rated students with clinically significant externalizing behaviors as having lower teacher closeness and higher teacher conflict. Therefore, indicating that from both the teacher's perspective and the student's perspective that building trust and closeness with teachers directly relates to the outward behavior of students.

From a different perspective, but relating directly to student mental health, it is also relevant to look at student-teacher relationships in high-performing school situations where

pressure on students is significant. Conner et al. referred to these as "pressure cooker" high schools in their study published in 2014. As a result of examining student-teacher relationships in high performing high schools, these researchers found that students who believe they have teachers who care about them and students who have an adult they can trust in the school fare better in terms of academic anxiety, internalizing symptoms, and physical problems related to school stress than students who do not have these relationships. From this data, it becomes clear that students experiencing high academic stress also develop mental health concerns, and this can be mitigated to some extent by the relationships students have with the adults in their school (Conner et al., 2014).

Students with special education needs are at higher risk as well for developing poor student-teacher relationships. For example, in one study, research demonstrated that oppositional behavior, autism severity, and teacher training predicted an increase in student-teacher conflict and therefore, a decrease in the positivity of the student-teacher relationship over a one-year period. Teacher preparedness, training in working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and classroom settings were unrelated to the student-teacher relationship (Caplan et. al., 2016). This provides evidence that even well-trained teachers, with a variety of classroom settings, struggle to build positive relationships with students as their needs become more significant. In another study, researchers examined the impacts of student-teacher relationships on at-risk urban adolescent students alongside parental conflict and depressive symptoms and misconduct. Results of this study indicated that positive student-teacher relationships helped protect against depressive symptoms and misconduct in adolescent students aged 13-18 (Wang et al., 2013).

These studies further demonstrate the need for intentional relationship building with students, and even more so with those who are most at-risk. They also provide evidence that as students' needs become greater, teachers have a more difficult time developing positive relationships. The inverse of these effects is demonstrated by Kosir and Tement (2014) in the findings indicating that teachers are more likely to build positive relationships with students who are already doing well. The tendency of teachers to gravitate toward building positive relationships with students who are already doing well poses a serious problem for at-risk students, such as those with special education and mental health concerns. A conscious decision needs to be made by teachers to build positive relationships with at-risk students, because, evidence indicates, that at-risk students stand to benefit significantly from positive student-teacher relationships. Once a conscious decision has been made to place an emphasis on building positive relationships with students, particularly those who are considered at-risk, it becomes imperative to seek further research to determine how to effectively build those powerful relationships.

Relationship Building Strategies

Current research reveals the importance and positive benefits of intentionally building relationships between teachers and students across a wide range of age groups and student demographics. In understanding that, it becomes important to explore strategies that directly impact student-teacher relationships in the classroom in an effort to move toward implementation. Fundamentally, information regarding building relationships with students often begins to occur when teachers first begin their teacher preparation. In 2018, Victoria Theisen-Homer found that teacher preparation and training programs prioritized different types of

student-teacher relationships at a philosophical level, and reported these in two different categories.

The first category, referred to as instrumental focus, is a one-way relationship style in which teachers build relationships as a means to motivate students to participate in teacher-directed activities and build compliance. In these relationships, students learn that their value is tied to their behavior and how hard they are able to work from the perspective of the teacher.

The second type of relationship, referred to as reciprocal focus, is a more holistic approach to relationships, where teachers gather complex information to develop a broader understanding of each student. Teachers invite students to work through problem solving and content together. Heavy emphasis is placed on students learning to think for themselves with a teacher who affirms and responds to students' thoughts and feelings (Homer, 2018).

This illustrates the foundational differences between ways that teachers may view their relationships with students, beginning with the influence of the preparation program they have gone through. In the same study, it was noted that teachers with an instrumental focus on student-teacher relationships were more likely to go on to teach in low-income, high minority schools while teachers with a reciprocal focus ended up in schools with more high-income and white students. This is of note, given the impacts that positive student-teacher relationships have demonstrated and furthering the notion that these relationships are not as likely to be leveraged in classroom settings with students who may stand to gain the most benefit.

Beyond philosophical focuses, gaining knowledge regarding specific strategies to improve student-teacher relationships allows for teachers of any philosophical background to begin the journey of intentionally incorporating relationship-building strategies into everyday

classroom practices, as a universal approach. Researchers have begun exploring the effectiveness of specific programs and strategies for enhancing the relationships between students and teachers.

In a meta-analysis of current research regarding common practices in universal approaches to improved student-teacher relationships, Kincade et al. (2020) reviewed effect size and specific practices associated with universal approaches to building and maintaining positive student-teacher relationships. In doing this, they explored which school and classroom-wide programs are most effective as well as identified the most common practice elements associated with effective school and classroom-wide programs.

After a rigorous review process, 21 studies met the criteria to be included in the meta-analysis that analyzed 13 programs. From those programs, which all demonstrated positive results in student-teacher relationships, researchers sought to determine the most common practice elements across effective programs. These practice elements were categorized in two ways, direct and indirect elements. Direct, referring to elements that involve interaction between teachers and students, and Indirect referring to aspects such as classroom supports and environmental structures. Both the direct and indirect practice elements identified were primarily categorized as proactive approaches (Kincade et al., 2020).

This specific meta-analysis of current research information is of particular interest and importance when considering what practices teachers who have students in the highest risk categories would consider placing as of highest importance for direct and indirect implementation. Although the research conducted in each of these studies does not specifically identify impacts for students with mental health concerns, utilizing these strategies intentionally

as a catalyst provides a starting point in identifying which strategies may or may not be effective for this specific and growing population of students that are at-risk in the classroom.

CHAPTER III: APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH

Evidence collected in the review of the literature indicates that there is a significant benefit for students, particularly students who are at-risk, in the development of positive student-teacher relationships. Evidence also suggests that there is a need for teachers to actively seek out positive relationships with students who are at-risk and leverage those relationships to help improve outcomes for those students. Given this, it is necessary to offer guidance and evidence-based practice strategies for improving relationships with students, specifically for the development of relationships with students who have acute mental health concerns.

Based on the evidence from the literature review regarding evidence-based practices for teacher-student relationship development, this application builds a workshop for teachers. The workshop will be specifically aimed at teachers who educationally serve students with known acute mental health concerns. The primary focus of the workshop will be to present, through google slides, specific strategies teachers can implement to improve teacher-student relationships and provide teachers with resources to help them implement those strategies. The workshop will have a combination of information delivery time, collaborative brainstorming, and individual planning. Benefits of this workshop for teachers include further knowledge on building relationships with students, specific strategies that can be implemented, time to collaborate with other teachers, and individual work time to develop a plan for implementation of at least one strategy identified. Teachers will gain from the workshop a strategy and plan to implement that

strategy. Students will benefit by having teachers who have an understanding of why building relationships is foundational in education, and students will feel those benefits through improved relationships with their teachers. By experiencing positive relationships with teachers, students reap a plethora of personal and educational benefits, particularly students who are already at-risk due to mental health concerns.

This workshop will be divided into three components: *Information delivery*-where current evidence for importance and strategies will be presented. *Professional collaboration*- during this time teachers will be placed into groups and collaboratively discuss the implementation of strategies presented. Finally, *Individual planning*- teachers will be given time during the workshop to develop a plan for implementation within their own classroom and/or role. This will allow teachers to gain new knowledge as well as a plan for how they will directly utilize the knowledge they have acquired.

Information Delivery

*Current Research***:** The information delivery portion of the workshop will begin with highlighting the societal importance of focusing on how teachers can respond to the mental health crisis that is plaguing students. National incidence data will be presented as well as local incidence data. Through a presentation of the result of the meta-analysis completed by Roorda et al. (2017), teachers will gain an understanding of the evidence that exists demonstrating the significant impacts of positive student-teacher relationships. In addition, teachers will be presented with evidence that suggests that leveraging positive relationships with students can be enormously impactful for at-risk students, in this case speaking specifically about students with acute mental health concerns. Lastly, in the area of background research, teachers will be

presented with the results found by Kosir & Tement (2014). These results implore teachers that if they are not intentional about building relationships with students who are at-risk or have known mental health concerns, data shows that they will likely build positive relationships with students who are already most likely to have positive outcomes. In this, the final charge will be given to teachers, that by placing intentional and explicit attention to building positive relationships with students who are at-risk or have known mental health concerns the outcomes for these students could be significantly impacted.

In this next portion of information delivery, emphasis will be transitioned from 'why build relationships' to evidence-based practices that can be directly implemented in classrooms. Primarily, the strategies discussed in this workshop will be proactive in nature.

Indirect Practice Elements: This first portion highlights indirect practice elements, or strategies, that are done in the classroom that may indirectly build positive relationships. These strategies are identified in the meta-analysis of research in the area completed by Kincade et al. (2020). Proactive indirect strategies are broken down by Kincade et al. into two categories: Indirect proactive and Indirect teaching. Indirect proactive strategies include elements of the classroom environment both the physical environment and the classroom culture that is created, as well as a variety of other elements. Indirect teaching strategies include strategies, such as teaching students about social, emotional, and behavioral concepts. A list of indirect proactive strategies and indirect teacher strategies will be displayed using google slides and will be provided to each teacher on a paper copy (Appendix 1). At this time, a large group discussion of these strategies will occur, in which teachers will be encouraged to ask clarifying questions. It will be noted that many of these strategies will be familiar, and many may already be used. In

this workshop, they are being viewed through the lens of tools to build positive relationships with students.

Direct Practice Elements: Direct practice elements, or direct interaction strategies that are done to improve or positively impact student-teacher relationships, will be presented next. These strategies are identified in the meta-analysis of research in the area completed by Kincade et al.(2020). Kincade et. al break down these proactive direct strategies into two categories: Direct Proactive and Direct Teaching. Direct Proactive strategies include elements such as positive interactions, 1:1 interactions, demonstration of respect, and coaching emotions, to name a few. Direct Teaching strategies include teacher behavior aimed at directly teaching positive social skills. These strategies will be displayed using google slides and also handed out in paper copy to each teacher (Appendix 2). Additionally, teachers will be given information specifically regarding trust-building strategies highlighted in the book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Hammond (2015). This information will include a handout specifically designed for teachers to consider the strategies they could use to continue to build trust with students in the classroom. Group discussion of the strategies will occur including an explanation of strategies and any requested clarifications.

Professional Collaboration

Group Assignment: For the entirety of the professional collaboration portion of the workshop, teachers will first be broken into small groups. Groups will include approximately 5-6 teachers, keeping numbers small enough for active participation of each group member, but allowing for collaboration. Groups will be pre-assigned and several factors will contribute to assignments. First will be teacher relationships, to ensure comfortable collaboration teachers will

be assigned in groups where they are familiar with at least one or more other group members. Another factor that will be considered when assigning groups is commonalities among the student populations the teachers serve. For example, placing teachers who serve similar age/grade levels together to aid in collaborative efforts. One other factor that may also be considered when assigning teacher groups is the environment in which the teachers serve. Grouping teachers who know each other, and have commonalities in student populations and teaching environments will help to foster deeper and more specific conversations regarding building relationships with their students.

Collaborative Guidance: Before teachers begin collaborative work, instructors will ensure that every teacher has the handouts from the information delivery portion of the workshop. Additionally, each group will be provided with guiding questions for discussion and collaborations. These questions will serve as a catalyst for teachers to begin discussing how they are already using relationship-building strategies. Based on their own strengths they will begin to discuss how they could add additional strategies to their classroom, and specifically how they can build relationships with students who are most at-risk or have identified mental health concerns. By having these discussions in a professional collaborative environment, teachers can openly ask and answer questions regarding practical implementation. In providing this step during the workshop, teachers are also building relationships with one another and developing an atmosphere where relationships are valued and specifically made a priority. By the end of the professional collaboration portion of the workshop, each teacher should begin to have some ideas about how they would like to intentionally focus on building relationships with their more vulnerable students.

Individual Planning

Planning Time: It is well known that many teachers often feel overwhelmed, and the purpose of this workshop is not to add more items to the teachers' "to-do" lists, to be done whenever there is the elusive extra time. In order to fully communicate the importance of this topic, ensure the highest probability of teacher application, and require the least amount of time outside of the workshop for implementation, teachers will be given time to utilize the resources provided, reflect on professional collaboration, and develop a specific plan for implementation in their own classroom with their specific students. During this time, instructors will be available to answer questions, provide further brainstorming, and provide requested feedback. During a workshop check-out, teachers will provide answers to a few questions indicating if they have successfully developed an implementation plan and if they would like a follow-up from the instructor.

Follow up: After completing the workshop, instructors will review the check-out slips provided by teachers and start by contacting any teacher that specifically indicated concerns, did not develop an implementation plan, or requested follow-up. After those teachers have been contacted, instructors will reach out to other teacher participants to offer follow-up conversations to address any concerns with the first steps in the implementation of the plan and strategies they identified at the workshop.

This application portion of the thesis is a workshop facilitated by using google slides, references to literature, professional collaboration, and time for individual reflection and work. It is designed to be presented to and support educators who are working with students who have known mental health concerns and/or are at-risk. The design is to take teachers through the

importance of building relationships, present evidence-based strategies to build relationships, and provide opportunities for each teacher to have individual reflection and action.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Literature

Summary of Literature

The questions addressed in this thesis are as follows: What impacts are observed in students who have experienced positive student-teacher relationships? Which strategies build student-teacher relationships with students receiving mental health treatment? Throughout the research explored, several common trends related to these statements are evident. Across a wide variety of studies, completed over many years of research, evidence demonstrates that when teachers make an effort to build positive relationships with their students, student outcomes are impacted positively. Additionally, research shows that it is necessary for educators to intentionally build relationships with students who are at-risk and/or have difficulties in the classroom. If there is no intentionality, educators will likely not build relationships with these students, but rather will build stronger relationships with students who are already demonstrating success in the classroom. Research indicates that there are a variety of strategies teachers can use to facilitate building positive relationships with students.

Limitations of the Research

In gathering and reviewing research it became clear that there is limited research that addresses building relationships specifically with students who have known mental health

concerns. Given that the mental health of students is of significant societal importance, a specific study of this population of students is a limitation in the current research. Similarly, the current research offers few studies looking at student-teacher relationships when the students have special education needs. This student population may overlap with students with mental health concerns, showing a gap in the research related to both of these populations.

Future Research

Further research is necessary to explore and broaden understanding of the extent to which student-teacher relationships impact outcomes for the growing number of students experiencing mental health concerns and trauma. Similarly, additional research is necessary to expand the variety of student populations in which specific relationship-building strategies are utilized and assessed for effectiveness.

One example could be conducting research to see if the strategies that have been shown to be effective in traditional classrooms with primarily neurotypical students show similar results with students with cognitive delays. The same could be done for students with social delays. This could be looked at through a special education lens, by studying students who have Individualized Education Plans.

Another example would be to look at whether the identified strategies are effective with students with significant trauma. For students who score significantly higher than average on the Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale (ACES), would the same strategies for developing positive relationships be effective as with students who score low on the ACES inventory?

Through a more general lens, future research may focus on the implementation of the strategies discussed in settings where student need is more specific than the general classroom environment.

Implications for Professional Application

In response to the current research, it is important for those in the education field to consider the level of emphasis that is placed on student-teacher relationships. Even though research shows that building student-teacher relationships significantly impacts student outcomes, the emphasis placed on this remains limited. Heavy emphasis is placed on evidence-based practices in a variety of academic areas. Educators and students stand to benefit significantly by placing similar emphasis on building positive student-teacher relationships. When planning professional development opportunities, creating school climate and culture, professional learning communities, school improvement plans, and even rubrics for teacher evaluations, the benefits of positive student-teacher relationships should be considered and intentionally integrated.

Creating an emphasis on positive student-teacher relationships as a cornerstone that is equally as important as academic skills is likely a huge perspective switch for many educators and administrators. The data indicating the significant mental health crisis students are enduring should not just shock educators, but prompt significant action. Based on the evidence presented in this thesis, education professionals would be well-served to consider philosophical changes that put positive relationships between students and teachers as a top priority.

Conclusion

      Research has shown that positive student-teacher relationships have a lasting impact on student outcomes and success. By using this information to form cultures of support and positive individual relationships with students who are at-risk or have challenges in the classroom, educators can leverage these relationships for the benefit of the students with significant needs. In using the impact of positive student-teacher relationships to lift up and empower students who otherwise are struggling, teachers can be a part of providing these students with the best possible opportunities for success in the classroom, and likey, even beyond the school walls.

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Appendix 1
Indirect Strategies for Relationship Building
Based on the Meta-Analysis of research completed by Kincake, Cook, & Goerdt

Classroom rules and routines	Teachers establish rules in the classroom that are short, and simply and positively worded ("do rules" instead of "don't rules"). Rules are explicitly taught, modeled, and precorrected by the teacher. Consistent routines and structures in the classroom are in place.
Student choice and empowerment	Teachers give students choices whenever possible. Teachers empower students by making their voice feel valued (e.g., empower students to ask questions, student-driven content/instruction).
Parental involvement	Teachers empower parents and involve them in behavior management systems to increase consistency across environments.
Transitions and downtime	Teachers prepare children adequately for transitions: give warnings, give helpful reminders, and provide clear and explicit transition rules. For transitions, teachers intentionally decrease downtime where students do not have tasks or time spent on managerial tasks.
Peer-assisted learning strategies	Teachers implement practices that include peer monitoring and responding to other peers' behavior (e.g., peer positive reporting: "tootling" where peers try to "catch other students being good" or peers taking turns teaching each other content).
Positive note home	Teachers send positive notes home to parents to outline appropriate and correct behaviors their child exhibited in school (e.g., "Good News Notes").
Opportunities to respond	Teachers use questions or prompts to allow students to respond in the classroom (e.g., Think-Pair-Share).
Sense of responsibility	Teachers give students a sense of responsibility in the classroom (e.g., handing out materials, line-leader, organizing materials).
Scaffolding	Teachers scaffold students' development when they encounter challenging situations or tasks. This means the teacher first models or demonstrates how to complete a task and then steps back, offering support as needed.
Class-wide meetings	Teachers start and/or end their day as a class to discuss plans for the day, expectations, sharing personal news (e.g., monthly "share" time), student news board, and other community-building activities.

Physical classroom	Teachers' classrooms are organized so students know where to find things and what to expect (e.g., desks are arranged for peer collaboration, pathways not clogged, materials are labeled).
High and achievable expectations	Teachers communicate high expectations and assure the student they are capable of meeting those expectations (e.g., "I believe in you. I know you can do this math assignment").
Teacher mindfulness	Teachers integrate mindful moments for themselves throughout their day: stop what they are doing, take intentional deep breaths, focus on how they are feeling/thinking, and proceed. This helps teachers to be present with their students in the moment.
Move-around breaks	Teachers allow time for students to get up and move their bodies.
Collaborative problem solving	Teachers educate students and work with them together, to identify a problem, generate possible solutions, anticipate different consequences, and evaluate the most effective solutions.
Self-regulation	Teachers educate students about how to recognize different emotions and how to manage them successfully. (e.g., practicing real-life dilemmas with puppets using self-calming strategies).
Emotion understanding	Teachers educate students about different emotions, how your body feels when you experience those emotions, and typical facial expressions. This content is focused on building emotional vocabulary and self-awareness.
Emotion expression	Teachers educate students about how to appropriately express specific emotions (verbally and nonverbally).
Self-monitoring	Teachers educate students about how to plan and monitor their own performance, how to determine if they acted the way they planned, and how to self-correct if needed.
Self-esteem	Teachers educate students on how to build their self-esteem/self-confidence and promote positive self-talk.
Goal-setting	Teachers educate students about and assist students with goal-setting

Appendix 2
Direct Strategies for Relationship Building
Based on the Meta-Analysis of research completed by Kincake, Cook, & Goerdt

Praise	Teachers effectively use praise in the classroom, which includes behavior-specific praise (e.g., "Thank you for sitting in your seat with your feet on the ground" or "Thank you for helping hand out those papers"). Praise can include focusing on the end product (e.g., "You did a great job with your math assignment") or the process (e.g., "I love how hard you studied for this exam. Your hard work paid off").
1:1 Time	Teachers spend 1:1 time during their day connecting with a student for the sole purpose of building their relationship
Coaching emotions	Teachers validate (e.g., "I understand you are angry. It is okay to be angry") and label (e.g., "Your body is telling me you are upset right now") emotions for the student.
Expressing care	Teachers express genuine care for the student (e.g., "I am so glad you are here today" or "I really missed you yesterday when you were gone" or "You contribute so much to my class").
Respect	Teachers model verbal and nonverbal respect for the child through eye contact, warm and calm voice, and good manners (e.g., "Please" and "Thank You").
Child-led activities	Teachers engage in child-led activities while narrating, validating, and labeling students' behaviors (e.g., make-believe play).
Getting to know your students	Teachers inquire about students' interests, review information to combat forgetfulness, and then find opportunities to reference that information. This should also include the teacher sharing information about themselves.
Reflective and supportive listening	Teachers provide reflective and supportive listening to their students. Reflective listening includes paraphrasing the students' message back to them to clarify understanding. Supportive listening includes teacher involvement and attunement as the student speaks.
Check-ins	Teachers, throughout the day, check in with students (e.g., "I noticed we had some hard conversations yesterday. I wanted to check in and make sure we were okay" or "I wanted to check in to see how you were doing").

Objective observation	Teachers objectively observe the students to learn more about them and their behavior, as well as check the assumptions/biases of the teacher.
Positive greetings	Teachers positively greet students every morning, which includes welcoming students and showing they value their presence. Positive farewells Teachers send students positive farewells at the end of the day, which includes thanking students for their hard work and showing they valued their presence throughout the day.
Social Skills	Teachers educate students about "friendship-making" skills or other skills related to appropriate social interactions.