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Teacher-Student Relationships in Project Based Learning: A Case Study of High Tech Middle North County

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A Case Study of High Tech Middle North County

By

Jennifer Ray Pieratt

Claremont Graduate University

2011

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APPROVAL OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Jennifer R Pieratt as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Ph.D.

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Abstract

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By

Jennifer Pieratt

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The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between pedagogy and teacher-student relationships. Researchers have hypothesized that these relationships can promote better student achievement, particularly among low-income students, and that instruction primarily shapes these relationships. Yet not enough is known about these relationships or their connection to student performance to move forward with school or teaching reforms. This study addresses this lack of knowledge. As such, it contributes to a stream of research that attempts to understand factors that contribute to student learning. The study setting is High Tech Middle North County (HTMNC), a charter school in San Marcos, CA. This case was chosen because of its unique and highly touted teaching practices based on relational and project-based pedagogies. Studying the implementation of these pedagogies and their meaning for the teachers and students at HTMNC will help researchers and educators better understand the role pedagogy plays in fostering teacher-student relationships. Through collegial relationships established by a project-based pedagogy, HTMNC teachers were able to develop positive relationships with students, allowing them to use these relationships to personalize curriculum and differentiate instruction, resulting in increased student motivation and engagement.

Key words: teacher-student relationships, learning, teaching, pedagogy, school structures

Dedication

I am thankful to have worked with a committee of highly esteemed and supportive individuals, and I will forever be grateful for your love and support, Greg.

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CHAPTER I: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS IN SCHOOL

Introduction

Since the enactment of *No Child Left Behind* schools have becoming increasingly concerned with raising student achievement. This goal has proven to be difficult in urban schools attended my minority students and located in challenging neighborhoods that are inflicted with poverty. There is a strong undercurrent in the current wave of school reform that believes that teacher-student relationships can address these problems. In part this belief has led to the proposal of small schools, which among other hypothesized benefits would foster positive relationships between students and teachers. However, not enough is known about these relationships or their affect on learning to move forward with these suggested reforms. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the antecedent questions regarding teacher-student relationships themselves: How do teachers and students understand these relationships? How do these relationships form? Particularly, does pedagogy play a role in their development? How do teachers and students perceive their relationships affecting student achievement? By addressing these questions, this study sets the stage for a richer examination of the relationship between teacher-student relationships and student learning.

Do Relationships Matter?

Many pedagogical philosophies are grounded in the belief that learning is a social process, which makes relationships instrumental in understanding how students learn. According to McCombs (2007) “learning is influenced by social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others” (p. 57). Similarly, Faulkner (1998) explained that Vygotsky

believed mental functioning in the individual can be understood only by examining the social and cultural processes from which it derives. For many theorists, learning and social relations are so intertwined that one cannot occur without the other. Raider-Roth (2005) added that Dewey understood relationships in school as “the essential foundation for learning” because the transaction that occurs between an individual and the social environment is the “bedrock of knowledge [and] the fundamental way that knowledge is built (p. 25).

While relationships in general are important in promoting social interaction that support learning, according to Dewey the relationship between the student and the teacher was particularly of interest. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) illustrated that the teacher must understand the capacities of the child and see to it that day-to-day conditions of the classroom lead to a fuller culmination of the child’s abilities. In order for teachers to fulfill their duties, according to Dewey, they must have an established relationship with students, which allows them to know the children well enough to assess their abilities and teach to their needs. Noddings (1984) declared that the child needs the guidance of a caring adult to attain competence of their world. The teacher therefore must “stretch the student’s world by presenting an effective selection of that world with which she is in contact and work cooperatively with the student in his struggle toward competence in that world” (p. 178). This cooperation cannot occur without knowing the student and having opportunities to interact with him or her closely throughout their learning. Therefore, in order to achieve the ideal teacher, according to Dewey and Noddings, teachers must be able to know their students and work closely with them every day.

Other theorists, such as Vygotsky, saw the importance of the teacher-student relationship in the learning process. Vygotsky coined the term Zone of Proximal Development, which can be

used to understand the importance of the teacher-student relationship. Vygotsky (1996), believed that this term explained “the place at which a child’s empirically rich but disorganized spontaneous concepts ‘meet’ the systematicity and logic of adult reasoning” (p. xxxv). This process occurs when the teacher works closely with the child to scaffold and support his or her learning. Faulkner (1998) pointed out that there are two aspects of a relationship: the current and the enduring, which are both important to the development of the student. The social exchanges that occur between the two in a relationship acts as a filter through which a teacher’s ability to scaffold and a student’s learning opportunities must be viewed. The work of Vygotsky and Faulkner suggested a personalized approach to learning, which is virtually impossible to achieve without an established relationship between the child and the adult.

In addition to supporting the development of the child, the student-teacher relationship is important because it prepares the student for his or her future as an individual and as a member of society. Raider-Roth (2005) explained that the child’s relationship with the self is constantly being constructed based on his or her interactions with others; such learning relationships can both help students connect to what they know and lead them to disconnect or disassociate from what they know. This construction of knowledge based on social interactions greatly impacts the future of children and their understanding of the world in which they live. Dewey was more concerned with the community, rather than the individual, and saw relationships as integral to the aims of education because it supported a more democratic nation and because it prepared students for society. Parker noted that Dewey stated the following: “Since education is a social process and there are many kinds of societies, a criterion for educational criticism and construction implies a particular social ideal...an undesirable society, in other words, is one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of

experience” (as cited in Johnston, 2006, p. 42). Dewey understood the importance of dialogue and, therefore, acknowledged the need for relationships in developing a democratic society.

Because learning is viewed as a social process, the interaction between a teacher and student plays an integral part in the development of the child. Therefore, it is worth considering how pedagogy influences these relationships and how such relationships can be used to improve student learning and achievement.

How Do Relationships Matter in School?

Reform efforts of the 21st century have thus far focused on approaches to improving student achievement. Great efforts have been made to better understand how to increase student performance in school, one of which has been the small schools movement. This movement, beginning in New York and Chicago has been rooted in the belief that smaller schools could provide the support necessary for students to improve their grade level proficiency and decrease drop-out rates. This movement acknowledges that with more attention from teachers, among other school improvements, students would succeed in school. Wasley and Lear (2001) stated that in a study conducted in 90 small schools in Chicago, “all schools had made significant improvements in school behavior and achievement” (p.2). Much of the research has focused on the success of small schools, often referring to the roles in which teachers have played in making students feel known and cared for, thus allowing them to feel invested in school and motivating them to achieve. However, little research has been done on what specifically fosters these relationships (other than school size) and the contribution that relationships play in student achievement. Through a review of the existing literature we can better understand how teacher-student relationships affect student behavior; foster student interest, motivation, and engagement;

and ultimately support student resiliency and persistence, thus improving student learning and achievement. With this knowledge we can better situate our understanding of the significance of teacher-student relationships, thus providing value to this study which seeks to identify what factors contribute to these relationships.

Student Motivation and Engagement

Put simply by Blankestein (2004), “relationships are at the core of successful learning communities and student success” (p. 58). There are many explanations that support this argument, beginning with theories of relationships and student motivation and engagement. The teacher has great potential to affect the behavior of the student in the classroom. Brophy and Good (1974) explained that negative teacher expectations and interactions often create self-fulfilling prophecies for a student, thus negatively affecting their academic performance in school. On the contrary, positive interactions can have an adverse affect. Raider-Roth (2005) claimed that relationships can positively affect the quality of student learning. It is also believed that when relationships are established between a teacher and a student, the student will become more motivated to perform. Noddings (in Deiro, 1996) declared that “children will work harder and do things—even odd things like adding fractions—for people they love and trust” (p. 8). According to Brookes (1989), through close-working relationships, teachers can also influence students’ goals by motivating them to buy into “the system,” which then leads to improved achievement. The ability of the teacher to support the child navigating through the educational system provides one way in which relationships can engage and motivate the child in school. Research by Talbert added that “personal bonds with adults in the school have greater capacity to motivate and engage students academically than do the more traditional forms of social controls that emphasize obedience to authority or conforming to the rules” (as cited in Deiro, 1996, p.

11). If children feel as though they are supported by their teacher rather than in opposition to them, they will likely be more engaged in their education and motivated to achieve. Anness (2003) agreed that teacher-student affective bonds can influence students' motivation and engagement because through these relationships, schools become a "better place to learn." In an environment that is fostered by positive relationships, the student's needs are met through these positive interactions and the child receives the support necessary to achieve academic success. Ultimately, by nurturing these needs, McCombs (2007) found that students will reduce feelings of isolation and increase motivation and engagement in any population.

Being engaged in one's learning creates intrinsic motivation, which can lead to improved academic performance. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) claimed that when learning is relevant to the world and the experiences of the child, education becomes more meaningful and thus engaging. According to Dewey, it is the role of the teacher to develop learning experiences for the student which center on these interests. The task that Dewey lays out for teachers does not explicitly state how a teacher must go about executing his theory, but if it did, it would likely discuss the significance of the teacher-student relationship in creating those engaging learning experiences. For a teacher to engage and motivate a student they must know the student and their interests; this can only be done through positive interactions and a close-working relationship. McCombs (2007) claimed that the way a learner views themselves and the quality of relationships associated with their learning contributes to how engaged the student is in his or her learning as well as the quality of his or her learning outcome. In addition, Kohn (2005) explained that when a student works closely with a teacher and feels unconditionally accepted he or she is more interested in learning and enjoys challenging tasks. Under this theory, acceptance becomes a force of engagement and motivation for a student. By developing strong

relationships, a teacher can support student interest and acceptance, which are key components to academic success.

Resiliency and Persistence

In addition to increasing motivation and engagement, through positive relationships a teacher can support student resiliency and persistence in the face of adverse situations. Through the support provided by teacher-student relationships, the student is able to overcome challenges and can be successful in school. These obstacles can include a range of challenges from poverty, lack of social capital, or past failure in school. McCombs (2007) referred to developmental research on risk and resilience, which claimed that there is great power in a bond with at least one adult. Diero (1996) stated “bonding with pro-social adults has been identified as the key protective factor buffering children against the influence of adverse situations” (p. 3). This is because the bonding that occurs between the teacher and the student through these relationships provides powerful impacts on the life of the student. In a study conducted by O’Donnell it was demonstrated that “bonding to teachers is associated with a decrease in delinquency or behavioral problems, an increase in social and academic skills, and higher scores on standardized achievement tests” (as cited in Diero, 195, p. 10). Williams (2003) added that similar research points to “the power in addressing the whole learner by providing caring teachers and schools. The power is in the results that such practices achieve, namely, the development of young people who can successfully overcome risks and challenges. Caring teachers can make the difference between students at risk for failure and student who possess resilience and the ability to learn” (p. 73). Williams reminds us of the power of caring, which cannot be achieved without positive teacher-student relationships.

Teachers can develop relationships which foster persistence and resiliency by holding high student expectations. According to Aness (2003), teachers should persist in their demands and support for student performance by not letting students fall through the cracks; they should sustain their high expectations for performance by creating opportunities and structures that push students through obstacles until they complete the required tasks, using their relationship as needed to achieve these things. Brophy and Good (1974) found that low teacher expectations lead to low student performance. Using this line of logic, high expectations for students can lead to high performance. This becomes increasingly important for students in adverse situations, whose teachers often expect less from them. Instead, by developing meaningful relationships with students, teachers have the ability to support students to become resilient in the face of challenges, by holding high expectations for them, combined with the support of a caring teacher. Meir reported that “close teacher-student relationships allows teachers to demand more of students without being insensitive or humiliating” (as cited in Aness, 2003, p. 59). This fragile balance is one that can be approached through a positive working teacher-student relationship. Williams (2003) added that “caring teachers hold strong beliefs in all students’ innate resiliency and capacity to learn” (p. 73). With the support of a teacher, a child is more likely to do better in school; therefore the role of teacher-student relationships is critical in resiliency and persistence in school.

The Results: Improved Student Achievement

One way to gauge student achievement is through drop-out rates. There is a great amount of research that suggests that teacher-student relationships, fostered specifically by small schools, can improve student achievement by reducing drop-out rates. Research conducted by Wasley et al. (2000) stated that in a study comparing eight small schools to neighboring large

schools, they found that small schools were able to lower their dropout rate to 4.8% in comparison with 12.9% at neighboring schools. This result can be attributed to the lower rate of course failure in small schools that Wasley et al. (2000) found, which often accounts for higher dropout rates. Wasley and Lear (2001) also found students in small schools attended five more days of school per semester than students in nearby high schools. Increased school attendance can contribute to more opportunities for academic success and can help reduce the possibility of a student dropping out due to academic failure. Another argument could be that the relationships that are fostered in smaller learning environments provide the teacher support necessary to keep students in school. Through these relationships students feel known and cared for by teachers and therefore become more invested in their education. These relationships are difficult to develop in large schools and therefore students have fewer ties to keep them in school.

The results of teacher-student relationships are that they can foster student motivation and engagement, they can support students to persist in the face of adverse situations and finally, they can increase academic achievement. Noddings (1984) frequently stated the need for caring in schools and the positive role that relationships play in the academic and developmental growth of the child. McCombs (2007) added that improving academic achievement requires more than just good instruction, it requires caring relationships as well; “teachers acting as mentors and forming strong relationships with their students are related to improved academic performance” (p. 64). In a study by Alexander et al. it was found that teacher-student relationships have an impact on student achievement due to improved interpersonal relations between teachers and students (as cited by Brooks, 1971, p. 142). Raider-Roth (2005) contributed that “there is a trend at all levels of the educational cycle... that the interpersonal relationships of school shape students’ achievement in subject matter performance such as mathematics as well as students’

preparedness for the tasks required of schooling” (p. 28). Finally, a report from a special National Study Group for Affirmative Development of Academic Ability argued that academic performance is nurtured and developed through trusting relationships in school. Many school reform efforts are grounded in the inherent belief that relationships can improve student achievement and the research above demonstrates that in fact this is true.

How Do Traditional Schools Fail to Support Teacher-Student Relationships?

There are many challenges facing schools today, from overcrowding to underfunding, which are responsible for the dysfunctional school structures that are incapable of supporting teacher-student relationships. Since the creation of the comprehensive American high school, schools have continued to expand in student population. Kathleen Cotton (1996) stated that “between 1940 and 1990 the total number of elementary and secondary public schools declined 69 percent...despite a 70 percent increase in the U.S. population” (p. 1). In response to this large influx of students, schools responded by expanding the size of the average high school. Work by West Ed (October 2001) explained that the common size of current American high schools is between 2,000 and 3,000 students, with urban schools as high as 5,000. As a result, the American high school has come to be accepted as a large and rather impersonal social institution.

The Dilemmas Schools Must Face

There are many detrimental effects associated with increasing school size, but the most obvious is overcrowded classrooms and increased student assignments to teachers. According to the Coalition of Essential Schools Online (n.d.), “schools often fail to focus on their ostensible central purpose—helping students learn to use their minds well [because] teachers, facing 150 or more students a day, regularly assign work on the basis of what can be graded quickly rather than

on the basis of what will push students to think deeply.” TheodoreSizer (1992) effectively described the greatest dilemma facing schools as the lack of personalization. Most comprehensive high schools reflect the following situation: The bell rings and four thousand students swarm into the halls, socializing with their group of friends while passing, grabbing their text books for the next class, and scurrying along to their seventh period. The teacher urges all 35 students to take their seats, as there is little time to waste in a short fifty-minute period. During this class, much like every other class during the day, students sit disengaged as they receive standardized information with little interaction with their classmates or teachers. While a walk through a typical comprehensive high school today might appear to be educational efficiently at its best, it is the emotions of those within the system that are unseen and unheard that matter most. Many students feel as if they are just a number in a contrived system, and many teachers feel as though there are too many kids and not enough time. In this system how can a child ever feel known or cared for by his or her teacher? How can a child feel invested in a system which doesn’t seem to value them as an individual?

According to Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash (2007), “five percent or 5,000 of America’s one hundred thousand public schools, representing more than 2,500,000 students, are on track to fall into the most extreme federal designation for failure by 2009-2010.” Research discussed later in this paper suggests that creating schools on a more human scale offers success in the face of failure. West Ed (2001) argued that smallness invites positive changes that include strong personal bonds, parent and community involvement, simplicity and focus, improved instructional quality, improved working conditions and job satisfactions, and built-in accountability. So if there are many positive attributes associated with undoing the large high

school structure, why does the American high school continue to remain a depersonalized social institution that fails so many of its students?

Why Schools Continue to Fail

One of the primary reasons why schools continue to foster failure is because of public perception of the American high school. Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash (2007) reported that “the school model our society provides...is largely the same as that used throughout American public education, a model unchanged from its origins in the early 20th century.” While the current student demographic reflects a changing need, the public is often reluctant to allow such changes to occur. Tom Gregory (2000) explained that “bigger is still often equated as better... [because of] people’s deep-seated notions of what constitutes a proper school” (p. 2). West Ed (2001) added that “the public’s image of what a high school should be is perhaps the greatest barrier to change. Most people want better but not different” (p. 2). These perceptions greatly affect community decisions to maintain large schools rather than break down into smaller schools. Gregory (2000) contributed to this argument by explaining that support for these decisions range from the desire to maintain a unified community, to avoiding aggravating the logistics of racial integration, while also supporting highly competitive athletic programs. These iconic notions of the American high school, which according Dykema (2002) Theodore Sizer suggested that “high school is expected to be everything to everybody,” serves as a major barrier to undoing outdated organizational structures and reducing school size.

In addition, another perception which challenges school improvement is the scientific approach to education. Margaret Wheatley (1992) declared that the 17th century Newtonian approach to understanding how the world works, which utilizes a machine model that views the world in parts that can be dissected and put back together, leads to a reductionist focus on things

rather than relationships. Payne (1996) argued that we cannot approach teaching and learning with the scientific ideas of Newton because “the most important part of learning seems to be related to relationship, if we listen to the data and potent realities in the research emerging from the disciplines of biology and physics” (p. 110). However, those in power often tend to dissect and departmentalize school systems and structures. Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu (2006) openly criticized departmentalization in schools and added that the decline of African-American students’ test scores from fourth grade on are due to the increasing number of teachers the child sees. He added that “in large high schools and some elementary schools students have four to seven teachers per day, [and] students can get lost” (p. 148).

Schools also continue to fail because they are unable to break a dysfunctional system. Charles Payne (2008) warned that because of disconnected policy discussions, “we have failed to account fully for the weakness of the social infrastructure and the often dysfunctional organizational environments of urban schools and school systems” (p. 1). Noddings (1992) added that “the system is strained, but largely because it knows only one way to do things: to add courses and routinized services...we think of providing specialists, computers, advanced math, and remedial reading. We could think of providing an adult [for] conversation, continuity, [and] encouraging a sense of belonging” (p. 13). Theodore Sizer (2002) contributed that “the problem isn’t the people, it’s the system” (p. 2). Sizer’s statement raised an important argument that teachers and students are not to blame for the dysfunctionality of schools, but rather those outside the system who make school-related decisions, such as politicians. Sizer (1984) suggested that it is the “top-down” reform efforts which are truly to blame for the typical structures of schools which help to make educational inadequacies all but inevitable.

There are countless challenges associated with current educational reforms, but none more difficult than that of standardization associated with accountability reforms. As a result of federal and state legislation focused on accountability, all schools have become focused on teaching standards and expecting all students to learn the same material, rather than recognizing their individual abilities and needs. Similarly, many school districts have moved to scripted curriculum, which functions on the assumption that all students should be taught in the same manner. With classroom time consumed by teaching content standards and standardizing the approach to teaching, it makes it difficult to develop individual relationships in the classroom. In a study on U.S.-Mexican youth, Angela Valenzuela (1999) found that in the urban school she observed in Texas, teachers tended to be more concerned with “form and non-personal content and only secondarily, if at all, with their students’ subjective reality” (p. 22). As a result of her observations and additional research, Valenzuela concluded that “schools are structured around an aesthetic caring whose essence lies in an attention to things and ideas rather than centering students’ learning around a moral ethic of caring that nurtures and values relationships”(p. 22). Based on Nodding’s work, Valenzuela argued that “the current emphases on achievement and on standard academic subjects may lead youth to conclude that adults do not care for them” (p. 110). This truly is a matter of concern that needs to be addressed if America’s educational system is ever to reach its vision of a quality education for all children.

Are Relationships the Wrong Emphasis for Improving Student Achievement?

While there is a small movement of growing support for teacher practices and school structures that place an emphasis on fostering caring relationships between teachers and students, there is also a great deal of criticism surrounding it. The critique of a relational

emphasis in school stems from criticism of the student-centered movement, which is often known for providing students with too much freedom at the risk of losing academic rigor. Ravitch (2000) argued that the low student performance that we see today is a result of reducing the academic demands of the schools by diverting students away from the academic curriculum and instead focusing on their self-esteem, culture, or interests. This critique is in direct contrast to leading relational theorists in education, who argue that these components are necessary to fostering relationships, which will improve student achievement. Ravitch (2000) also suggested that the progressive movement, influenced by Dewey, was to blame for the deterioration of academic rigor in our schools because it “raised unrealistic expectations of the teacher ... [and] it diminished the intellectual purpose of the schools, resulting in harmful consequences...resulting in schools loss of purpose” (p. 459). E.D Hirsh (1996), a strong proponent of standards and accountability, contributed to Ravitch’s sentiment of a curriculum that focuses too much on social curriculum that supports relationships and not enough on the academic curriculum. Hirsch (1996) argued that the mentality of those who support an emphasis on relational pedagogy and student-centered approaches to education actually date back to the era of Romanticism, which viewed education as needing to relate to student interests and their natural human state. Hirsch argued that there is great danger in this approach to education and criticized it’s supporters as using these “oversimplifications... to continue to corrupt the common sense of even some of our ablest teachers and administrators, and continue to be advocated by experts under the banner of ‘reform’” (p. 58). Both Ravitch and Hirsch blamed theories explored in this paper as being responsible for the low academic performance of students in America. They instead insist that teacher practices and schools should be structured to deliver academic content as its first priority.

Noddings (1992) recognized the critique of approaches to promoting caring relationships in school by referring to the work of Gardner, who argued that schools were being asked to do too much at the risk of academic excellence. A common criticism of America's schooling system is that it is expected to solve society's problems, such as alleviating poverty and racism while teaching individuals to be moral citizens. While these attributes are important, Hirsch (2006) would argue that alternative approaches to education, such as providing students with core background knowledge, would eradicate most of the dilemmas facing schools today. The critique of promoting student-teacher relationships in school is not that such bonds are insignificant, it is that they should not become a higher priority than academic content.

Moving Forward

Given what the literature informs us about the value of teacher-student relationships in school, it is worth further consideration as to how these relationships develop, specifically how pedagogy influences these relationships.

Problem Statement & Research Questions

Research that considers how pedagogy influences teacher-student relationships is limited, thus begging the need for research that explicitly explores the relationship between pedagogy and teacher-student relationships. A better understanding of the influence of pedagogy on teacher-student relationships may guide school reform aimed at improving teaching practices and potentially future studies of student achievement, both topics of growing interest to educators, administrators, and politicians in an era of accountability and achievement gaps.

In an effort to understand the role that pedagogy plays in teacher-student relationships this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do teachers and students define or otherwise understand (positive and negative) teacher-student relationships?
2. How do teachers and students see these relationships developing generally?
 - a) What factors facilitate these relationships?
 - b) What factors constrain these relationships?
3. How do teachers and students perceive their relationships contributing to student learning?

CHAPTER II: FRAMEWORKS

A study of pedagogy and teacher-student relationships draws on, and later contributes to, an understanding of relational pedagogy.

Defining Relational Pedagogy

Relational pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that evolved out of the Feminist Movement in the 1960s (Poplin 2008). Feminists of the latter half of the century critiqued the existing order of institutions, including educational systems. As a result, feminist pedagogy emerged, which Webb, Allen & Walker (2002) describe as “a reformation of the relationship between professor and student, empowerment, building community, privileging voice, respecting diversity of personal experience, and challenging traditional pedagogical notions” (p. 1). As a leader of the Women’s Studies Movement, Nel Noddings influenced others to challenge the curriculum and consider the significance of caring and relationships in teaching and learning (Poplin 2008, Noddings 1984). Relational pedagogy, with roots in feminist pedagogy, is defined as an approach to education in which teachers are guided by “an ethic of caring”, teach to the holistic needs of their students, create relevant learning experiences and are committed to developing connections with their students (Noddings,1984, 1992). Relational

Pedagogy is an approach to teaching that relies on the teacher's development of an improved relationship with oneself and a close-working relationship with their students. Palmer (1998) suggests that in order to foster these relationships with students the teacher must follow a pedagogical design that supports an open space, invites student voice, honors the story of the student in addition to the content, creates an environment that is supported by the community, and welcomes both silence and speech. Palmer defines this type of relational pedagogy as responsible for establishing the Habits of Heart (the term used to refer to socio-emotional development) within every student. These habits are fostered through teaching practices that support relationships with students. Boyd, MacNeill & Sullivan (2006) assert that:

The relational pedagogy approach treats relationships as the foundation of good pedagogy, building on the strong emphasis on relationships already embedded in pedagogy itself (MacNeill & Silcox, 2006). Relational pedagogy equips learners to become partners in their own education for life. At the same time, it recognizes that building relationships without improved student learning across all of the dimensions of education does not constitute good pedagogy (p. 2).

Relational pedagogy can therefore be defined according to the presence of the following factors:

- A sense of responsibility to care for the student
- A concern for the holistic needs of the student
- A commitment to creating relevant learning experiences
- Presence of a positive teacher-student relationship

Defining Teacher-Student Relationships

According to Vygotsky (1996) and Faulkner (1998), learning is a social process dependent upon close relationships between teachers and students. In turn, closeness is built upon a high level of dialogue or social exchanges. For Kohn (2005) and Noddings (1984), a strong working relationship requires teachers and students to work together closely and frequently. From Dewey's perspective (1938), teacher-student relationships require that teachers know their students, particularly their abilities and interests, an idea reflected in recent studies about how people learn (Sharp & Bransford, 2007). Williams (2003) and Ladson-Billings (1994) have argued that high expectations for student performance are also an integral piece of teacher-student relationships. Finally, the emotions associated with a teacher-student relationship also define its character. Noddings (1984), Williams (2003), and McCombs (2007), for instance, explained that a positive teacher-student relationship is present when students feel loved and cared for by their teachers, when students feel safe enough and trust their teachers enough to take risks and make mistakes, and when students feel as though they have a close bond with their teachers.

Drawing on these perspectives, teacher-student relationships may be defined by:

- frequent exchanges
- knowledge of student abilities and interests
- high expectations
- caring
- trust
- emotional bonds

It seems possible to group these attributes into conditions (frequent exchanges, knowledge of student abilities and interests, high expectations, and caring) and results (trust and

emotional bonding). Thus, at the outset of this study, a positive teacher-student relationship will be defined by the presence of both types of attributes.

In contrast, a negative relationship can be defined by the inverse of these attributes. That is, a negative teacher-student relationship reflects little interaction, limited teacher knowledge of student capacities, low expectations, an apparent lack of caring (even conflict), and feelings of mistrust and isolation. In support, Brophy and Good (1974) explained that low teacher expectations can have a detrimental effect on teacher-student relationships, and McCombs (2007) added that a negative relationship can be identified by feelings associated with isolation.

How Teacher-Student Relationships Develop

There are several salient factors that are important to understand in the development of teacher-student relationships, including the learning climate, school structures and teaching practices.

The Learning Climate: Creating Caring Communities

It is important to understand how learning climates are established because according to McCombs (2007) students placed in positive environments were more likely to develop better relationships with their teachers. Diero (1996) builds on this argument by explaining that “school environments can be important resources for encouraging and supporting teachers who want to develop close and trusting connections with students” (p. 111). McCombs (2007) added that the climate of a classroom is important because students are more likely to work hard for a teacher that they know and like. In a caring classrooms and school community Noddings pointed out that the teacher must provide opportunities to build community and mutual respect, create social responsibility, develop an appreciation for diversity, develop emotional literacy and

manage and resolve conflict (as cited in McCombs, 2007, p. 72). According to the ecological living system, as suggested by McCombs (2007) classrooms must be healthy places that attend to the psychological-social-physical needs of the student by supporting relationships. In order for this to happen, the teacher must help students to see themselves as effective learners, encourage self-determination, support students to become self-controlled, foster ongoing friendships between peers, and build strong home-school connections. By creating this type of climate in the classroom, the teacher is better able to connect with students on a personal level, thus supporting teacher-student relationships. These caring communities can also be identified as communities of commitment. Aness (2003) described these communities as those that are characterized by “strong, caring ties that are analogous to family bonds “(p. 63). By creating communities that are committed to its members, teachers can develop bonds with students that are similar to those shared within a family. A sense of unconditional caring within a classroom or school provides students the sense of comfort and care that they often need to be successful in school.

Positive classroom climates are developed when students feel a sense of support from and trust of the schooling environment. Once these emotions are met, the student is more likely to engage in meaningful relationships. According to McCombs (2007), in a positive classroom climate “the students perceive that they are cared about, respected, in positive relationship with their teacher and their peers, and that it is safe to make mistakes” (p. 75). Diero (1996) added that supportive school environments are fostered by an overall educational mission to the student’s personal growth, in addition to classroom and school-wide structures for communication and collective problem solving, norms that support an extended role of the teacher beyond the classroom, and individualized instructional strategies. Through

personalization that is offered by the model as suggested by Diero, a child's needs are likely to be met through a close working relationship with the teacher.

Finally, a positive school environment must allow a student to establish trust in the teacher through the presence of a caring classroom climate. Raider-Roth (2005) stated "an environment in which trustworthy relationships can thrive requires that students be free to make choices that reflect their interests, to disagree with teachers' perspectives, and to take risks with ideas that are new and not fully formed" (p. 34). In order for a student to feel comfortable to take academic risks, they must feel as though they are in a safe space and will be accepted unconditionally. Raider-Roth (2005) added that "trustworthy relationships in the classroom can be understood as a commitment to honoring both privacy and dissent, sharing authority among the members of the class, and creating a collaborative focus of study through which teachers and students can actively form a community of learners" (p. 34). Creating a community built on trust in the classroom supports a positive climate, which fosters student-teacher relationships. In addition, McCombs (2007) asserted that in a climate of trust, children are more likely to talk to their teachers and work with them to address issues of concern. Not only does a caring community create improved relationships between teachers and students, it supports them as well.

School Practices and Structures that Support Relationships

There are various approaches that can be taken to design schools that support strong teacher-student relationships. According to Diero (1996), such school practices include school-wide structures for communication and collective problem-solving, such as team teaching, weekly staff meetings, core teams, and joint parent-teacher-student conferences. Diero (1996) also confirmed that organizational strategies for revitalization and recommitment are also

important in creating a caring school community; this can be achieved by planning school-wide retreats, establishing mutual respect for professionalism of teachers and administrators, providing close contact with nurturing principals, and offering ongoing support for instruction and flexibility with teacher's schedules. Each of these suggestions provides teachers with the mobility and support needed to foster caring relationships with students. This type of support by administration ranges from professional support for teaching, to the flexibility needed to have close interactions with students during the school day.

Another school-wide strategy that supports the outcome of close relationships is the concept of looping students. Looping refers to the practice of keeping students with the same teacher over the course of several years. Noddings (1984) insisted that "in order to establish the level of trust and understanding that is required for open dialogue, we might consider a reorganization of schooling that would provide extended contact between teachers" (p. 186). This could be achieved by having the same teacher follow the students on to the next consecutive grades in school or the teacher acting as an advisor that would serve as a point of contact and support for the students over the course of their academic career. According to Ancess (2003) "supporting relationships in school are advisory-like mechanisms that link a small group of students with a single faculty member whose role it is to know the students well and to know their overall progress" (p. 82). Sullo (2007) added that Advisory or Homeroom provides students with the opportunity to get to know an adult over an extended period of time, even if the students never has a class with that teacher. Looping supports the position that in order for teachers to develop relationships with their students, they need increased interaction with them. According to Ancess (2003) this means that "teachers and students must be able to have easy, regular, planned, and unplanned access to one another" (p. 81). By providing more access

between the teacher and student there is increased opportunity for them to develop a close relationship.

Placement of students into teams provides another approach to increasing teacher-student access. By placing students in learning teams with interdisciplinary teaching, a constant group of teachers shares the same group of students. Ancess (2003) commented that this assures “frequent and easy access and formal and informal and planned and unplanned interactions between staff and students. The proximity of students and team teachers and the flow of cluster teachers in and out of each other’s room increase the possibilities for engagement” (p. 82). Noddings (1984) argued that “in order to establish the level of trust and understanding that is required for open dialogue, we might consider a reorganization of schooling that would provide extended contact between teachers and students” (p. 186). Both advisory and learning teams can provide the access that Noddings and Ancess argue is necessary in the development of relationships in school.

The social curriculum is also a practice that caring environments consider in order to facilitate relationships in school. The social curriculum refers to social skills that rely on interaction, such as cooperation and sharing. Raider-Roth (2005) insisted that “for teachers, the standardized curriculum and assessments that flood their classrooms create numerous obstacles to their efforts to both know their students and act on the knowledge that they have about their students” (p. 167). Raider-Roth (2005) reported that this standardization of curriculum, rather than a focus on social curriculum, has led to hostility in the classroom, rather than creating a relational/social sphere in the classroom. Johnston (2006) claimed that when teachers know their students, they are able to learn about each individual and what they need, which isn’t always academic support. Students may instead need to develop what Johnston (2006) referred to as

“human qualities that you would like to see humans have in life...school is to learn to look at the world, as we’re all a part. We are together in this thing. Then, on top of that comes the academic stuff...sometimes the social curriculum is more important than parts of the academic curriculum” (p. 32). The culture of the school determines whether or not social curriculum will be an accepted practice. Under current federal legislation, most schools are focused solely on the academic content necessary to improve student performance on standardized tests. However, schools that are able to strike a balance between the academic and social curriculum are best able to foster teacher-student relationships.

The typical school day schedule also dictates a learning environment’s ability to support relationships. Currently, the school day centers on the primary function of academics, rather than fostering caring interactions. Noddings (1992) suggested the school day should be organized in a way that reflects its primary purpose: caring relationships. And in order for this to happen, the following must take place: lunchtime should no longer be “an educational dead spot” but instead a time for meaningful discussion with adults, schools must be more open to parents and community members visiting and helping in the classroom every day, and there should be a greater moral purpose of caring throughout the day through activities such as learning centers. Raider-Roth (2005) added that it is important to consider creating a school schedule that supports extended conversations, which are necessary for establishing trusting relationships in school. When students are in classrooms for a short period of time and then have a limited passing period, it is difficult to have meaningful interactions that are non-academic, which are so important in developing relationships. Raider-Roth (2005) also suggested that when teachers do not experience the arts with their students, and instead send them off to specialists, they lose the opportunity to get to know their students in a different context which may provide them with the

chance to get to know their additional interests and skills. Lastly, the daily schedule must support teacher development that supports fostering relationships as well. Ancess (2003) noted that this can be achieved by “scheduling regular time for teaching teams to meet, plan, share information, and strategize to support students. Teachers harvest their relationships with students at meetings with colleagues for the goal of academic progress. Additionally, the structure of instruction reinforces the power of relationships to leverage student progress” (p. 83)

Another approach to structuring schools to support caring relationships is by creating smaller learning communities. Johnston (2006) states that class size affects a teacher’s ability to get to know students, and a “smaller class size presents more possibilities to work individually with each child” (p. 27). Raider-Roth (2005) added that “if establishing and nurturing teacher-student relationships is important, then class sizes must be manageable so that teachers and students can actually get to know one another in fundamental ways” (p. 164). Noddings (1984) suggested that the best way to achieve this breakdown is by considering smaller schools, which would include reorganizing schools to establish dialogue between teachers and students and sacrificing economies of scale for the sake of fostering relationships. The environments that are fostered by small schools are a large reason that students who have historically struggled in school are now succeeding. According to their Cultural Ecology theory, Ogbu & Simmons (1998) argued that many minority students are influenced by their culture and community, and often lack trust in the schooling system and the opportunities that it provides for minorities. Bryk and Schneider offered the argument that the structure of small schools is less complex, therefore relational trust is likely to form and be sustained (as cited in Eddy, 2000). With improved relationships with teachers, a student is less likely to see himself or herself as an insignificant number in a system and more likely to buy in to his or her education. This commitment between teachers and

students to improving academic achievement is fostered by small communities and supportive environments that are offered by small schools. In addition to being a member of a caring community, students from small schools reported feeling safer in these schools, allowing them to focus on their academics. Wasley and Leer (2001) found in their research that these schools reported fewer fights and no incidents of serious violence, therefore students attending these schools reported feeling safer in school. In order to push students to reach their academic potential, it is imperative that they feel safe in school. This sense of safety combined with trust in teachers creates an environment that is conducive to improved academic achievement.

School practices and teaching strategies are important steps along the path of creating academic success because they facilitate improved educational experiences and working relationships with students. *Research for Action Online* (2008) stated that in small schools “teachers know their students well, students feel known by their teachers, relationships between students and teachers are close, caring and supportive, and a sense of family/community exists.” Wasley and Lear (2001) also argued that what makes small schools work are the relationships between students, adults and parents, which are strong and ongoing. These relationships are often difficult to establish in large schools because teachers are responsible for up to 150 students a day and spend approximately 50 minutes together. In addition, teachers have little time to discuss personal matters or get to know their students because they are under a great deal of pressure to cover specific material during their time together. However, Gregory and Smith (1987) explained that relationships found in small schools provide students with access to adults that often promotes collegiality with teachers and creates a sense of belonging to the school community. In addition, these relationships are crucial, according to *Research for Action Online* (2008), because they enable teachers to push students more in school, monitor their work, offer necessary support

and provide more individualized attention. Personalization, a key element of small schools, is a way to foster relationships that promote improved student achievement in school. French, Atkinson & Rugen (2007) implied that restructuring schools to include block schedules, classroom team assignments, looping students, creating heterogeneous learning groups, and creating advisories can promote personalization. As a result of personalization small schools are designed to meet the needs of those it serves, something that is not guaranteed by large schools. The outcome of this design is improved experiences in school and student achievement.

Personal Pedagogy and Teacher-Student Relationships

Finally, the pedagogical practices of teachers can support teacher-student relationships. The importance of pedagogy makes sense in light of Sizer's claim that teachers and students interact primarily around content and instruction (1984). How an educator approaches teaching and learning greatly affects the development of relationships in the classroom, making pedagogy a significant component for teacher-student relationships. According to Ancess (2003), "relationships are a pedagogical tool that enables teachers to care not only about their students but also about their students' learning" (p. 80). Therefore, it is imperative to understand not only what teacher practices foster and support relationships in the classroom but also what personal qualities (personal pedagogy) allow a teacher to develop those relationships with students.

Parker Palmer (1998) declared that good teaching is not merely identified by technique but rather the personal characteristics of the teacher, the ability of the teacher to have a strong sense of personal identity infused in the work, and the teacher's capacity for connectedness. Palmer defined this connectedness as "the connections made by good teachers [which] are held not in their methods, but in their hearts, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit will converge in the human self" (p. 10). This connectedness fosters relationships with students and

supports the ability of a teacher to care about students. Noddings (1984) reported that the ability to care is “a state of mental suffering or of engrossment; to care is to be in a burdened mental state, one of anxiety, fear or solicitude about something or someone...to care may mean to be charged with the protection, welfare, or maintenance of something or someone” (p. 9).

According to Noddings’s “ethic of caring,” any teacher who possesses the ability to care characterizes a good educator; one who cares enough to know their students, thus fostering a meaningful and supportive relationship with them.

The relational pedagogical theories of Noddings and Palmer consider the important personal characteristics of the teacher, which are considered necessary for fostering relationships with students. While these personality traits are significant, there are also important skills that teachers must possess, which also allows them to develop these relationships. Ancess (2003) stated that in order for a strong teacher-student relationship to develop, the following capacities must be present in the teacher: the teacher must know the student well, including their personal interests and academic abilities; the teacher must be able to establish trust for the student by being accessible, accepting, and helpful with the needs of the child; the teacher must be persistent in their expectations for the child; finally, the teacher must be able to establish leverage through various roles by functioning as “the instructor, advisor, confidant, advocate, tutor, facilitator, mediator and surrogate family” (p. 80). Ancess added that these “roles provide teachers with multiple opportunities and entry points to establish close, caring, and trusting relationships that enable them to know students well-both as students and as people-from diverse perspectives, and use that knowledge and their relationships to provide students with personal attention and influence their behavior” (p. 80). The ability of the teacher to develop these roles must originate with the desire to care and the ability to connect with the student, as both

Noddings and Palmer suggested. These relational theories suggest that who the teacher is, is often more important than what or how they teach. That said, pedagogical practices are arguably just as significant as teacher characteristics.

Additional Pedagogical Theories That Support Teacher-Student Relationships

The pedagogical practices of a teacher can have a positive effect on a teacher-student relationship. It is important to note that there are elements of other related pedagogies that help us understand relational pedagogy. One of these practices, titled Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, has elements of relational pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1994) defined this as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes.” (p. 18). This form of teaching aims at excellence through high teacher expectations delivered through close working relationships. Ladson-Billings (1994) explained culturally relevant teachers as conductors or coaches because “their personal charm and charisma act as a catalyst to help propel students to academic excellence ... [through] fluid and equitable relationships which extend beyond the classroom”(p. 24-25). Geneva Gay (2000) added that the goals of culturally relevant pedagogy are to relate personal growth to real-world connections and develop life-long academic, social, and citizenship skills, habits of mind, and critical inquiry of the established structures of society. Culturally relevant teaching requires that the teacher know the student on an academic and personal level. Through the fulfillment of these pedagogical practices, the teacher is able to foster a relationship with the student. Ladson-Billings and Gay both supported the work of Noddings on the need for caring in education. Gay (2000) saw caring as part of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy because she defined caring as having concern for students and their performance. She added that caring requires a teacher to be action-provoking by not excusing failure and taking accountability for student

success. In a caring environment, fostered by strong teacher-student relationships, the student sees the school as a “home away from home” because they are “nourished, supported, protected, encouraged and held accountable” (p. 47). According to Gay, in these types of environments the students become more willing to participate in learning activities because they become invested in established relationships, thus warranting higher levels of achievement.” Ladson-Billings expanded on Noddings concept of an ethic of caring, by stating that she sees it as encompassing teacher concern for the “implications their work has on their students’ lives, the welfare of the community and unjust social arrangements” (p. 210). While this is a broader definition of caring, it’s inspiration in the work of Noddings relies on the teachers need to develop close working relationships with the student *and* the need to possess an innate concern for supporting the academic, social and personal needs of the children in their classroom and in the future. Implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy fosters and supports close working relationships between teachers and students.

An additional pedagogical approach that relational pedagogy draws on is the Learner-Centered Approach. McCombs (2007) defines this as when a teacher utilizes interactions with students to gain insight into individual students’ learning strengths and needs, support the learning of the whole child, combine rigorous curriculum with attention to the social environment, and implement action research in the classroom to better understand the prevalence of the achievement gap. Through this pedagogical approach, it is believed that the teacher will be able to establish the relationships necessary to support teaching and learning. In addition, according to McCombs (2007), the teacher should be able to successfully involve students in the lesson, use a variety of activities and learning methods, apply teaching methods relevant to the

curriculum, integrate multiple types of thinking, and plan and set high expectations for each lesson.

Diero (1996) stated that the following teaching strategies support bonding with students:

- Creating one-on-one time with students by being open to conversations
- Designing curriculum to maximize individual or small-group interaction
- Interweaving personal and academic conversation
- Using direct personal dialogue during non-academic time
- Writing comments on student work
- Using nonverbal communication with students
- Allowing appropriate self-disclosure with students
- Holding high expectations for students while supporting them with the belief in their abilities
- Networking with the social world of the student
- Building a strong sense of community in the classroom
- Using rituals and traditions in the classroom.

Each of these approaches to teaching relies heavily on frequent interactions in an effort to develop teacher-student relationships that can improve the learning process. Drawing on these perspectives, elements that foster teacher-student relationships include:

- Learning climate
- School culture
- School structure (small learning communities, looping, teams, scheduling)
- Personal Pedagogy (a teacher's ability to care)

- Pedagogical practices

The Significance of Teacher-Student Relationships in School

Teacher-student relationships are significant because they affect the learning process. Positive teacher-student relationships are believed to greatly affect the climate of a classroom, thus making it more conducive to learning (Diero 1996, McCombs 2007). In addition, these relationships also provide an element of personalization, which can improve the learning experiences of a student (Sizer 1992). Finally, relationships can be used to motivate and engage students in the learning process (Noddings 1984, Ladson-Billings 1994). In the current era of accountability student achievement is intertwined in the discussion of student learning. Therefore, if we understand that relationships play an important role in the learning process, we may also eventually consider how they can affect student performance.

In the context of this study, it is important to state that teacher-student relationships are significant because they can *possibly* be used to improve student learning, and thus student achievement. While this study is not designed to directly address a connection to academic performance, theories and topics related to student achievement contribute to the framework used to approach this research. Similarly, this study provides a springboard for future studies which may consider the link between relationships, learning and achievement.

Understanding the positive effect which relationships can have on student learning and achievement sheds light on the importance of teacher-student relationships. With this understanding, we must continue to learn how these relationships develop and what factors constrain or foster them, and thus the importance of this study.

CHAPTER III: DESIGN AND METHODS

This research employed an exploratory, descriptive, embedded, single case study design. The design uses a case approach because the study asks “how” and “why” questions and explores contemporary educational practices in their unique context, which requires interview and documentary evidence (Yin, 2003). As Wenglinsky (2004) argued, large-N studies do not allow a researcher to have an in-depth understanding of what is happening in classrooms; therefore, this study of how and why teacher-student relationships are developing and being used took a case study approach. In order to address the essential questions of this research, the case approach allowed me to spend time with teachers and students in order to gain insight into how these relationships form and operate in practice, which may help the field to better understand them and, perhaps, to use them to promote better learning results.

The design focuses on a single case because High Tech Middle North County (HTMNC) (San Diego) represents a “critical” or unique case (Yin 2003) of relational pedagogy, promoting teacher-student relationships through Project Based Learning. Accordingly, the case of relational pedagogy at HTMNC constitutes the primary unit of analysis for the study.

The design is embedded because findings and conclusions regarding teacher-student relationships depend on teacher and student perspectives on relationships, their development and consequence, and pedagogy’s role in their development. Thus, teachers and students each form an embedded level or unit of analysis in the case.

The design is exploratory, accommodating teachers’ and students’ own perceptions of the meanings, sources, and utility of teacher-student relationships (Yin, 2003). The starting point of this research is the theoretical perspectives outlined above, which expect pedagogy to be a key factor influencing teacher-student relationships. This starting point helps orient the study.

Exploratory studies help to fill in gaps. Yin (2003) offers that “a justifiable rationale for conducting an exploratory study [is] to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry” (p. 6). By exploring how teacher-student relationships are fostered, I was able to develop propositions or hypotheses for further research, allowing others to better examine factors that ultimately contribute to student learning and achievement.

Study Procedures

This research involved the following procedures: case selection, obtaining school cooperation, collecting data (developing and pilot testing the interview protocol; revising the protocol, then scheduling and conducting interviews; conducting focus groups with students; designing and administering a survey to students based on the focus group results; collecting school or teacher documentary evidence), preparing data for analysis, analyzing data, conducting key informant reviews, sharing findings and complying with IRB procedures.

Case Selection

HTHNC’s relational pedagogy is the case in this research. As noted, the critical nature of the case, that is, its unique interest and context, justifies its selection (Yin, 2003).

A Critical Case: Relational Pedagogy at HTMNC. If pedagogy is one factor, perhaps the most salient factor, contributing to teacher-student relationships, what teaching practices specifically foster the relationships that promote learning, and how do they operate in practice? The relational pedagogy at High Tech Middle North County (San Diego) presents a rich opportunity to explore these issues. The High Tech Middle model is built on the premise that relationships matter to student achievement, thus these relationships lie at the heart of the High Tech learning environment.

High Tech schools are built on four design principles: personalization, adult world connection, common intellectual mission, and teacher as designer. All principles connect to the broad organizational mission of preparing students for the adult world by responding to the needs of every individual student. This mission is believed to best be achieved through the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL).

Project-Based Learning requires that all knowledge and skills be taught *through* projects. These projects are designed by individual teachers to create a “hands on” learning experience for students. Through this process, project benchmarks and final products will likely differ due to student interest or abilities. It is a teacher’s responsibility to know each of his or her students well enough to create a project that aligns to the capacities and interests of those students.

In order to effectively meet the needs of every student in project work, teachers must utilize personalization. Personalization can be measured by how closely the teacher monitors students’ academic and personal needs, how frequently students are able to pursue their personal interests through their work, and how frequently students receive individualized attention and support.

The level of personalization that is prescribed by the HT model requires teachers to know their students well. Each teacher approaches this task differently, ranging from daily conferences, blogs, weekly student letters addressed to their teachers, team-building and on-going icebreaker activities, surveys, reflections, and group discussions. Teachers have the freedom to approach these relationships in a manner that suits them, however, the HT model expects that teachers will develop, foster, and utilize these relationships to support students through the learning process.

A slight variance exists between each of the ten High Tech schools in San Diego county, as each executes the model differently. However, High Tech High Middle County (HTMNC) has made a significant commitment to developing and sustaining teacher-student relationships. Without these relationships, it would be difficult to implement the High Tech pedagogical model, which depends upon teachers knowing their students and providing them with ongoing support through the learning process.

According to the High Tech organization, the pedagogical model is defined as follows:

We emphasize projects at High Tech Middle North County because we believe they represent an effective pedagogy, offering multiple entry points for students with varying learning styles and academic experience. The projects described here range across the grade levels and academic disciplines, yet they share certain characteristics. Most important, they are all teacher-designed. They address essential questions that are relevant not only in the academic arena, but also in the world beyond school and in students' lives. They culminate in a product or performance, with intermediate products or "checkpoints" along the way. And finally, they all involve lots of reflection on the part of teachers and students. (website)

Implications for a Critical Case. In the context of the larger theoretical issues regarding how teacher-student relationships are defined, how they develop, and how they contribute to achievement, HTMNC provides a critical case of theory in practice. Its structure, culture, and relational pedagogy set the stage for relationship building (e.g., knowledge of student interests and abilities, frequent interactions, high expectations, caring) and student achievement. In other words, we would expect to see teacher-student relationships form at HTMNC and to see student learning benefit from these relationships. Thus, exploring how these expectations play out in the

HTMNC setting can sharpen our understanding of teacher-student relationships and the role of pedagogy and other factors that play in their development of these relationships. Because teacher-student relationships may increase student motivation and engagement, and because these factors are directly related to increased student achievement (Blanckstein (2004), Raider-Roth (2005), Brooks (1989), Deiro (1996), Aness (2003), McCombs (2007), and Kohn (2005), if the field gains better knowledge about what these relationships look like, how these relationships matter and how they are fostered, then policy and practice both may be better situated to harness this knowledge as a tool of student achievement.

Obtaining School Cooperation

Because of my position as a teacher at HTHNC, and because of the nature of ongoing reflection and improvement which permeates HT schools, access to teachers and students was easily attainable. The Director of HTMNC provided full permission for this study.

Data Sources and Collection

Data for the study came from interviews with teachers, focus groups with students, a student survey, and relevant school documents, such as teacher project sheets, teacher-generated assessments, student-led comments and administrative correspondence to teachers and parents, which enabled an analysis of the HTMNC model.

Interviews. Teacher interviews were based on a semi-structured interview protocol. Interview questions were based on the research questions and key theoretical elements, with final wording based on the results of a pilot test. The purpose of the interviews was to capture teachers' perceptions and experiences with relational pedagogy and teacher-student relationships. Questions included, but were not limited to, those in the protocol. I wanted to elicit perspectives and other information not anticipated in advance of the interview.

Pilot testing the interview protocol. I conducted a pilot test of the interview protocol with two teachers at HTMNC. This number represents 16 percent of the faculty at HTHMNC. The test consisted of two parts: (1) individual interviews with the teachers, then (2) a mini focus group with these teachers during which I explained the purposes of the research, characterized the information I received from their responses, and sought their advice about improving the wording or effectiveness of the questions.

Selection of interviewees. I interviewed all but one teacher at HTMNC (12). HTMNC teachers were classified by level of experience (novice, experienced, or veteran). By classifying teachers in this way, I was able to compare patterns of responses within these groups.

Interview procedures. Interview procedures included the following eight steps: (1) compile a list of teachers at HTMNC, (2) send a note explaining the study and requesting an interview, (3) schedule the interview at a time convenient for the interviewee, (4) meet at the appointed time, (5) review and complete the interview consent form, (6) conduct and audio tape the interview, (7) ask the interviewee to identify and contribute relevant documents such as teacher project sheets, teacher-generated assessments, student-led comments and administrative correspondence to teachers and parents, and (8) send a thank you note. I also secured the confidentiality of the interview process and records according to IRB procedures.

Student focus groups. In an effort to understand students' perceptions of these relationships and what promotes or constrains them, I conducted one focus group of six students. The group was selected at random to reflect all grade levels and gender. The purpose of the focus group was to elicit student perceptions about teacher-student relationships, how they form, and how relational pedagogy does or does not promote them. I adapted the teacher interview protocol, and used those questions to start the conversation with students. As with the teacher

interviews, I wanted to elicit perspectives and other information not anticipated in advance of the conversations. I audiotaped the focus group conversations.

Student survey. Based on the student focus group I then developed and administered a survey to all students at HTMNC, gaining advance approval of my committee regarding the survey's content. I conducted the surveys for all students during Advisory period using a computer-generated survey. HTMNC class size ranges from 25-27 students, and I asked each student in the school (approximately 300) to participate in the survey. Those students whose parents provide written consent were included in this study (100).

Documents. I collected available documentary evidence from the school and from each teacher regarding relational pedagogy, Project Based Learning, personalization, and related topics, as available. This information allowed me to construct conceptual and operational models of the school's relational pedagogy, and it provided new information about the pedagogy's implementation.

Data Analysis. In order to analyze the data collected for this study, I needed to complete several phases of organization and analysis, including preparing the interview and focus group data, capturing first impressions, coding the interviews, identifying patterns and themes, translating interview and focus group data into a student survey, analyzing the survey data, drawing analytic conclusions, and verifying findings.

Preparing interview and focus group data. First, I transcribed, verified (listened while reading the transcripts), duplicated, and cataloged the recorded materials.

Capturing first impressions. Then I read through the (interview and focus group) transcripts and documentary materials and wrote short memos recording my initial impressions

about the information that seemed most salient. These memos helped me identify themes and patterns.

Coding the interviews. Next I used content analysis techniques to code the interview data and to display these results. I employed both demographic/descriptive codes denoting type of respondent (novice/seasoned) and conceptual codes that organize the content into distinctive categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Neuendorf, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). My coding scheme started with a set of codes derived from the research questions and theoretical framework, then I allowed additional codes to arise as I read the data. The coding scheme was exhaustive (covering all the data) and mutually exclusive (so that one code only fit each piece of information). I then asked the committee to review the coding scheme before beginning this analysis.

Identifying patterns and themes. The coding allowed me to identify issues, patterns, and themes in the data base. I described these findings in narrative form, and I looked for ways to display the results graphically (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Neuendorf, 2002).

Translating interview and focus group data into a student survey. For this task, I needed to translate issues and themes from the interview and focus group data into a survey to explore how students identify teacher-student relationships and the factors that foster them.

Analyzing survey results. I analyzed the results from the student surveys by inputting all survey results into graph form from the online database, using Google “forms”.

Drawing analytic conclusions. My approach to drawing analytic conclusions from the data was to compare (1) teachers’ perceptions across teacher types (novice v. seasoned), (2) teacher and student perceptions, and (3) teacher and student perceptions to the HTMNC model. I then developed a model of the HTMNC pedagogy and of teacher and student perceptions, then

compared these models. Such a comparison allowed clear contrasts (similarities and differences) between theory and practice, and between teacher and student perceptions. I expressed these conclusions in terms of propositions that future studies can examine.

Verifying findings. As a means of ensuring that my findings and conclusions are plausible, I asked my committee members and a few key informants at the school to read and comment on draft chapters.

Sharing Findings. At the conclusion of analyzing my findings I wrote a memo to the Director of HTMNC and presented my findings, propositions and school implications to the staff at HTMNC during a Professional Development workshop. I also shared my findings with the co-founders and Director of Curriculum for the High Tech schools.

Complying with IRB. I followed CGU's IRB procedures for conducting this study, including permissions, confidentiality, data management, and other issues.

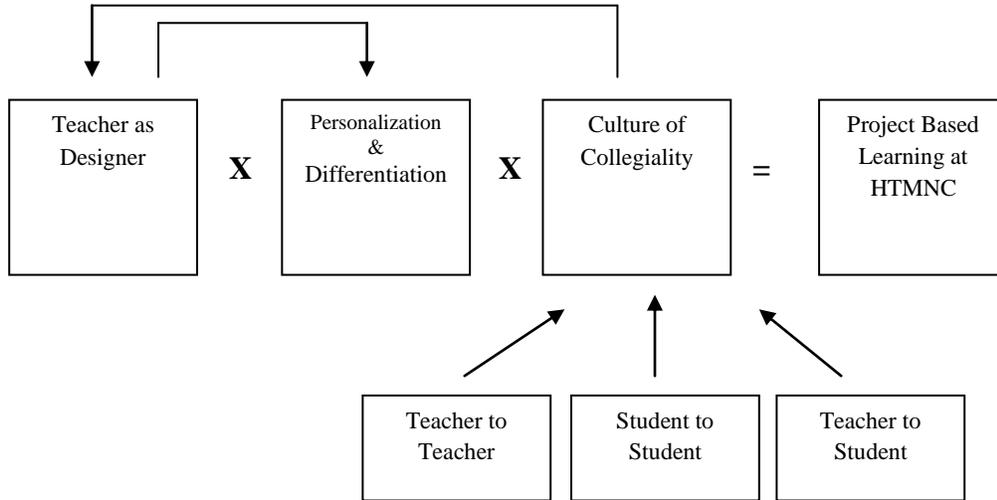
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

High Tech Middle North County (HTMNC) provides a rich context for a study on pedagogy and teacher-student relationships. In an effort to fully understand the pedagogy at HTMNC, the researcher worked closely with teachers and students to define the model, in theory and operation (Figure 1). By clearly defining this model, we are better able to understand how pedagogy, in addition to other factors, fosters or constrains teacher-student relationships at HTMNC. This information is valuable to our emerging understanding of teacher-student relationships because it explores how pedagogy influences these relationships and how such relationships can be used to improve student learning and achievement.

Defining HTMNC Pedagogy

While each teacher at HTMNC defined the pedagogical model at HTMNC differently, salient themes emerged throughout these different discussions and will be discussed in depth below.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of HTMNC Pedagogy



A Project-Based Pedagogy

The most glaring component that undergirds this pedagogy is the use of projects as an instructional strategy. “Project-Based Learning” (PBL) comprised the most common response by teachers when asked to define HTMNC’s pedagogy. In fact, over half (seven) of the staff referred to projects when defining HTMNC’s pedagogy. One veteran teacher, who was new to HTMNC, explained the pedagogy to be:

a lot more than the normal public school philosophy because we’re not just pushing testing all the time...the way we do things here, projects I think is an advantage by being able to do projects and also being able to do some form of standard discipline because

these projects gives them more of a wide range of understanding because now they actually put their hands on something besides just a pencil and pen.

Because PBL has become such an innate element of the school culture, teachers did not seem to feel the need to elaborate much on this explanation of PBL as an explicit mechanism of the school's pedagogy, and instead merely referenced it. One veteran teacher stated "*obviously* we're project based and... I think it all works just right, there's a really lovely balance of content and application of the content and so there's real learning or real long-term learning." However, such quick references to PBL often served as a springboard for discussion of other valuable elements that projects seemed to foster, thus also defining the HTMNC pedagogy.

Projects as an Avenue for Personalization and Differentiation

Projects lend themselves to several other elements that contribute to the holistic definition of HTMNC's pedagogy. *Teacher as Designer*, a High Tech Design Principle, is embedded in the pedagogical model at HTMNC, and was referenced specifically by four teachers. At HTMNC, part of the art of teaching includes designing projects, and all corresponding curriculum and assessment, in an effort to engage and support every student. One teacher described this pedagogical concept manifesting itself in her classroom in the following way: "...we might have an overarching thing that we're studying together but then in terms of what they learn or want to learn more about, I kind of let them have their choice with that." Through the autonomy that HTMNC's pedagogical model allows, teachers are able to incorporate student interests, thus supporting personalization. This concept of student "voice and choice" was a reemerging theme throughout the teacher interviews, as these terms were explicitly stated by the four teachers who discussed personalization as being a major component of HMTNC's pedagogy.

The concept of differentiation is related to three out of four design principles: *teacher as designer*, *common intellectual mission* and *personalization*, and thus aids in defining the pedagogical model at HTMNC. Differentiation is an instructional strategy that allows teachers to design projects to meet the needs and levels of every student in their classroom. Differentiation was explicitly mentioned by only two teachers when discussing pedagogy at HTMNC, but it is worth mentioning because it is part of the High Tech model and because it was implicitly referred to during discussions with teachers related to PBL. One teacher described differentiation simply as “using projects as an access point for every kid,” while another teacher described the way in which PBL allowed for differentiation as the following:

In Project Based Learning I’ll give them an introduction and then by doing the projects and by doing the research, that’s where the real understanding comes. And then for Math it’s kind of a different story with having diverse learners in the same classroom. I just feel like we cover things as a class but yet we give opportunities for the advanced kids to take it a step further and then we make accommodations for the lower kids to just take the learning at their level and not pushing them out of their comfort zone.

The final facet of differentiation that originated some discussion about the HTMNC pedagogical model was *personalization*. The High Tech organization defines *personalization*, amongst other qualities, as “the ability of students to pursue personal interests through projects” (website). Only two teachers explicitly stated “personalization”, but perhaps because this design principle, like the remaining three, are so engrained in the pedagogical culture that they are assumed and therefore not explicitly stated. One teacher echoed personalization as being part of the HTMNC pedagogy by stating “I think the overarching philosophy is an importance of individualized education and *true* individualized education.” Teachers described personalization

through the lens of differentiation, as if one could not exist without the other. Another teacher added that the pedagogy at HTMNC “is just really personalizing a kids’ education and...giving them the support that they need to grow at their own level”. Through teacher narratives it became clear that personalization could only be achieved through differentiation, facilitated by a curriculum designed by teachers. Therefore tailored project work shapes and thus defines the pedagogical model at HTMNC.

A Pedagogy Defined by a Culture of Collegiality through PBL

Project-based Learning also paved the road for a discussion about the role of the teacher and student, as defining HTMNC’s pedagogy. When asked to define HTMNC’s pedagogical model, five teachers specifically discussed the role of the teacher and student as being part of the art and craft of teaching at their school. Of these five participants it was explained that PBL requires that a teacher serve as a colleague more than a “beacon of knowledge”. Over the course of the remaining teacher interviews, although it wasn’t explicitly stated, it became evident that all but one teacher viewed their role as a facilitator in the practice of teaching and learning at HTMNC. One teacher described the teacher and student roles through the following example:

Instead of giving them a very rigid plan, I give them structure but I feel like they have a lot more liberty to find a way that they learn best in this atmosphere... I feel like as far as in Science especially that I kind of give them information but then they take it to the next level so I’ll give them an introduction and then they have to do research on their own and then share back with the class what they learned.

Through project work, facilitated by a teacher, students are seen as being collaboratively responsible for their learning. One teacher described the pedagogy at HTMNC as fostering “an active learning environment where students are encouraged to help make their own learning and

take it to another level”. Teacher and student working side by side through project work are fostered by many positive attributes discussed throughout this chapter. This collegial relationship between teacher and student also facilitates positive characteristics responsible for positive teacher-student relationships.

Finally, a definitive element of HTMNC’s pedagogy was the culture of the school. Although school culture is not typically used to define the art of teaching and learning, several teachers felt that pedagogy could not be discussed without considering the culture of the school, as the two characteristics were so deeply intertwined that they were viewed as dependent on one another. Again, “culture” was only explicitly stated by three teachers, however it was alluded to by the remaining teachers interviewed over the course of our time together. One teacher’s view of the HTMNC pedagogy including a “deep sense of community built in to each classroom” was described in more general terms by other teachers. These terms that were collectively used to describe learning in classrooms at HTMNC included “safety”, “love”, “fun”, and “care”. Another teacher defined the teaching philosophy at HTMNC as being a “responsive and adaptable” staff. This definition reinforces emerging characteristics of HTMNC’s pedagogy and a connection between them. HTMNC pedagogy is based in collegiality, which allows for personalization via school structures and teacher-created curriculum, thus enabling differentiation through projects.

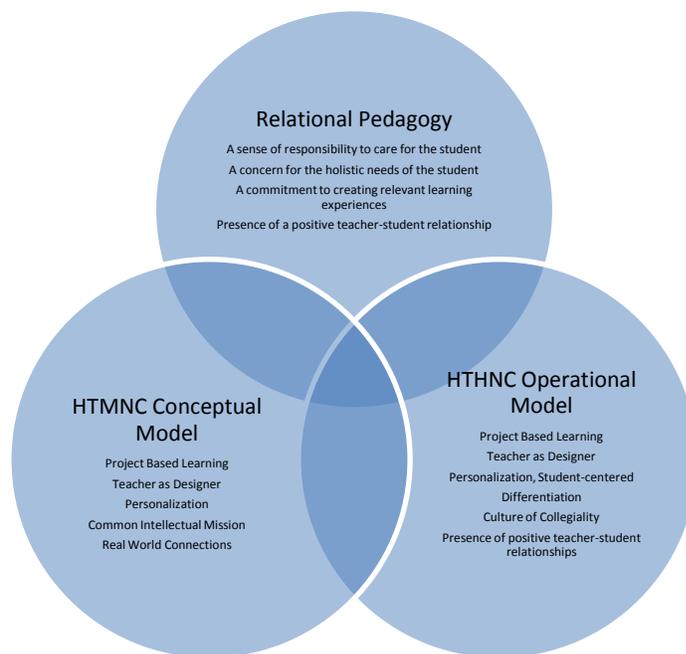
A clear definition of HTMNC’s pedagogical model provides insight to various factors that are significant to the field of teaching and learning. Seeing how these factors evolve from theory to practice greatly contributes to current literature on pedagogy and aids in understanding the value of an alternative pedagogy, such as PBL. By continuing our exploration of HTMNC’s

pedagogy in operation we can understand the role it plays in either facilitating or constraining teacher-student relationships, and eventually, how that affects student learning and achievement.

Pedagogical Model Alignment

The parallels between teachers’ personal pedagogy and the HTMNC model were striking (figure 2). Most teachers even used High Tech design principles explicitly when asked to define their own teaching philosophy. In an effort to understand how the HTMNC pedagogy plays out in practice, it is important to understand the individual philosophies which put the model in motion. An understanding of this “living model” sets the context for this study by providing the foundation for the ideas and philosophies which foster teacher-student relationships at HTMNC. The traits which define HTMNC teachers’ pedagogies can be divided into the categories of instructional strategies, teacher perception of the teacher and learner and the significance of relationships.

Figure 2. Conceptual and Operational Model Alignment



HTMNC Instructional Strategies

Eight teachers referred to instructional strategies as defining their personal pedagogy, three of which discussed differentiation. Differentiation is part of the HT Design Principle, *personalization*, which requires that teachers know and accommodate their instruction and curriculum to meet the needs and interests of each student. When asked to define their own pedagogy, teachers simply stated “it’s kind of my philosophy that not everybody learns in the same way” or that they found it their philosophy to create “projects that ‘hit every kid’”. Another teacher elaborates on the importance of differentiation in their personal philosophy by explaining that “you have to develop strategies trying to reach everyone...putting Gardner’s philosophies to test...[which] covers the whole myriad of understanding”. This concept of teaching to the needs, interests and styles of different learners in the classroom is just one example of the many ways in which the High Tech model influences and aligns with the individual teachers’ pedagogies at HTMNC.

Another instructional strategy that is supported by a HT Design Principle and was referred to by two teachers in their personal pedagogy was the concept of *Real World Connections*, or the instructional attempt to make connections between curriculum and what goes on outside of the classroom. As one beginning teacher explained:

It’s kind of cool to come in without coming from a teaching background and having a practical understanding of what happens outside of school. So I really focus on that...so in math I’ll bring in money or use shopping with something that is on sale...I guess because I’m a new teacher and I was an engineer, I’m coming from such a different background that I feel like my philosophy is more practical...[using theory] it’s hard to

make that connection with some of the concepts, but I think that is the best way to teach and learn, once they can actually apply it [what they are learning].

Another teacher added that they utilized hands-on approaches to teaching and learning in an effort to support real-world connections. This “experiential” instructional strategy allows students to apply their knowledge through various avenues, which can lead to engagement. Real-World Connections is a prized design principle at the HT schools, often attracting many workers from “industry” to teach at their schools. This career to academic connection was not surprising to see played out in the pedagogies of two teachers at HTMNC, most likely because both of these teachers worked in the “field” prior to becoming a teacher.

Teacher Perception of the Self and Student

For every teacher interviewed it was clear that teaching was personal for them and they took seriously their responsibility to educate. In fact half of the staff interviewed (six) explicitly mentioned their role, or the role of the student, as defining their personal pedagogy.

The role of the student is also connected to the responsibilities and view of the teacher. One teacher described her pedagogy as “I want students to keep working until they accomplish whatever goal they have. So it’s not just like a turn it in and be done with it thing, they keep working at it.” Another teacher added “I want kids to be able to show me what they know. I want kids to be successful, so it’s more about growth and where they enter my classroom-I want them to make strides by the end of the year.” For these two teachers, in particular, their pedagogy was defined and driven by the student’s growth. When asked to define their personal approach to teaching these six teachers primarily discussed a calling to truly educate the holistic needs of the student, and for the student to be actively involved in that process. These philosophies continued

to paint the picture of the culture at HTMNC, which was later discovered to be one of collegiality grounded in project work.

The Role of Relationships in HTMNC Teacher Pedagogy

While many teachers discussed academics or the holistic needs of students within their pedagogy, four others mentioned the importance of developing relationships. One teacher simply stated that her pedagogy was based on “relationships and how people work together”. Another teacher explained “the most important think you can do is connect with kids...they heart of it is letting them know they are loved and they’re valued”. A different teacher echoed the re-emerging theme of collegiality within this study, as being key to her pedagogy; She explained that “working side by side” with students drove her pedagogy. Although it was only discussed by one teacher, it is worth mentioning that one veteran teacher’s approach to teaching and learning was driven by her goal to develop relationships with families. She stated “I want to know a lot about their families and I want to try and figure out ways to get their families involved in education”. With evidence of such a large amount of positive teacher-student relationships at HTMNC, it was surprising that only four teachers mentioned this component in their personal pedagogy. However, while it wasn’t explicitly stated by teachers when asked about their pedagogy, it was alluded to throughout their interview, as evidenced by the following findings.

Understanding the personal philosophies about teaching and learning of teachers at HTMNC provided valuable insight to the operational model of the HTMNC pedagogy. Through this insight, it was apparent that an alignment exists between individual teacher’s philosophies and that of the school.

Evaluation of Personal Alignment to HTMNC Model

When asked to discuss their own pedagogy, most HTMNC teachers discussed the traits which define the HTMNC model. This alignment may be due to the hiring and training process within the High Tech organization; that is perspective employees are placed through a rigorous hiring process that includes teacher, student, and administration interviews, in addition to a demo lesson in a HTMNC classroom. Through this process, “candidates” have the opportunity to be sure their philosophy aligns with that of HTMNC and vice versa. Once teachers are hired, they are required to attend a two week summer training that assimilates them to the culture of the HT organization. Also, beginning teachers receive further training and support through the High Teach Graduate School, which offers teaching credentials, Master’s degree programs and Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) certification. Since every teacher at HTMNC has completed or received a portion of these requirements and/or supports, it is not surprising that the line between their personal pedagogy and that of the organization has been blurred.

When asked how teachers viewed the HTMNC pedagogy influencing what happens in their classroom, answers could be clustered into two categories: philosophy and practice. Philosophically, three teachers mentioned that the HTMNC pedagogy influenced their project brainstorming and planning. One teacher explained “the idea of *adult world connection* helps me be able to start thinking about [what I will teach] and how they’ll apply it”. As a result of HTMNC’s pedagogy another teacher added how it influences her thinking: “I think of how I can tie concepts together and then link it to something in the real world”. Another teacher echoed this concept of application to content as influencing her thinking about “education being relevant to kids’ lives. I want them to see purpose in what they do and have multiple ways of showing what they know and to grow as critical thinkers”.

The majority of teachers (nine) discussed the HTMNC model as directly influencing their actions, rather than thoughts or ideas, in the classroom. The concept of collaboration was the most striking alignment between the teachers' pedagogy and the HTMNC model. Several teachers explained that the importance placed on group work for students at HTMNC had a profound impact on their instructional choices. Three teachers also mentioned the influence that collegial collaboration had on the decisions they made in their own classroom. One veteran teacher stated "teachers also collaborate with one another. We get so much feedback on what we are implementing in the class. I feel so much better than if it would have been just me doing everything alone...that sense of collaboration that the kids have is also put in place with teachers." The veteran teachers at HTMNC provided valuable insight to these experiences of teacher-driven work and collaboration as empowering, and were also able to provide valuable comparisons to previous schools where they had worked. As one of these teachers explained, "everything here is collaborative versus in a lot of regular public schools, where you're just isolated in your classroom and you really don't know what's going on next door or you really don't agree with what is going on next door". These teachers all discussed the personal value they saw in the concept of collaboration, both for teachers and students. HTMNC's commitment to collaboration was reflected in HTMNC teachers' personal pedagogies by directly influenced their instructional choices, thus showing alignment between teachers' personal pedagogy to the HTMNC pedagogical model.

Developing a clear definition of HTMNC's pedagogical through the collective thoughts of the staff was imperative to this study. Once the model was established, it then became necessary to move from theory to practice by understanding how this model plays out in the day-to-day ideas and actions of the teachers and students. Discussing each teacher's personal philosophies

about teaching and learning enabled a more robust understanding, not only of the pedagogical model, but about its alignment in practice. This knowledge was necessary in order to fully understand the context in which teacher-student relationships were developing.

Understanding Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

As the literature suggests, positive teacher-student relationships play a role in successful learning situations. In order for us to better understand these positive teacher-student relationships, we must take an in-depth look at how they manifest at HTMNC. In order to do this we must first be aware of how teachers and students at HTMNC define these interactions. According to participants, in order for a teacher-student relationship to be positive, they must have the following characteristics (Figure 3):

Figure 3
Defining Traits of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Trait	For teachers	For students
Personalization	Present –teacher ability to know student needs (academic, personal, social, emotional)	Strong-91% “neutral, agree or strongly agreed” curriculum tailored to their interests. 96% felt their teacher designed projects at their academic level. 92% said teacher knows how to teach them in a way that they understood.
Teacher Characteristics	Present-teacher personality and demeanor, rapport	86% “neutral, agree of strongly agree” that their relationship with their teacher is based on their personality.
Respect	Strong-“mutual respect” referenced by most teachers	Strong-91% strongly agree, agree, neutral
Communication	Present – communication regarding academic and non-academic content exists in class and “in passing”	Basic-80% strongly agree, agree, neutral that teachers discuss non-academic content
Collaboration	Very Strong-PBL facilitates	Strong-91% strongly agree,

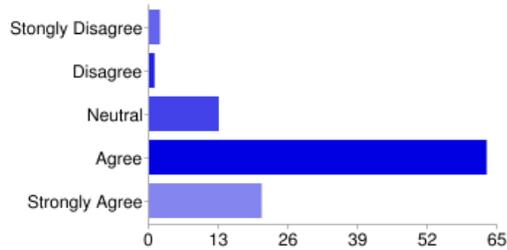
	“revision relationship”, student “voice” and thus collegiality.	agree, neutral that their teacher spends one on one time with them in the classroom
Teacher Care and Support	Very Strong-teacher provides support for different needs, advocate/mentor, high teacher expectations	Strong- 86% felt teachers had high expectations
Comfort and trust	Very Strong- accessibility and approachability of teacher	N.A.

The Presence of Personalization.

According to the teachers and students of HTMNC one of the defining characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships was personalization, or how well the teacher and student know one another. Five teachers discussed this concept of “knowing the student” when asked to define a positive relationship. Out of 100 students surveyed, 84 participants agreed or strongly agreed that they knew their teacher well (Figure 4). These responses reflect that the majority of students at HTMNC feel as though they know their teachers and that their teachers know them, but what does “knowing each other” entail? Through interviews it became clear that in order for a positive relationship to exist, teachers and students must know each other on an academic and personal level. According to teacher interviews, this requires the teacher to know a student’s academic abilities, including challenges and strengths, and what interest they hold outside of school. However, through many interviews it became clear that possessing academic knowledge of a student was often dependent on knowing the student personally. Therefore, it is difficult to parse these two variables and develop separate definitions of these elements of positive relationships. For example, one teacher shared that “it can be appreciating them for something they created and/or growth that they’ve made. So there’s academic ones and then ones who just knowing who they are and what’s important to them and talking to them about things totally

unrelated to our classroom.” This brief narrative displays that knowing students personally and academically can be equally important in positive relationships, but also shows the blurred division of academic and personal relationships.

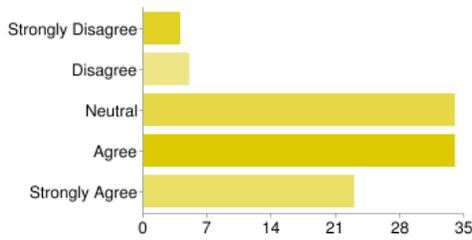
Figure 4. I know my teacher well



One teacher shared a common sentiment of other HTMNC teachers, which was the use of a personal knowledge of the student to harness an academic relationship that would allow the student to be successful.

Not only knowing your students on a personal level and where they come from, and what influences the work that they do in your class, but also knowing them academically, as students. What their strengths and weakness are and trying to somehow blend in their backgrounds with what they do in the classroom. And that can range from you know they aren't going do work at home because of things going on at home, so making sure that everything gets done here at school. You know, whether it's coming in to office hours or students who come from other backgrounds and English is their second language. And so how you use that to make sure they're successful here and don't fall through the cracks. Student surveys reflected teachers' abilities to bridge these personal relationships into academic ones, in an effort to help them learn. When asked if students felt as though teachers used this personal knowledge to design projects that interested them 57% responded "agree" or "strongly agreed"(Figure 5).

Figure 5. My teacher designs projects that interest me and that I can relate to



Not only did students feel as though the curriculum was tailored to their interests, but also their ability. Ninety six percent of students responded that they felt as though their teacher designed projects at their academic level and 92% responded that their teacher knows how to teach them in a way that they understand (Figure 6, 7). These data provide evidence that HTMNC teachers are successful in developing personal and academic relationships, through the commitment and implementation of personalization. Since both teachers and students referred to personalization as a defining characteristic of a positive teacher-student relationship, and student data supported that those features were present, it can be suggested that positive teacher-student relationships exist at HTMNC. This further validates that HTMNC serves as a significant context for this study on teacher-student relationships and that an exploration of the factors that are supporting these relationships can contribute to the field of existing knowledge on teacher-student relationships.

Figure 6. My teacher designs projects that are at my academic level

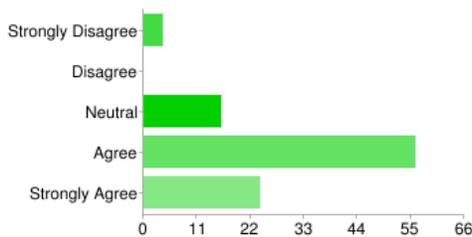
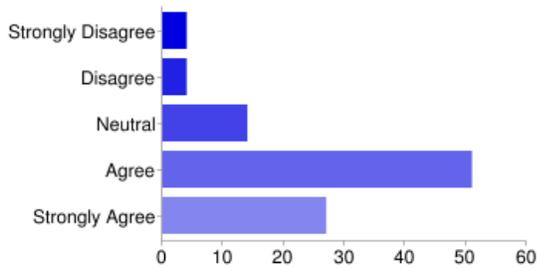


Figure 7. My teacher knows how to teach me in a way that I understand.

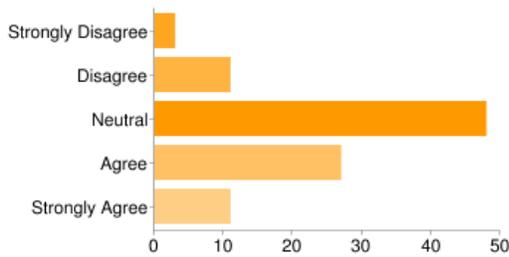


Teacher characteristics and positive relationships

For approximately half of students and four teachers, a positive relationship is defined by the personality of the teacher and interactions that are a result of their demeanor. 38% of students responded “agree” or “strongly agree” that their relationship with their teacher is based on their personality (Figure 8). These opinions were supported by two teacher narratives which highlighted basic personality traits such as openness or humor as being definitive features of a positive teacher-student relationship. One teacher explained a positive teacher-student relationship defined by her personality, and how that resonates in the classroom:

I think for me personally, just being really candid and it’s not like the man behind the curtain or the woman behind the curtain; it’s always expressing a purpose for why I’m doing what I’m doing. I don’t give homework for the sake of giving homework...I’m always extremely clear with them on why I do things and I just think not having any pretense or ulterior motives, or I’m not trying to trick them in any way; I’m very open and honest with them.

Figure 8. My relationship with my teacher is based on their personality.



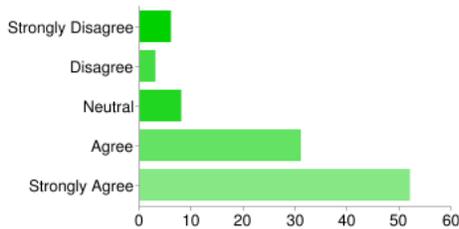
Another teacher added that a “jovial attitude”, exemplified by humor, defines positive teacher-student relationships. Such openness and humor creates rapport between teachers and students that may aid in facilitating positive relationships. Another teacher explained that the ability to laugh at yourself and have the kids laugh with you develops positive interactions. These positive interactions can generate a bond between teachers and students, which is also referred to as a positive teacher-student relationship.

The Basics: Respect and Communication

When asked to define the basic components of a positive teacher-student relationship, it was not surprising to hear terms such as respect and communication, which are often associated with any well-functioning relationship. While one teacher noted this respect as being exchangeable between the teacher and student as “that each person feel valued for what they’re bringing...they just want to be loved so much and they want to love you”, another teacher defined this respect as needing to originate from the teacher. This teacher described a positive relationship as one in which “teachers need to just respect their students and their interests and where they’re coming from-their backgrounds”. A basic reference to the term “respect” was a reoccurring theme throughout teacher interviews. Clearly students are recipients of this feeling of respect described by their teachers, as 83% responded “strongly agree” or “agree” when asked if

they felt respected by their teachers (Figure 9); reinforcing that this trait of positive relationships exists in large numbers at HTMNC.

Figure 9. My teacher treats me with respect.



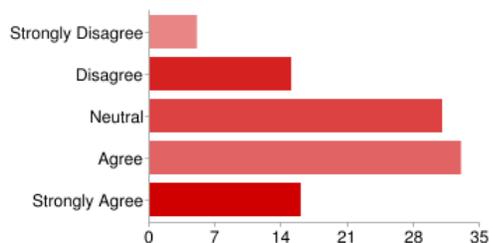
Similar to “respect”, the ability of a teacher and student to communicate is linked to positive relationships. Half of the staff at HTMNC referred to respect with a basic explanation of “open lines of communication” or “two way communication”. It was clear that the frequency and way in which teachers speak to students allows for a sense of understanding that is necessary for positive relationships. While the content of such communication can vary, its existence is what builds the positive relationship. One teacher shared:

I think it [communication] needs to be about everything. Something positive can come out of something negative. So the positive interactions are like when they do well in class or they ask a question that you know when you start telling them the answer it becomes a discussion and they’re into it. But sometimes they don’t do what they’re supposed to and then you have to have that serious conversation. Even though something negative happened, it turns into a positive because they realize it from you talking about it.

The content that defined communication varied, and was a re-emerging theme within the definition of a positive relationship for both teachers and students. One teacher explained that non-academic communication can sometimes be just as valuable for building relationships as academic discussions. When asked the content of their communication with teachers, 49% of students responded that teachers talk to them about things other than academics (Figure 10). This

communication supports the element of personalization that both teachers and students suggested was necessary for positive relationships. Communication also leads to other traits of positive relationships, such as collaboration.

Figure 10. My teacher talks to me about things other than academics.



Working Side by Side: Collaboration

Due to the nature of PBL, collaboration is likely to occur between a teacher and student. The combination of the absence of textbooks, mandated instructional material or high frequency of direct instruction, coupled with teacher-designed projects, facilitates teacher-student collaboration. This collegiality that exists at HTMNC was believed by many teachers to define a positive teacher-student relationship. One teacher explained that teacher-student and student-student collaboration positively affects the learning environment, which allows for positive teacher-student relationships. Another teacher described collaboration as providing opportunities for student voice, elaborated as “It’s really important for them to know that they have input, that it’s not just you have to do what I say, no questions asked. So they feel like they’re an active participant in their education”. Several teachers described that collaboration, similar to the scenarios described above, happen through one on one conferences with students during project work time. 64% of students confirmed that teachers spend one on one time with them in the classroom (Figure 11) and 65% state that their teachers communicate with them often (Figure 12). Through such collaboration teachers and students are able to develop a collegial relationship, which is seen as a positive one at HTMNC. One teacher described this as “the

student being open to constructive criticism from the teacher”, leading to a “revision relationship”. Through the process of PBL, and the revisions that such work entails, collaboration is present and thus seen as an element of a positive teacher-student relationship.

Figure 11. My teacher spends one on one time helping me in the classroom

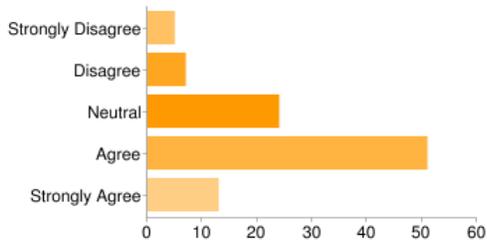
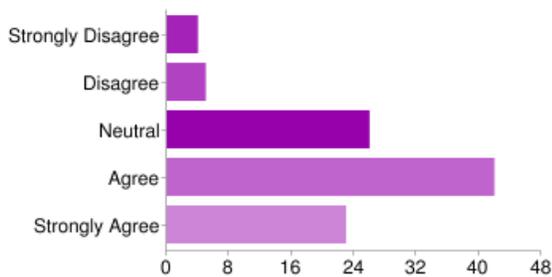


Figure 12. I communicate often with my teacher in class.



Knowing a Teacher Cares: Support and Expectations

Eight out of twelve teachers interviewed explicitly stated that a student must know that a teacher cares about them in order for a positive relationship to develop between a teacher and student. One teacher described this “teacher care” simply as when a student needs help “if they don’t understand...they know I’ll be here for you”. Another teacher provided an example to show teacher care as: “...with technology these days you can sign into your computer at night and you can chose to not be seen, but if you’re seen students can easily access you and ask you questions”. This accessibility was a common theme discussed by teachers as being a way for students to know that teachers care about them. Through such access, teachers are able to

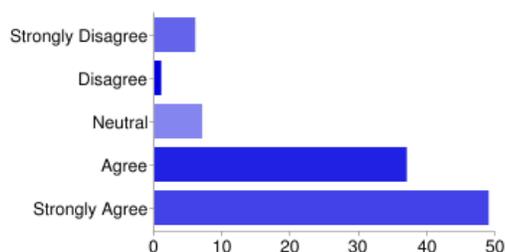
provide support to students for whatever needs they may have, and that was seen as a major contribution to positive teacher-student relationships.

An additional way for students to know that a teacher cares about them is based on teacher expectations. One teacher explained the connection between expectations and caring as:

“The kids see that you care about them. If you’re disappointed they kind of feel like they let you down because they know that I’m not here to be an authority figure and put them down, but I’m here to support them and make them be successful. And I let them know if they’re capable of doing much more and they’re not fulfilling their potential”.

Other teachers explained that they push students because they believe they are capable and because they want to see them work to their potential. When students were asked if they felt as though their teacher had high expectations of them, 86% of HTMNC students responded positively (Figure 13). Based on a definition of “teacher care” built on high expectations, it is evident that students at HTMNC feel as though their teachers care about them.

Figure 13. My teacher has high expectations for me.



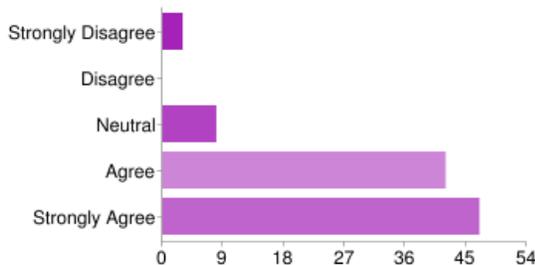
Some teachers used a metaphor to describe “teacher care” that is necessary for positive teacher-student relationships. One teacher defined a positive relationship as the following:

When students feel like the teacher is on their team...I think the most important aspect is that students don’t feel like it’s a me versus them kind of experience in their education; they really feel like teachers are a part of their education and an important ally in their

education and so being on a kids team is always informing what I do, and how I approach discipline and how I approach being an advocate for a student.”

Another teacher used the metaphor of a family to describe the characteristics of a positive teacher-student relationship. Regardless of the terms that were used to define positive relationships, it was evident at HTMNC that teachers felt strongly that they must make it clear how much they cared about their students, in order for a positive relationship to exist between them. Based on this teacher commitment to caring for students in an effort to promote positive relationships, it was not surprising that 89% of students at HTMNC felt that their teacher cared about their future and a mere 3% stated that their teacher did not care about their future (Figure 14).

Figure 14. My teacher cares about my future.



Another element of “teacher care” that re-emerged for both teachers and students was the concept that a teacher must care about a student’s academic and non-academic needs. One teacher described “the teacher’s willingness to be there for students besides just the academics...gives them the idea that their teacher will be there in whatever facet they need them to be, whether it’s academic or personal or social”. Another teacher echoed this statement by explaining that a positive teacher-student relationship exists when a student approaches different teachers for different needs. This awareness of teacher care and the ability to seek different teachers for different types of “care” and support closely relates to comfort. If a student is more

comfortable with a teacher, the student is more likely to approach that teacher, which is another defining element of positive teacher-student relationships discussed in the following section.

Comfort and Trust

All but two teachers described comfort and trust as being present in a positive teacher-student relationship. According to many teachers, if a student feels comfortable with a teacher, they have a good relationship. This comfort leads to a factor of “approachability”, in which a student feels safe coming to the teacher with issues or asking questions. One teacher described this process as “if a student feels comfortable with me and they ask lots of questions and voice their concerns, it makes me feel like we have something good when they come to me because they’re not afraid to ask me a question; and that makes me feel like I’m approachable”. The student’s ability to trust the knowledge of the teacher, regarding content, was discussed by several teachers. However, several teachers went on to explain that this comfort and trust is also evident with topics unrelated to academics. As one teacher noted, “a positive relationship is where the child feels comfortable enough to come to the teacher and ask questions and talks about personal issues and ask a question that could be defined as a stupid question and feel comfortable doing so, knowing that they’re not going to be laughed at or jumped on or embarrassed”. If students feel comfortable enough to talk to a teacher and seek advice, it shows that those students are comfortable enough with their teachers to trust their opinion about non-academic issues. This non-academic support is an important component to building a relationship, but is highly overlooked because it does not relate directly to school or schoolwork. However, the insight provided by HMTNC teachers and students proves that this trait of teacher-student relationships is worth further consideration, in an effort to better facilitate this factor and thus improve learning conditions.

Teachers described that comfort and trust within a positive relationship are established in several ways. One contributing factor is “accessibility” of the teacher to the student. Teachers discussed that students will approach them before and after school, at lunch, and during non-academic times. Providing opportunities where the teacher is available for students is clearly significant to facilitating this trait. Other teachers felt that honesty allowed for the comfort and trust necessary in positive teacher-student relationships. When asked to describe a positive relationship, one teacher described how “they would really talk to me honestly about where they are academically what their needs are academically”. Another teacher supported this statement by adding, “I think we have to be honest with our students but also do it in a way where it’s constructive...if we want a positive relationship”. According to HTMNC teachers when these factors in Figure 4 are present students feel comfortable and are willing to approach teachers. This builds trust and reassurance that is necessary for any type of positive relationship.

Defining Negative Teacher-Student Relationships

If the field is to obtain a better grasp on ways to foster teacher-student relationships, then researchers and practitioners must also consider what factors are present in a negative relationship and what is responsible for such interactions in an effort to ameliorate these in school. Because this study focuses on one particular case, HTMNC, it is worth discussing how HTMNC teachers defined a negative relationship. This definition consists of mostly the opposite of those characteristics which define a positive relationship, with two additional characteristics: teacher pedagogy and outside factors.

The Basics

Similar to a negative relationship in general, a negative teacher-student relationship is seen as one that does not embody basic components such as comfort, communication and respect. Teachers explained that a lack of trust is evident when teachers and students are constantly questioning one another, which contributed to a feeling of “unapproachability”. One teacher described this as a student possibly feeling like there was “an imaginary wall between the teacher and student, like it’s all business all the time and they feel like they can’t approach their teacher in general”. As a result of not feeling comfortable approaching a teacher, a student might not feel comfortable asking questions, which can affect their progress or performance in that class. According to HTMNC teachers, a lack of comfort and trust creates a feeling that a student cannot approach a teacher, which quickly creates a block in communication. One teacher explained how a lack of communication can be detrimental to teacher-student relationships:

The biggest problem is if you don’t have that open line of communication and students aren’t telling you, they don’t even necessarily have to tell you the specific thing that is going on, but I always tell them like let me know something’s going on because you’re acting out in class, for example, and I see it as you know something’s going on but you’re not telling me what and I can’t help you if you’re not at least letting me know something is there. So I think that is the biggest cause—it’s just there’s something out there that’s bothering them which is usually what it is, but you don’t know that and if they’re not communicating that to you, it’s really hard to proceed from there.

Also connected to communication is respect. When one of these components is missing it is difficult for the other to exist, which often happens in negative teacher-student relationships. Two teachers made reference to “disrespect” as being a defining element of a negative

relationship. All of the elements discussed by teachers can be considered basic components of any relationship, which are highly interconnected. Other traits of negative relationships were those that existed as a result of pedagogical decisions.

Teacher pedagogy

Decisions related to one's approach to teaching and the role of the teacher were seen as being defining elements of a negative relationship by teachers at HTMNC. Half of the staff (six) described the role of the teacher as a direct instructor, rather than a facilitator, as central in a negative teacher-student relationship. One teacher simply stated a negative teacher-student relationship is when "the teacher is just assumed to have all the knowledge already and they're delivering it". Another teacher refers to this as "When teachers are seen as the beacon of knowledge and ... everything has to go through them; sort of all the ideas or ... just things that arise in a classroom." Through teacher interviews it was clear that PBL facilitates a dynamic and unique role of a teacher that allows positive, rather than negative relationships to occur. Every teacher interviewed suggested that they approached teaching and learning mostly through side-by-side interactions, where knowledge is shared, rather than delivered solely by the teacher. One veteran teacher provided a valuable comparison between HTMNC and other schools by adding "in other schools it is viewed more as like, you know, the teacher and student and I'm here to give you information and it might not be as much of a two way street and maybe doesn't carry over into the personal stuff".

Aside from the role of the teacher, another approach to teaching that defines negative relationships is the inability of the teacher to be flexible. This inflexibility was referred to as a teacher's failure to be willing to work or grow or truly listen to their students. One teacher added, "if you neglect [student background and their experiences] or you don't try to look at it

from their perspective I think you're going to have a hard time connecting with the students". Based on these teachers' explanations, if teachers are unwilling to listen to students and honor the flexibility necessary to integrate student voice into their curriculum or approach to teaching, a negative relationship will likely develop.

Outside factors

Eight teachers mentioned outside factors that were unrelated to the teacher or the school as defining negative teacher-student relationships. These defining factors were commonly referred to as "preexisting walls" that students have up, prior to entering the classroom. One teacher explained the matter, saying,

When [students] are shut down for whatever reason—when there's a disconnect. And maybe it's because a student doesn't trust you as a teacher or has so many other things going on in their life that dealing with school is not a priority. Or you are working hard with a student to communicate but there's not the support at home-sometimes that makes things really difficult.

Teachers explained that these walls exist due to events that occur outside of the classroom during non-academic activities such as recess, events off campus or at home. These outside factors are problematic for several reasons, all of which contribute to negative relationships. One reason is that these "walls" make it difficult for teachers and students to connect. A veteran teacher explained that "typically, and especially in middle school, students become withdrawn. Whereas in elementary school I think they're typically more pleasers, so they will keep trying at the relationship. In middle school it's more like I'm done with you and so I see that more as like withdrawing...". This disinterest in connecting with a teacher that is often associated with adolescence can serve as a defining element of negative teacher-student relationships because it

makes it difficult for a teacher to connect with a student, on an academic or personal level.

Another effect of these “walls” is that it creates judgment, on behalf of the student, which makes it difficult for teachers to develop positive relationships with students. One teacher described “when a kid is coming in with all sorts of walls already up and they’re already not liking me, I have to break that down. That’s challenging and it takes more time”. Another teacher added that these walls are detrimental when they exist for not only students, but teachers as well. She explained that making judgments about a student based on negative interactions can ruin a relationship between a teacher and student.

Analogous to basic traits which define a positive relationship, a negative relationship was defined by the absence or inverse of those factors. While the decisions made by teachers related to interactions with students and their pedagogical philosophy were all seen as defining negative teacher-student relationships, features that existed outside of these factors were seen as equally important.

Factors that Facilitate Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

At HTMNC, teachers and students noted how macro-level factors, such as decisions made by the school, and micro-level factors, such decision made by teachers, facilitated positive relationships.

Macro level: School Philosophy and Structures

School Philosophy. When asked what teachers believed to facilitate positive relationships with students, nine teachers responded that it was the school’s approach to learning (Figure 15). Some teachers simply stated “projects” or “project-based learning” as supporting positive relationships, while others felt that the element of personalization that accompanies projects was

responsible for allowing these relationships to develop. One teacher described that projects explicitly allow for this personalization. She explained:

Just knowing the kids. That’s not knowing them academically but knowing what are they interested in and I’ve done projects in the beginning of the year about identity to get the kids knowing each other but then it also shows me what they are interested in. It’s like those personalized things that every student feels like they can connect. I try to do projects where kids can kind of show their shared interest and then I can kind of see what makes them tick and know a little bit about their story.

Figure 15. Factors that Facilitate Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

	<i>Description</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Specific Factors</i>	<i>Student Input</i>
Teachers	#1 Veteran *a	Teacher personality	Teacher characteristics, rapport	Figure 8,10
		School pedagogy	Work with students as colleagues	Figure 10,11,12
	#2 Veteran	School structure	Class size	Figure 16
		School structure	Class size	Figure 16
	School pedagogy	Teacher as facilitator	n/a	
	Teacher personality	Teacher characteristic	Figure 8	
	#3 Veteran	School pedagogy	Real-world connection, role of teacher	n/a
		School structure	Advisory	n/a
	#4 Veteran	School structure	Advisory, Teams, SLCs	Figure 17,18
		Teacher personality	Rapport, Caring	Figure 10, 13,14
	#5 Veteran	School structure	Teams, Class size	Figure 16,17
		School philosophy	Personalization	Figure 5, 6,7

#6 Veteran	School structure	Class size, advisory, teams, flexibility,	Figure 16,17
	School philosophy	Teacher as facilitator	n/a
#7 Experienced *b	School structure	Class size , Teams,	Figure 16,17
	Teacher Characteristic	Personality, rapport	Figure 8,10
	School pedagogy	personalization	Figure 5,6,7
#8 Experienced	School structure	Class size, Teams, Time, Freedom, Advisory	Figure 16,17
	School pedagogy	Teacher as facilitator	n/a
#9 Experienced	Teacher characteristics	Teacher personality, rapport	Figure 8,10
	School Structure	Teams	Figure 17
#10 Beginning *c	School pedagogy	Personalization	Figure 5,6,7
	School structure	Class size, Time, Freedom	Figure 16
#11 Beginning	Teacher characteristics	Teacher personality, rapport	Figure 8,10
	School structure	Summer Bridge program	n/a
#12 Beginning	School structure	Class size	Figure 16
	School philosophy	Projects as commitment	Figure n/a
	Teacher characteristic	Personality, rapport	Figure 8,10

*a notes a Veteran teacher as an individual who has taught for six or more years

*b notes an Experienced teacher as one who has taught for three to five years

*c notes a Beginning teacher as one who has taught for one to two years

Personalization can include creating opportunities through project work to get to know students, but they can also serve as an avenue for personalizing the curriculum to meet their needs and

interests. One teacher explained that personalization makes students feel more valued and therefore respond more positively to the relationship.

The school philosophy of PBL, which facilitates a collegial culture between teachers and students, was also referenced by eight teachers as being a contributing factor to positive teacher-student relationships. When asked what fosters positive relationships, one teacher explained that “when we’re doing projects and I’m working with them as a colleague on something, that’s harder to do in a worksheet curriculum, driven-crazy-pacing-guide universe. But it’s easier to do in our situation.” Several teachers discussed the opportunity to work collaboratively with students, through “project work time” [this is the term used to reference the time that is allotted to students in class to work on a project with the support and guidance from a teacher] as being a factor which contributed to these relationships. One teacher described this through the following narrative:

I think in project-based learning, the teacher really becomes the facilitator. And also when you’re working with the kids all day long versus you standing up in front of the room all day long, it just gives you an opportunity to give more one on one feedback with the kids. You get to know them better too. And like there’s those moments of ya know once the kids are comfortable with you, you know during project time they’ll ask you a random question and I’m fine with that, I will answer because I feel like that helps relationships. So like yesterday we had project time and some of the boys I heard them talking about college basketball and so I was like is that really what we’re supposed to be doing right now? Then I started having the conversation with them and in only lasted like two minutes, but it just helped build relationships.

Through this collegial relationship, facilitated by the school's philosophy of PBL, teachers are able to work closely with students, allowing them to get to know students and personalize the curriculum. In addition, this collaboration fosters a sense of commitment that is evident in project work, which is seen as being responsible for positive relationships as well. One teacher described this as: "The commitment that is made to these kids as far as projects go, the work they're turning out, is a testament to that commitment. It's not just a talk, teachers practice it on a daily basis and they put all these supports in place because of this commitment." In other words, a teacher's commitment to student project work is a reflection of the institutional commitment that is made to students. This commitment is taken from a theory, or school philosophy, and put into practice through purposeful school structures, which were also seen as major contributing factors to positive teacher-student relationships.

School Size

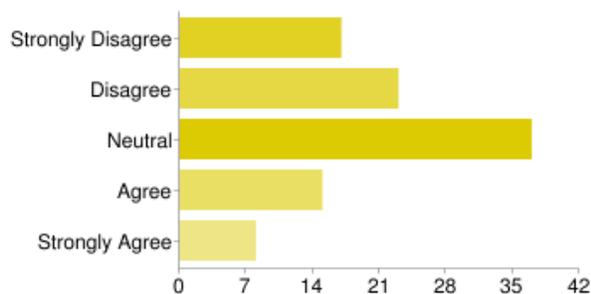
There are many structures put in place by the school to deliberately support the design principles and pedagogical philosophy of HTMNC. One of these is the intentional decision to remain a "small school" with small classes. Several teachers made reference to the size of their classroom (two classes of approximately 26 students) as being a factor which contributed to positive teacher-student relationships. One veteran teacher provided a comparison to a school where she previously taught, which shed light on how important class size is to facilitating teacher-student relationships:

Class size is super important. When I think back to my first day of teaching, 64 kids sat down in my classroom at the same time I was in front of them terrified. I was seeing over 100 kids every single day, and I just didn't know them at all. I found that I was maybe able to connect with 25-30 of them, but here I'm able to connect with 54—like every

single one of these kids I know them and I know what's important to them. So class size is crazy important.

Under these circumstances, which exist in most comprehensive high schools, it is difficult to work closely with a large number of students. Interestingly, when students were asked if they felt the size of their class affected their relationship with their teacher, 40% felt as though it did not and 37% responded “neutral” (Figure 16) . These student opinions are inconsistent with teacher beliefs about the power of small classrooms. Because teacher claims are not empirically supported in the existing literature, it is important to remain open to other explanations related to the significance of classroom and school size, as it relates to relationships and student achievement. However, a great deal of research has been dedicated to “going small” and the importance of relationships in those institutions, and HTMNC teacher opinion supports the general belief among teaches that small learning environments support teacher-student relationships.

Figure 16. The size of my class (# of students) affects my relationship with my teacher.

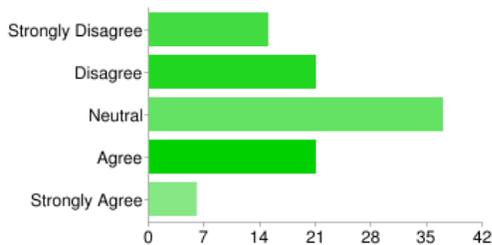


Teaching and Learning Teams

The small classes at HTMNC are part of a structural decision that also includes teaching and student “teams”. Teachers explained that the way classes are set up provides opportunities to get to know students better and also make positive connections by seeing students continuously throughout the day in blocks. By teaching in blocks, teachers are allotted two hours of time with

students in addition to the flexibility to share time with their partner teacher. While eight teachers saw the structural decision of placing students in teams to be a significant contribution to teacher-student relationships, students did not necessarily agree. In fact, 36% disagreed and 37% were neutral when asked if they thought how often they saw their teacher during the day affected their relationship with them (Figure 17).

Figure 17. How often I see my teacher during the day affects my relationship with my teacher.



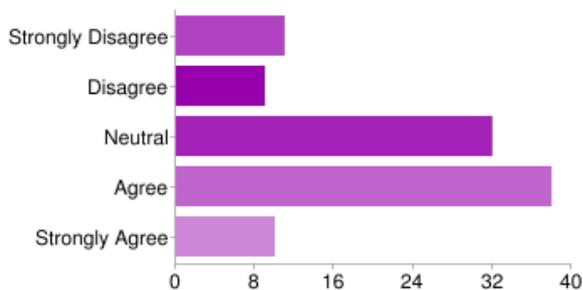
According to teachers, not only is the division of students into teams important for relationships, but so is the distribution of teachers into partnerships. One teacher provided insight to the value of teaching in teams to support relationships as the following:

The class size is important but so are the teaching partnerships. Just having another person, that ally, that you can discuss student behaviors with and just kind of ‘hey are they doing this in your class?’ or ‘hey, I noticed that Jimmy wasn’t performing well, maybe there’s something going on, is he doing this in your class or just mine?’

The existence of team structures provides more teacher flexibility regarding how they choose to spend their time with students. Two teachers mentioned that “team time” is a factor which facilitates positive relationships. Team time allows flexibility for activities besides instruction, such as ice breaker activities, that allow for bonding between teachers and students. In addition to these team building activities, another way that team time is spent at HTMNC is preparing for and holding Student Led Conferences (SLCs). During SLCs, students are responsible for

facilitating conferences regarding their academic, social and personal growth, with their parents and teachers. Only one teacher mentioned that SLCs serve as an important contribution to positive teacher-student relationships, but when students were asked, almost half (48%) responded “agree” or “strongly agree” that SLCs helped them have a good relationship with their teacher (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Student Led Conferences (SLCs) help me have a good relationship with my teacher



Non-Academic Classes

The daily schedule at HTMNC includes non-academic classes during first and sixth period. These non-academic classes were seen by five teachers as being a source of support for teacher-student relationships. First period every day begins with Advisory and the last period of the day is spent in an elective class called “SIG” (Student Interest Group) or Xblock (a physically active course). All of these classes are taught by HTMNC teachers and include all three grade levels at the school. One teacher described these courses as positively contributing to relationships:

With Xblock and SIG you get sixth, seventh and eighth grades, so those class sizes are even smaller than your normal class size. So you’re making connections with the entire school. So like next year the sixth graders that come in and are in my classroom next year, I’m not starting over with. Some of the kids you might now know as well, but you kind of know all of the kids in some aspect or another.

Advisory was also mentioned explicitly by four teachers, when asked what factors support positive teacher-student relationships. One teacher explained that in Advisory they talk about things that happen outside of school, which allows teachers to get to know students more. During an unrelated question about school improvement, ten teachers made reference to Advisory as potentially being a structure put in place to support teacher-student relationships, but almost every teacher agreed that its execution was a challenge. One veteran teacher described the *potential* of Advisory to “build relationships with students because it is held every day of the week” but went on to explain that the staff does not have a consistent and clear understanding of the mission of Advisory at HTMNC. Despite its challenges, all teachers who mentioned Advisory did so in the context of it being a factor that was intended to contribute to positive teacher-student relationships, and with improvements, could really act as an engine to drive them.

The pedagogical ideas of HTMNC, combined with the structures put in place to support such a philosophy, all contribute to an overall school culture that every teacher interviewed found to contribute to positive teacher-student relationships. These macro-level factors shed light on intentional decisions made by school designers and leaders to support teacher-student relationships. The insight that HTMNC teachers provided throughout this study suggests that these factors allow relationships to flourish, which is important for future school designers and leaders who are interested in fostering these same qualities in an effort to improve student learning. These macro-level factors also provide the opportunity for micro-level features, which were also found to be important to fostering positive teacher-student relationships.

Micro level: Inside the Classroom

Because teacher pedagogy and personality were used by students and teachers alike to define positive relationships, it is not surprising that these themes re-emerged as being factors which were seen as contributing to such relationships. Defined here as “personal pedagogy”, this term includes decisions made by teachers about teaching and learning, their personality, characteristics, and demeanor, in addition to non-academic decisions that they make regarding interactions with students.

Pedagogy and Personality

Four teachers attributed choices that they made in their classroom to contributing to positive teacher-student relationships. One teacher described how the way in which a teacher approaches content fosters these relationships: “In the Humanities you have writing as a tool to get to know your kids. We start off the year with narrative writing, which is based off of your own experiences, so you learn about them through their writing”. In addition to instructional decisions that are made about teaching and learning, a teacher’s personality also comprised these micro-level factors that facilitated positive relationships according to seven teachers. When asked to discuss factors that fostered teacher-student relationships, responses included: “just being yourself...silly”, “crack jokes...self deprecating”, “thinking at their age level”. Another teacher saw her personal choices aiding positive relationships. She explained: “telling students I love them almost every day. I take an interest in what they’re doing. I joke with them in a really respectful way. I try to find the positive in all of them and call it out.”

Two other teachers explained that the decision to be honest and upfront was part of their personal pedagogy that fostered positive relationships. This was defined as transparency and consistency with academic expectations, in addition to a personal level by being open to talking

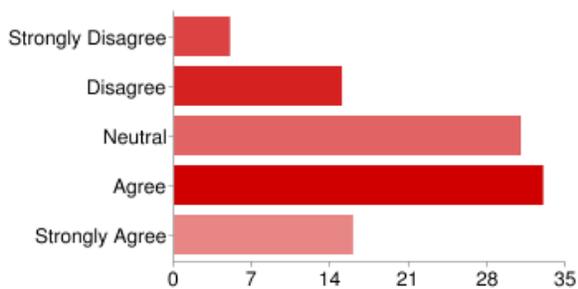
about life outside of the classroom. One teacher explained that “being transparent about your own life . . . your personal goals, or things you’ve done in the past—when they see where I’m a person and not just like someone else or just a teacher”. While half of the staff discussed pedagogy and personality as factors that contributed to positive relationships, less than half of the students agreed. Again, Figure 8 shows that only 38% of students felt as though their relationship with their teacher is based on their personality. With 48% of students feeling neutral about this topic, it can be assumed that students were not opposed to the idea of teacher personality contributing to their relationship, they were merely indifferent.

Non-Academic Encounters

The element of transparency discussed previously contributes to non-academic encounters, which five teachers also believed to be important factors in developing positive relationships. Teachers saw these interactions as mostly happening through personal, side conversations with students, termed by one teacher as “one-on-one stuff”. During these moments teachers are able to find out about student backgrounds, ranging from family matters to what happens outside of school. According to one teacher, these happen by “just taking the time to not just talk to kids about content, but asking them what’s going on in their personal lives and being willing to listen to them when they’re super excited about something that’s going on; just taking the time to sit down with them”. Teachers explained that these interactions can happen during fun activities, such as field trips or school events, but that it is also important to just being available for conversations with kids. These conversations can also be driven by an awareness or dedication on behalf of the teacher to focus on non-academic growth as well. One teacher described this as a teacher’s responsibility to “focus on the content and their performance, but also their social and emotional development too”. When students were asked about non-academic conversations,

49% agreed or strongly agreed that their teacher spoke to them about topics unrelated to academics (Figure 19). It is important to note that while only five teachers explicitly stated that non-academic encounters were a factor that contributed to positive teacher-student relationships, these encounters were discussed by every other member of the staff throughout the course of their interview. For example, non-academic encounters were discussed by two teachers in the context of project work time and by another teacher in the context of school structures when discussing 6th period classes. With almost half of the student population confirming that these encounters indeed happen and every teacher acknowledging their significance, non-academic encounters are confirmed to be an important factor in developing positive relationships.

Figure 19. My teacher talks to me about things other than academics



Classroom Climate

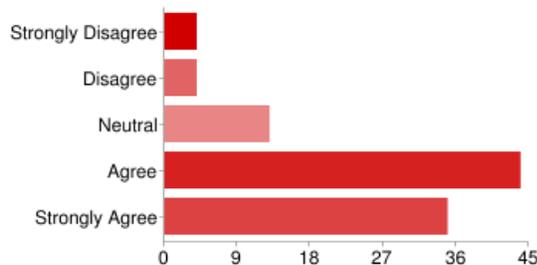
A teacher’s personality guides his or her pedagogy and non-academic encounters, which collectively establishes a classroom climate. When asked what factors facilitate positive teacher-student relationships, five teachers responded that elements of a positive classroom climate are responsible for such relationships. These elements include a classroom set up for collaboration and one that is dedicated to developing trust and comfort for all members of the class. One teacher described the following as being important to building a positive climate:

I think what really fosters this [positive relationships] is trust-making things clear for kids and letting them know that it’s okay to mess up. In other words, if you don’t fall down

every now and then you'll never know if you can pick yourself up. So again, I tell kids there is not real wrong answer. The only real, wrong answer is the one you never attempt because we'll never know how to give you that skill if you don't let me know where you're having that loss.

One teacher explained in this type of climate students feel more confident and are willing to take academic risks that lead to progress. These factors were seen as aiding in the development of a classroom climate that fostered positive teacher-student relationships at HTMNC. When students were asked if they felt that their teacher supported a caring classroom environment, 79% agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 20). With this combined teacher and student insight, one can see how these positive classroom climates indeed support positive teacher-student relationships.

Figure 20. My teacher supports a caring classroom environment.



While larger mechanisms, such as school philosophy and structures, were seen as contributions to positive teacher-student relationships, so were these smaller, personal decisions made by teachers every day inside their classroom. It is important to note, however, that the macro-level factors previously discussed support these micro-level factors; as elements such as class teams and 6th period, for example, provide more ample opportunities for students to get to know their teacher's personality. As a result both of these levels must coexist in order for positive teacher-student relationships to flourish at HTMNC.

Factors that Constrain Relationships

In an effort to effectively identify the factors which support teacher-student relationships, we must also be able to understand what factors constrain these relationships. If this study is to make a contribution to research on school improvement and student achievement, it must be able to identify what schools are currently doing to undermine teacher-student relationships.

Researchers and practitioners must be able to explain how decisions related to school structures and curriculum are negatively affecting these relationships, so as to avoid them in the future.

Because only half of the staff at HTMNC has worked in environments outside of the High Tech organization, it was difficult for the majority of teachers to speak to this topic. However, these “veteran” teachers provided valuable insight about their experiences in other schools, which allowed them to reflect and offer in-depth comparisons between these schools and HTMNC, in regards to teacher-student relationships. Similar to factors which *facilitate* these relationships, teacher responses about factors which *constrain* them also can be categorized into macro-level and micro-level factors.

Macro level: Classroom size and school structures

External mandates were discussed by two teachers as being detrimental to teacher-student relationships. One teacher described how curriculum decisions are often made by individuals far removed from the classroom, rather than allowing the classroom teacher to make those decisions based on student’s needs. In these situations, teachers do not have the flexibility to personalize curriculum, which can constrain their relationships with students.

In addition to external mandates, school structures were also seen as being potential origins of constraint for teacher-student relationships. Seven teachers felt that school size had a significant impact on these relationships; this was not surprising since an overwhelming number

of teachers felt that class size had the potential to foster relationships. Veteran teachers at HMTNC offered comparisons to other schools where they had taught. These teachers contended that large class size made it difficult to connect with every student, which, in turn, makes developing relationships sometimes impossible. The following narrative supports these challenges:

I think sometimes when you have so many kids that there's just not enough hours in the day to really meet the needs of all of them, or form like deep relationships with teach student. Maybe you can know one or two things about them, but I'm not going to know they have a soccer game that weekend or that their mom just had a baby. I think they end up being just numbers.

Class size is also directly related to class structure and schedules. In most comprehensive high schools students attend six courses throughout the day. Teachers at HMTNC, who have experienced team structures and block schedules, felt as though traditional class structures can often constrain teacher-student relationships. One veteran teacher explained that a six-period schedule constrains relationships because the teacher sees too many students in a day.

Overall, one of the sources of attraction for HMTNC teachers to teach in this setting was because of the small, personalized approach to education. Therefore, it was not surprising that their dedication to school structures which support close interactions with fewer students was evident in their beliefs and approaches to teaching and learning.

Micro level: Teacher pedagogy and student personality

The majority of factors that were believed to constrain relationships were school-wide, systemic issues. However, a few teachers mentioned other factors which are worth noting. One beginning teacher referenced teacher pedagogy as being a source of constraint for teacher-

student relationships, explaining that “if a teacher takes the standpoint of I’m just here to dispense information to you and you need to sit in your seat and be quiet, then you don’t have interactions throughout the day”. These interactions were seen as being a factor which facilitated positive relationships, and actions which counteracted such interactions were assumed to constrain teacher-student relationships. Another beginning teacher referred to student personality as being a potential source of constraint for these relationships. This teacher explained a situation in which she was not able to communicate with the student, due to a poor attitude, which made it very difficult to have a positive relationship with them.

Most beginning teachers were unable to speak to macro-level factors that constrain relationships because of their lack of experience in structures outside of HTMNC. As a result, all responses that deal with micro-level issues were discussed by beginning teachers because these related to their level of experience, inside their own classroom at HTMNC. In comparison, more experienced and veteran teachers were able to discuss larger, systemic constraints, such as school structures and schedules. In general, when asked what factors constrained teacher-student relationships, almost every teacher used the HTMNC model as a positive lens through which they discussed what they saw as working well at their school to facilitate relationships. This optimistic approach to addressing a negative topic provided insight into the sense of pride that existed within the teaching community at HTMNC. It was evident that teachers really believed in the HTMNC model and were proud to be a part of a community that valued and thus cultivates positive teacher-student relationships.

Summary

The data collected throughout this study provided an in-depth look at the critical case of HTMNC, its theories, structures and practices. Moreover, these data allowed valuable insight to small scale and systemic decisions that affect teacher-student relationships. The salient findings gained from this study will contribute to a new understanding of factors which shape teacher-student relationships. With this knowledge school leaders and teachers can make more informed decisions regarding school design, instruction and curriculum, in an effort to improve student learning and achievement.

Teacher descriptions of HTMNC pedagogy allowed the development of a collective pedagogical model, which was established as a culture of collegiality based in Project Based Learning. This model was then used to move beyond theory to practice. The model was used to compare HTMNC's philosophies to those of individual teachers. All participating teachers' personal philosophies aligned with those of the established model. Implementation of the model was then discussed, through teacher practices in the classroom. These practices focused on project design, instructional decisions and personal approaches to students and learning. Although this study is grounded in a theoretical framework on teacher-student relationships, it was necessary to develop a working definition of teacher-student relationships, as seen by teachers and students at HTMNC. Both positive and negative teacher-student relationships were defined, and then we moved beyond these definitions to looking at the sources of them. An in-depth analysis was offered of factors that not only fostered these relationships, but constrained them as well.

Finally, we consider the role in which teacher-student relationships play in student learning. With a more clear understanding of how these relationships can be harnessed to improve teaching and learning, we can utilize this knowledge to improve student achievement.

CHAPTER V: THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Over 100 years after the introduction of ideas that set the stage for progressive education, so many educators continue to hold these endearing ideas in their hearts. Unfortunately, so few of them are able to link their hearts and hands in their work. The recent wave of school reform geared toward “going small” or increased autonomy through charter schools, have enabled more teachers the opportunity to work in a system that approaches education on a human scale. These institutions, like HTMNC, pride themselves on personalization, grounded in the belief that teacher-student relationships matter. This belief begs the question, how do they matter? We now consider the significance of teacher-student relationships and their contribution to teaching and learning.

Student Learning

Teacher-student relationships were believed by all HTMNC teachers to affect student learning. This study set out to understand how these relationships were not only developing, but how they were being used. The following discussion highlights the ways in which relationships were harnessed by teachers in the classroom to promote student learning.

Personalization

Personalization was believed by HTMNC teachers to support relationships and to improve student learning. When teachers were asked if they believed relationships helped them teach better, the outcome of such relationships was viewed through two different lenses: one academic, the other socio-emotional. One teacher explained, “If I know more about them, I know what their

needs are and I know what their interests are, so I can develop lessons around that”. This process contributes to student learning because if a teacher is creating things based on student interests then they’re going to be more willing to take risks, which contributes to student learning.

Another teacher explained how relationships allow them to teach better because they provide an avenue for differentiation, which he viewed as a key component to learning:

Oh yeah [relationships] help me because when you know your kids you know their strengths and weaknesses and then you can chart them differently and give accommodations accordingly...knowing who they are, knowing how they struggle, and then being able to make accommodations so that they can be successful...I think it just helps you target better like where kids need extra support.

Other teachers mentioned that teacher-student relationships are important to teaching and learning, not because of academics, but because they allow the “basic needs” of the student to be met. These needs were viewed as a precursor to learning. Specifically, this was referred to by several teachers as “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs”. When asked how teacher-student relationships contribute to teaching and learning, the following was mentioned:

I just think walls get in the way of their learning. It’s kind of that model of basic needs and you know they always talk about basic needs being your food and your sleep and safe place-shelter, but I think the basic need of being respected is a human need. Once kids feel that broken down, they’re available to learn.

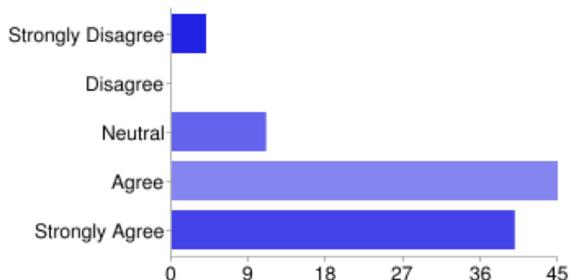
Another teacher echoed these same feelings about relationships by stating:

I guess you could go to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in the sense of if they’re not worried about asking a question and if they’re not worried about how they’re going to look in front of their peers, they’re not worried about all these other things that middle-

schoolers worry about all the time, then they can focus more on the content and maybe ask a really stupid question but that leads to a really good question and a better conversation can come from that. So not being stifled.

According to both teachers and students at HTMNC, if a teacher has a good relationship with a student, they are able to meet or provide the basic human needs of a student, which allows the student to learn better. The middle level of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs suggests that “social needs” are necessary for survival. The students of HTMNC supported Maslow’s theory by suggesting that if they felt comfortable asking a teacher for help, that would help them learn better. In fact, 85% of students at HTMNC stated that the ability of a relationship with a teacher could in fact provide this basic need, allowing them to learn better (Figure 21).

Figure 21. If I feel comfortable asking my teacher for help, that helps me learn better.



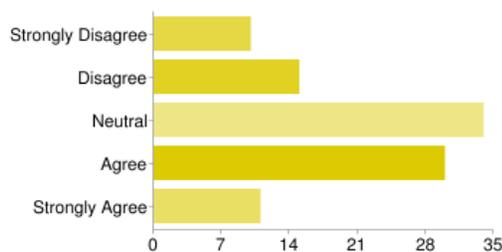
Motivation and Engagement

When teachers were asked to discuss how they saw relationships contributing to student learning, ten responses could be categorized under the terms “motivation “or “engagement”. Each response provided valuable insight to better understanding how teacher-student relationships foster resilience, and thus capacity to learn.

Several teachers discussed that relationships support how engaged the student is in learning the content. Some teachers mentioned that when positive relationships are present, students are more likely to participate and be productive. Some students stated that the relationship that they

have with a teacher actually decides if they pay attention in class. 34% responded “neutral”, while 41% stated “agree” or “strongly agree” that these relationships affect their attentiveness, and thus engagement (Figure 22). It is presumed that if a student feels connected to a teacher or material, they become vested in the class and more motivated to learn. One teacher explained how engagement can foster resilience and thus relationships, by stating “...when you come to a road block or when you come to something that’s challenging you have something to fall back on and push you forward.”

Figure 22. My relationship with my teacher decides if I will pay attention to the in class (if I'm engaged).



The remainder of HTMNC teachers explicitly stated “motivation” as being a key contribution of teacher-student relationships to student learning. One teacher explained that when a positive relationship is present “they help students learn because I think students have more buy-in and are more motivated when they know you care about what they do”. One teacher explained how developing connections to content fosters relationships and thus engages and motivates students to learn:

When students are excited about a concept or project it just makes the process a lot easier and I think that stems from the teacher bringing a level of excitement and a level of passion to the project that they’re doing...your excitement and your passion and what you bring to the project, it resonates with them and that kind of goes with your

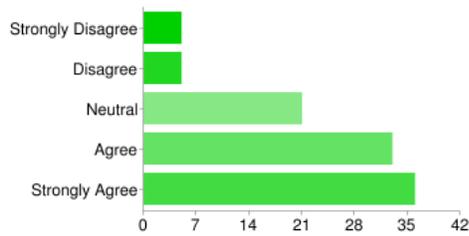
connection to them. I think the more connections you have with them, then they will get excited about you know creating work and making cool stuff.

Another teacher contributed to this understanding of how teacher-student relationships can foster motivation, and thus improve student learning, saying:

With good teacher-student relationships you are uninhibited. You are more affected by them. You're more inspired to be the best teacher you can be for them...kids will do stuff for you when they care about you in a different way...they will reach further, they will ask you more questions, they will come after school, during lunch, and they're just more inspired to take their learning to this other level...just more motivated...

As a result of these connections and engagement referred to by HTMNC teachers, students were believed to be more motivated to learn. As a result of this motivation, one teacher explained that “productivity level” usually increases. Students of HTMNC were similarly asked if they believed that their relationships with teachers affected their motivation and achievement. 21% replied “neutral” and 69% replied “agree” or “strongly agree” when asked if they liked a teacher they believed they would be more likely to do well in that class (Figure 23). Overall, the insight offered by HTMNC teachers and students supports achievement and motivation theory, which explains that when a student is engaged via curriculum or a teacher, they are more likely to achieve (Wigfield & Eccles 2000). PBL at HTMNC fosters the perfect hybrid of school culture and curriculum that fosters teacher-student relationships necessary to create resilient and engaged students who are motivated to learn.

Figure 23. If I like a teacher I'm more likely (motivated) to do well in class.



Class Climate

The final way in which teacher-student relationships were seen as significant to student learning was in the role they play in fostering a positive class climate. HTMNC teachers explained that factors such as comfort, trust and respect are facilitated by teacher-student relationships and these develop a positive classroom environment that is more conducive to student learning. Three teachers explained that positive teacher-student relationships create a sense of comfort. In this comfortable learning environment, supported by positive relationships, students are not as nervous to make mistakes, which is important for student growth and learning. These “mistakes” were further discussed by a teacher, who explained the following:

It’s like when I talk to my students about brainstorming and I’m like “no idea is a bad idea, just let it flow, like just spit anything out”. More good can come from that because junk is coming out with it too but that’s okay and they’re not inhibited by that and they’re not thinking already like how do I censor myself in such a way that only the good comes out, which I think inhibits the good from coming out.

Other teachers went on to explain the way in which this sense of comfort, fostered by relationships, further facilitates a positive classroom climate. One teacher stated: “When you have a deeper connection with your students I feel like they’re more open to hearing what you have to say and learning from one another and being comfortable putting themselves out there, making themselves vulnerable by sharing their work...so just giving that sense of I guess support

and community.” In addition to creating an environment of support, relationships allow students to feel more comfortable approaching the teacher, which was defined previously by HTMNC teachers and students as an important component to positive relationships and student learning. Finally, one veteran teacher discussed relationships as important to creating a sense of respect, which was believed to contribute to student learning. She shared the following insight:

If [students] respect me and see me as somebody who is important in their life, then they give me the space to lead them. And if they don't then it's over. I had a class back at school X that just didn't see me that way...and it was really hard just teaching them anything because I had to break down the wall first before I could teach you know. Now may years later and in an environment where you know it's really possible, I just walk in and say “guess what we're going to do today?” and they just do it!

Overall, basic qualities such as respect, comfort and trust were re-emerging themes throughout this research conducted on pedagogy and teacher-student relationships. Teachers and students both indicated that when these basic features exist, teachers and students are able to connect. Teachers are then able to harness these connections to support student learning. The structural and pedagogical model of HTMNC, aligned with and supported by individual teacher's pedagogies, truly cultivate these connections.

In conclusion, it is important to note that *every* HTMNC teacher believed that teacher-student relationships were a significant component, often a prerequisite, for student learning, as seen in Figure 24. This resounding commentary on the value of relationships in school provides a foundation for future research to build upon, in an effort to better understand ways in which relationships can be utilized to improve teaching and learning, and thus student achievement

Figure 24. Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships to Student Learning

Category of Importance (and sub-definition)	Short-term Consequence for Learning (Defined by participant)
<u>Personalization</u> 1. Teacher knowledge of student strengths/weakness 2. Teacher knowledge of student interest 3. Teacher meets “human” needs of students	1. Facilitates differentiation 2. Enables student “passions” to be integrated into lessons/projects 3. Basic (socio-emotional) needs can be met, in order for student learning to occur
<u>Motivation & Engagement</u> 1. Connections to material 2. Fosters resilience 3. Increases productivity level (participation, attentiveness)	1. More likely to do work if they can connect to what they are doing 2. Provides inspiration to move beyond “road blocks” 3. More likely to take steps necessary to complete work
<u>Class Climate</u> 1. Comfortable, trustworthy environment 2. Student approaches teacher 3. Mutual respect between teacher and student	1. Students feel safe to make mistakes, seek/ receive feedback and input 2. Allows the teacher to better support student needs 3. Breaks down “wall”, necessary for learning

Propositions

Lessons from this study on the linkage between relationships, pedagogy and achievement are best summarized as propositions that indicate the relationship between pedagogy and teacher-student relationships. These lessons involve the various factors which affect teacher-student relationships and in turn how these relationships are leveraged to improve learning conditions for students at HTMNC.

Proposition 1

Personal pedagogy develops positive teacher-student relationships to the extent that school structures work in conjunction with teacher personality.

This study found that teacher-student relationships are fostered by school structures (such as small class size, small schools, daily schedules and team structures), but that these factors do not work in isolation. Rather, school structures work in union with teacher personality and individual approach to teaching and learning, thus highlighting the power of personal pedagogy.

Several school structures were discussed by teachers throughout this study in the context of factors which facilitated teacher-student relationships. These structures were part of an intentional design by the founders of the High Tech schools to create an environment where teachers and students could work side by side on meaningful projects. HTMNC structures such as school size, class size, teams, and daily schedule promote a collegial environment that fosters the development of teacher-student relationships. These structures are not unique to HTMNC and in fact exist in many schools across the country. The Coalition of Essential Schools (n.d.) in fact prides itself on celebrating schools who strive to function on a human scale. While embedded structures at HMTNC lend themselves to relationship development, they alone do not guarantee that teachers and students will develop positive relationships.

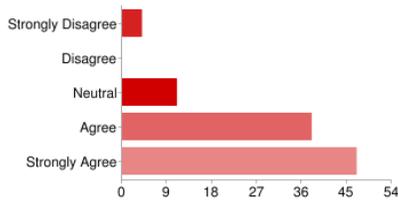
Two factors, aside from school structures, developed as reemerging themes that fostered positive teacher-student relationships. These factors are teacher personality and teacher personal pedagogy. It is important to note that these factors can exist in various models and designs of schools, and while supported by, are not dependent upon school structures.

A teacher's personality was seen by both students and staff as contributing to positive teacher-student relationships. In fact, ten teachers explicitly discussed the role their personality played in developing relationships with their students. One teacher explained positive relationships are dependent upon "the rapport that you have [with students] and how you carry yourself in the classroom". Similarly, 38% of students said that their relationship with their

teacher is dependent on their teacher's personality (see Figure 8). Characteristics such as sense of humor and communication style, which shape a teacher's personality, can exist in any environment. Because of this, school structures are not deemed as a requirement for the development of positive teacher-student relationships. Therefore, structures such as those embedded at HTMNC can be viewed as helpful in developing relationships and supporting those that exist, but they are not a prerequisite.

In a similar vein as teacher personality, personal pedagogy was also seen by members of HTMNC as contributing to positive teacher-student relationships. Personal pedagogy can be defined as the combination of a teacher's personality, their epistemological beliefs and their approach to teaching (in practice). All twelve teachers mentioned "projects" throughout the discussion on their pedagogy and 85% of students supported the use of PBL in their classroom (Figure 25). And although HTMNC's pedagogical model aligned closely to all teachers' in theory and practice, each teacher had a slightly unique definition of knowledge and approach to education. As one veteran teacher stated: "[defining HTMNC's pedagogy] is such a hard question because when I've looked in different classrooms the impression that I got is very varied, like from one teacher to another." Although the school is united in their commitment to projects, no two teachers or classroom are the same at HTMNC due to teachers' personal pedagogies. Such differences supports that despite a school's pedagogical model or structure, variety can exist. This variety proves that while school structures are helpful, they are again not necessary for the development of positive teacher-student relationships.

Figure 25. My teacher uses projects to teach our class.



Conversely to factors which were seen as contributing to positive relationships were those that were viewed as potential constraints. While such constraints included teacher personality and personal pedagogy, so was student personality. One teacher described a negative relationship that she had with a student that didn't allow them to have any sort of communication because any interaction between them just "took her to a bad place as a teacher and a facilitator". When micro level obstacles such as these develop between a teacher and a student, school structures become insignificant to the discussion of teacher-student relationships. Such constraints can exist in a small classroom or a large classroom, small school or a large school-size is irrelevant to the relationship if the teacher and student cannot connect due to personality misalignment or pedagogical approaches that do not effectively meet the needs or interest of the student.

Veteran teachers provided valuable insight to the role in which school structure play in developing teacher-student relationship because they were able to offer a comparison between HTMNC and alternative environments. Three of these teachers specifically discussed the value they saw in the size of classrooms at HTMNC in developing positive relationships. However, what they also mentioned throughout our discussion was their ability to connect with students, although fewer than at HTMNC, in other settings. One teacher compared her experiences, noting:

I had 64 [students] in a trailer. I was seeing over 100 kids every single day, and I just didn't know them at all and I found that I was able to connect with maybe 15, 20 but here I'm able to connect with 54, every single one of these kids; I know them and I know what's important to them.

Another veteran teacher added: "I come from schools where I had 40 students per class and I had six classes a day, so you are looking at like upwards almost 200 students every day. And logistically it's impossible to develop any kind of a relationship with more than a handful."

These narratives are important because they support the value in school structures in developing positive teacher-student relationships. However, what they also show is that it is not impossible to develop positive relationship in alternative environments. This is due to personal pedagogy and teacher personality, which is the only common variable in two diverse environments. The large difference that seems to exist between HTMNC and other schools appears to be the number of positive relationships that can be developed under different school structures. In short, school structures are an important factor which contributes to positive relationships, but they are not a prerequisite for teachers and students to have good relationships. Rather, personal pedagogy is a more powerful source of developing positive relationships between teachers and students.

Proposition 2

Positive teacher-student relationships develop to the extent that a collegial relationship forms between teacher and student.

Project Based Learning fosters positive teacher-student relationships to the extent that it develops a culture of collegiality, and teacher narratives help to paint a picture of what this looks like at HTMNC. This culture is driven largely by the dynamic that exists between teachers and students as a result of collaborating on projects. Through this process teachers and students work

together closely, taking on the positions of colleagues rather than that of an instructor and a student. For example, as one teacher explained, “we work side by side together on projects”. The culture that is embedded at HTMNC is also defined by a “collegial pedagogy”. Soep (2008) defined this pedagogy as:

[When] young people and adults carry out projects together where they are truly dependent on one another to get work done. Both parties come in with a certain set of skills, experiences, and social networks. This kind of pedagogy values the perspectives of and questions that young people bring, and the sensibilities they have that may be unfamiliar to adults.

While “collegial pedagogy” was not viewed as the *primary* pedagogy at HTMNC by teachers, it was clearly viewed as a result of the project-based pedagogy that was described. Teachers referred to collegiality as more of a result of PBL, rather than a driving force for projects. Collegial pedagogy as defined by Soep (2008) instead manifested itself as the culture at HTMNC. In this culture the following collegial relationships were embedded: teacher to teacher, student to student, and teacher to student. Collegial practices were evident in one teacher’s explanation of her knowledge of what’s going on in other classrooms and working together with other teachers every day. Another teacher provided insight to the collegial interactions of students when they work together “on the deck” frequently. And finally, the collegial relationship between teachers and students was evidenced by student data in Figure 11 (my teacher works with me one-on-one) and Figure 12 (I communicate often with my teacher in class).

In this culture that was discussed by teachers, collegial relationships exist between teachers and students as a result of the process of PBL. Freire (n.d) speaks to the significance of collegial

relationships in the learning process by describing the value in "...authentic dialogue between learners and educators as equally knowing subjects"(p. 7). What Freire described brings about two important points, as it relates to a collegial culture at HTMNC: (1) meaningful communication between teacher and student must exist, and (2) teachers and students must equally value and respect the knowledge of one another.

Communication exists between teachers and students because of the ongoing process of project work. Such communication occurs during daily one-on-one conferences, benchmark assessments and open-work time. During this time teachers and students are not only discussing work, but they are discussing authentic work. Callier and Riordan (2009) explained that at the HT schools "we are striving for ... adults and young people [to] carry out shared projects and create original work for outside audiences" (p. 489). At HTMNC teachers and students work side by side to create personalized projects, as evidenced by Figures 5 and 6 (my teacher designs projects for my interests and at my level), that often results in an exhibition of student work. With a public audience in mind, students likely deem their work as more meaningful, resulting in meaningful communication between teachers and students. Through these exchanges of ideas, teachers and students begin to exist as colleagues collaborating on a shared vision, rather than independent and hierarchal beings.

At HTMNC a collegial culture rests upon the belief that students and teachers equally value and respect the knowledge of one another. This was evidenced by the belief that the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator, rather than a "beacon of knowledge", as one teacher described. Typically, teachers are assumed to hold all of the knowledge in the classroom and are responsible for delivering that knowledge to their students. However, at HTMNC it was clear that *both* teachers and students were believed to possess valuable insight that has a place in the

process of project work. For example, one teacher described a current project that her class was working on and the opportunity that it presented for knowledge delivered by students rather than the teacher:

I had never done this project before. I knew a little bit about it but I told the kids “oh my gosh I didn’t know all this”...and they found it hilarious because they were like “what do you mean you didn’t know all this?” and it’s great because if you learn along side of them they really get it and you get it too.

Projects can provide ample opportunities for student input because they are not functioning within a fixed curriculum to be delivered to the student by a teacher; rather they are a reflection of collaboration between two equals. Collegiality is not a prerequisite for PBL, but at HTMNC its existence was responsible for developing a school culture that fostered positive teacher-student relationships.

The culture of collegiality that exists at HTMNC is a contributing factor to positive teacher-student relationships because a collegial relationship is relational by nature. According to Boyd (2006), “Teachers using relational pedagogic strategies become great teachers because they learn as much from their students as their students learn from them” (p. 4). Although this quote is describing relational pedagogy, it in fact depicts our discussion on collegiality entirely. When teachers and students are functioning as colleagues on project work, basic components of a positive relationship (as defined previously by HTMNC teachers in Figure 3) emerge. In this sense, the culture of collegiality at HTMNC breeds positive teacher-student relationships.

- **Collaboration** requires the exchange of ideas, offering opportunities for student input.

- Teacher and student are required to **communicate** effectively when working side by side in project work.
- Student knowledge is valued, thus providing students the opportunity to contribute to project work. This creates basic feelings of **respect and value**.
- The teacher becomes totally accessible to the student through one-on-one collaboration, thus increasing **comfort and trust**.

As a result of a collegial culture that fosters positive teacher-student relationships, student learning is improved. Expectancy-Value Theory teaches us that when students are engaged in their learning and value what they are being taught, they are more likely to be motivated (Wigfield & Eccles 2000). Weiner's Motivation Theory (1985) adds that when such attributes are present and emotions, such as motivation, will derive actions, like achievement. Therefore, engaging in meaningful dialogue and collaborating about purposeful work, as a colleague through PBL, is likely to motivate students to perform.

The collegial relationships between teachers and students at HTMNC do not exist independently but rather mirror the collegial relationships of teacher to teacher and student to student, thus developing an entire culture of collegiality. Recent research by Daly, Der-Martirosian, Moolenaar, Liou, (n.d) suggests that "there is a positive relationship between teacher social interaction [collegiality] and increased student achievement" (p. 2). If we continue down this trajectory than it is possible that collegial relationships, such as those embedded in the culture at HMTNC, can provide positive student learning experiences, and thus increased student achievement. These comments indicate that there is validity to continued research on teacher-student relationships and student achievement. If we are to understand how to improve student achievement, we must first understand the ways in which we can improve the process and

conditions of their learning. Clearly, teacher-student relationships are part of that process and lead to conditions that are worthy of future thinking in the field of student achievement.

Proposition 3

Project Based Learning fosters positive teacher-student relationships to the extent that it allows teachers to personalize the curriculum to student interests and needs, thus allowing for differentiation.

As discussed previously, personal pedagogy and school pedagogy have the ability to affect teacher-student relationships. These combined pedagogies drive instructional approaches which are also responsible for developing positive teacher-student relationships. At HTMNC, instructional approaches such as personalization and differentiation lead to positive teacher-student relationships.

When the High Tech schools were designed, founder Larry Rosenstock had a specific vision in mind. This vision included a learning space where students felt known and valued. He believed that school structures and projects could serve as vehicles for personalization. Project Based Learning in general does not depend on or drive personalization, but at the High Tech schools it does. At HTMNC, PBL facilitates personalization, which enables teachers to differentiate curriculum and instruction, resulting in positive teacher-student relationships. Projects were unanimously seen as the mechanism for personalization because PBL provides the flexibility in curriculum necessary for integrating student interests. Personalization is not only the act of knowing students, but also the act of integrating this knowledge into the curriculum by designing projects which speak to the interests of every student. This process depends upon teachers and students knowing each other well. Therefore, HTMNC teachers make great efforts to learn student interests, beliefs, strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, they then are

able to create projects that allow students to feel valued. Students begin to “see themselves” in the curriculum and as a result become engaged in their learning.

Another facet of personalization that is responsible for improving teacher-student relationships is the integration of student “voice and choice” in project work. For example, one teacher allowed students to pick from a menu of projects on his syllabus, while another allowed them to pick their final product from a list of ten options, and another allowed students to design their own project entirely. By offering student choice, teachers provide students the opportunity to integrate their interests into the classroom. Additionally, this practice of personalization allows students to feel as though they have ownership of the curriculum. As a result, students feel engaged and empowered because they are made to feel as though their interests and opinions matter. By offering opportunities for student voice through projects, teachers also make students feel valued and respected. As discussed previously, respect was seen as a defining component of a positive relationship by both teachers and students at HTMNC. Therefore, personalization as a result of PBL develops basic components of a positive relationship, as defined by the members of HTMNC.

Similar to personalization, differentiation is also an outcome of HTMNC’s pedagogical model, which is responsible for positive teacher-student relationships. Differentiation is defined by the diversity of instructional strategies, assignments and assessments provided to students in an effort to meet the needs and abilities of every child in a classroom. At HTMNC this looks like any combination of the following: one-on-one conferencing during project work time, instructional workshops for small groups, scaffolding of benchmarks for project work, variety in final project products or multiple versions of tests and rubrics. This instructional approach, inspired by PBL, allows teachers to tailor the curriculum and instruction to meet students’ needs

and abilities. Through this process, many positive outcomes develop that are responsible for improving teacher-student relations.

One outcome is that students feel acknowledged and valued. Differentiation requires that a teacher knows the students' academic level. This requires a direct effort on behalf of the teacher to not only evaluate the student individually, but then design assignments to meet the level of that student. When a teacher makes this explicit effort, it is obvious to the student. This is supported by student awareness of teachers designing projects at their level (Figure 6). Differentiation also allows students to feel valued because it requires teachers to provide supports to students during the learning process. The personalized attention that is often associated with scaffolding assignments, likely makes students feel as though their learning matters to the teacher. Through this process positive interactions can occur because the student begins to feel as though the teacher is "on their team", as one teacher referred to it. In addition to feeling known and important to a teacher, students are more likely to feel successful when a teacher differentiates instruction. PBL allows teachers to teach to the different levels of students in their classroom; by doing this students have an increased chance of working to their level, rather than in a standardized curriculum that may be above or below their academic abilities. As a result, differentiated project work increases the opportunities for student success and thus positive learning experiences. The student will likely attribute these positive experiences to the work they are engaging in with teacher. Through these connections a positive teacher-student relationship emerges.

The pedagogical model at HTMNC rooted in PBL naturally allows for personalization and differentiation. These instructional strategies allow a student to feel valued and known by their teacher, thus fostering positive interactions and learning conditions.

Proposition 4

Positive teacher-student relationships flourish in settings of teacher and school autonomy, working within a framework of accountability.

Currently, HTMNC exists as one of the first Statewide Benefit Charters (SBC) in the state of California. According to the California Department of Education (2004), SBC “requires petitioners to make their case for ‘statewide benefit’ based upon uniqueness of the educational program and the demonstration of benefit to pupils, communities, the state, and (as applicable) the school itself.” (p. 3). The title of SBC means that a school does not report to a local district, but rather works directly with the state of California. Like most charter schools, HTMNC is granted freedom to design their school and tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of their student population. This autonomy affords the staff the many opportunities to get to know their students on a personal level and differentiate the curriculum.

Various school structures exist at HTMNC that enable frequent interactions between students and their two core teachers. Such structures include the size of the school (approximately 300), individual classrooms (25-27 students) and interdisciplinary teams (52 students). By designing a school that limits the number of students that teachers interact with on a daily basis, teachers are better able to have more meaningful connections with a fewer number of students. These connections serve three purposes: (1) they offer additional insight to student academic strengths and weakness’ (2) they provide teachers with an awareness of what is going on in the life of the student outside of school, and (3) they gain additional knowledge about student interests.

HTMNC teachers not only benefit from the autonomy provided by the state, but also from the freedom they are granted by the administration. One of the High Tech design principles,

Teacher as Designer, allows teachers complete control over their curriculum. This means that no two teachers at HTMNC teach the same material in the same way. This combination of autonomy and the freedom of PBL provides HTMNC teachers with the insight to students' needs and interests, and the avenue to truly meet those needs and interests. This combination was also believed by teachers and students to improved student learning because it is more targeted and individualized than standardized curriculum and instruction. Since no two students are identical, neither should be the approach to educating them. Through the process of integrating student interests and teaching to their needs, students begin to have more positive educational experiences at the hand of their teacher. Students likely then associate these experiences with their teachers, thus allowing positive relationships to emerge. This process suggests a link between relationships and student learning, through the connector of a pedagogy that integrates personalization and differentiation. At HTMNC this pedagogy is identified as PBL.

While there are many benefits to providing schools with autonomy, there are risks as well. Therefore, such freedoms are not offered without great responsibility, and with the title of SBC come additional accountability expectations. SBC schools are expected to uphold specified rankings on the California Academic Performance Index (API), often out-performing local schools (Gao 2006). In 2011 HTMNC's API score was 842 with all subgroups scoring at or above the statewide performance target of 800 in 2010 (CDE 2011). These figures show that with full autonomy, HTMNC was still able to achieve the accountability standards as defined by the state of California. In the case of HTMNC both teachers and students agreed that positive teacher-student relationships contribute to improved conditions for student learning. These relationships were found to be a result of the factors offered by school and teacher autonomy,

such as school structures and teacher-generated curriculum; thus making the case for school autonomy, accompanied by accountability.

Future Questions

Future investigations of teacher-student relationships should further explore and test the propositions developed in this study. They might also focus on questions such as the following:

- Does the presence of positive teacher-student relationships lead to increased student achievement (as defined by standardized tests)? Do students “perform” better for teachers in which they have positive relationships?
- Are teacher-student relationships equally important for all sub-populations of students (SES, ethnicity, learning disabilities, etc.)? Are teacher-student relationships more significant to learning and achievement for students from historically under-performing sub-groups, who face adverse situations?
- When students and teachers mirror collegial relationships such as teacher social networks (Daly, Der-Martirosian, Moolenaar, Liou, n.d), will the result be increased student achievement? Can the implementation of collegial pedagogy (between teacher and student) increase student achievement?

These and related questions would develop researchers’ and practitioners’ understandings of the role of teacher-student relationships in student learning, specifically in terms of increasing student achievement—a growing interest of policy makers, school leaders and educators.

Policy Implications

Findings from this study support the notion that pedagogy contributes to positive teacher-student relationships. Factors responsible for this outcome include school structures and culture, pedagogy and teacher personality. These findings suggest three important implications for policy:

First, flexibility in school design is significant for schools that are increasingly concerned with meeting school improvement mandates from district, state and national levels. To the extent that the propositions from this study are confirmed, small school structures could be viewed as a contributing factor to fostering positive teacher-student relationships. With that said, providing flexibility in school policies may allow for the redesign efforts necessary to better foster teacher-student relationships. Allowing for more Statewide Benefit Charters (SBC), such as HTMNC, may provide the autonomy needed to redesign comprehensive schools, while also upholding accountability expectations.

A second policy implication relates to the standardization of curriculum that has increasingly emerged since the implementation of No Child Left Behind. State, and recent national, standards leave little flexibility for the integration of instructional strategies such as personalization and differentiation, both of which we now understand as contributing factors in developing positive teacher-student relationships. In addition, scripted curriculum that is the result of such standardization does not provide teachers with the time or opportunities needed to have non-academic interactions with students, which also facilitate positive teacher-student relationships. Standardization adversely affects the roles of teachers and students in the classroom by suggesting that the teacher must deliver a set curriculum to the student, rather than providing opportunity for collaboration on a final product that reflects the knowledge of both the

student and the teacher. This top-down approach to teaching and learning does not allow for collegiality, which we also now know can be an avenue for promoting teacher-student relationships.

Finally, teacher education programs mirror the schools of our nations by preparing their graduates to teach in the culture of standardization that currently exists. With policies aimed at teacher performance, universities are backed into a wall to teach their students how to “survive” in the classroom by improving student achievement. In addition, NCLB requires such rigorous requirements for “highly qualified teachers” that now the goal of teacher education programs is to focus on those requirements. As a result, the relevance of creative design, passion or inventive pedagogies in teacher education is decreasing. However, with the number of charter schools growing perhaps the outlook for teacher ed. programs is not so bleak. Policies for teaching credentials should continue to require teachers to not only be prepared to teach in a standardized classroom, but to also be prepared to teach in a school that offers flexibility in alternative pedagogies, such as PBL, Culturally Relevant or Critical Pedagogy. Such policies would only increase the qualifications of teachers and allow them to be more responsive to alternative schools and student populations. As research on non-traditional schools and pedagogies, like this one, continues to evolve it is likely that schools may reconsider their structures or pedagogies. As a result, future teachers will need to know how to assimilate to survive in such environments.

There is great value in theory within the field of education; however, it’s effectiveness in practice is of a greater interest to the contemporary discussion on student achievement. Practice serves as the link between theory and policy, as decisions are made by politicians and school leaders around practices which are derived from theories about improving student performance.

This study strives to make sense of the ways in which these theories can be executed to optimize learning conditions. As a result of one school's efforts, we are now able to see how theory inspired school structures and pedagogies, which resulted in positive teacher-student relationships. HTMNC sheds light on the possibility of how teacher-student relationships can be harnessed to improve learning, perhaps thus ultimately used to improve student achievement.

CHAPTER VI. DISCUSSION: CONSIDERING TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The framework for this study evolved out of research on small schools, which assumed the value of teacher-student relationships in student learning and achievement (Alexander et al, Raider-Roth 2005, Wasley et. al. 2000). As discussed previously, this assumption lacks hard evidence that explicitly states *how* teacher-student relationships can improve student achievement. This study attempted to begin a discussion about the link between teacher-student relationships and achievement by looking at the ways in which these relationships develop and how they are harnessed by teachers in the classroom. This study aids in our understanding of student achievement, as teaching and learning (both directly related to student achievement) provide the context for the study.

A great deal of educational reform, both historical and contemporary, is grounded in the belief that teacher-student relationships can improve student achievement. Wasley and Lear (2001) reported that relationships can promote better student achievement, particularly among low-income students (Wasley and Lear, 2001). While this is important information for reform aimed at closing the achievement gap, it is also important to know whether such findings apply to all students. Klem and Connell (2004) assert that a caring school environment, fostered by

teacher support, increases student engagement and thus student achievement (2004). Bergin & Bergin (2009) add that the more attached a student is to a teacher, the more likely they are to have higher grades and score higher on standardized test scores (2009). Adversely, Pais (2009) argues “children with conflicted teacher-student relationships feel stress, which interferes with learning” (p. 1). This, and related research, help us understand the importance of relationships in improving student achievement. However, little research has been dedicated to this topic of teacher-student relationships in and of itself, or the intervening variables in this equation, such as the role that pedagogy plays in developing these relationships.

Wenglinsky (2004) pointed out that there is a significant hole in current literature and research regarding teacher practices that can help remedy the achievement gap. He attributed this knowledge gap to “the difficulties associated with capturing what occurs in the classroom using questionnaires or other instruments used in large-scale research” (p. 4). An additional dilemma with research regarding teacher-student relationships and achievement is that research has considered this relationship only among other variables, such as school size, classroom climate, or curriculum (Schmidt, Murray, & Nguyen, 2007; Bryk and Schneider, as cited in Eddy, 2000; French, Atkinson, & Rugen 2007). In short, the literature lacks a good understanding of these relationships and a clear connection between teacher-student relationships and student achievement. While this study did not explicitly make this connection, it is designed to lay the ground work for future studies that may.

Issues of achievement undergird the essential questions which guided this research. Specifically, ‘what is the contribution of teacher-student relationships to student learning?’ This study uncovered teacher and student perceptions of the connection between relationships,

engagement, motivation and learning. These insights validated the need for additional research aimed at understanding the potential of relationships to influence student achievement.

In the same vein, many additional questions related to achievement developed as a result of this study. During the data collection phase the researcher began reviewing API scores for HTMNC and its surrounding schools, in an effort to understand if the difference in school models related to student achievement. During this process it became clear that there is an existing disparity in subgroup academic performance, within and among these schools. For example, in 2010 the API score for white students at HTMNC was 863, while it was 747 for Hispanic/Latino students and 763 for socioeconomically disadvantaged students (California Department of Education 2011). These gaps raise questions of injustice and inequity which have plagued our education system for decades. Are the school structures, pedagogical methods and close relationships with teachers at HTMNC benefiting *all* students? The neighboring comprehensive middle school (with a population of 1213) had a gap of 118 API points between white and Hispanic/Latino students, compared to HTMNC's gap of 89 points. Does this mean that although gaps exist at HTMNC, perhaps their methods are proving more successful with underperforming subgroups? These statistics point to the need for the field to better understand how pedagogy and relationships influence learning and achievement.

As with all charter schools, HTMNC is a "choice school", meaning parents have the capital needed to enroll their child, and students have the option to attend the school. This leads to a unique composition of student population at HTMNC, which does not exist at neighboring schools. For example, Hispanic/Latino students consist of 29 % of HTMNCs population, while 76% of the neighboring middle school's population is comprised of Hispanic/Latino students (California Department of Education 2011). Given what is known about HTMNCs school

performance, why aren't neighborhood children interested in attending? What about HTMNC's model isn't attractive to students who make up the neighborhood surrounding it? Do these neighborhood students have the capital needed to enroll in the free lottery to attend HTMNC? If future research can provide an affirmative link between pedagogy, relationships, learning and achievement, it would behoove future research to also consider ways in which historically underperforming subgroups are not better represented at HTMNC and how they could be, in an effort to close the achievement gap.

During discussion with a key informant of this study, the researcher was informed that there are several schools in the U.S that follow a pedagogical model of PBL, but vary drastically from HTMNC in that it is a scripted curriculum. Additional research could be designed to understand if PBL, without personalization and differentiation, are as successful in developing teacher-student relationships as the HTMNC model. Such a study could attempt to make a connection between these variables and achievement by simply using standardized academic performance scores, college going rates or SAT scores to draw analytic conclusions. In this way, such a study could provide the links which this study lacked between pedagogy and relationships to learning and achievement.

While this research did not directly address the connection between relationships and achievement, it does pave the way for future studies designed to collect and analyze data that can address this gap in the existing literature. Student and teacher data from this study suggest that relationships contribute to learning and achievement. However, such assertions were not proven in this study. In the current era of accountability, every school would greatly benefit from research which attempts to make the connection between variables such as pedagogy, teacher-student relationships, and, ultimately, student achievement.

Appendix A
Teacher Interview

Teacher Characteristics

Gender:	M	F							
Level of Experience:	Beginner (1-2 years)			Experienced (3-5)			Veteran (6+)		
Years at HTMNC:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+
Subject Taught:	Math/Science			Humanities			Exploratory		

Defining HTMNC Pedagogical Model

1. How would you define the pedagogical philosophy at HTMNC?
2. To what extent does HTMNC’s pedagogical model shape your classroom practices?

Probe: Ideas and Operations

Defining Personal Pedagogical Model

3. How would you define your personal pedagogical philosophy?
4. Do your personal philosophies align with the HTH pedagogical model? If so, how? If not, in what ways do they differ?

Defining Teacher-Student relationships

5. What defines a teacher-student relationship?

Probe: “are there different types”?

6. What defines positive relationships with students” in general”?

Probe: “how do you connect with kids?”

- Kinds of interactions
- Places of interaction
- Subjects of interaction
- What do you think fostered this?

7. How would you define “challenging”/negative relationships with students “in general” ?

Probe: how define the relationship

- Kinds of interactions
- Places of interaction
- Subjects of interaction
- What do you think fostered this?

Sources of Teacher-Student Relationships

8. How, in your experience, do good teacher-student relationships develop?
Probe: what facilitates—class size, climate, culture, pedagogy
9. (if not mentioned thus far) Does the schools' pedagogical approach influence teacher-student relationships? If so, how? If not, why not?
10. What, in your experience, prevents good teacher-student relationships from developing?

Role of Relationships in Student Learning

11. How do you define/measure student "learning"?
Probe: are there different types of learning (ie. "academic vs. socio-emotional")
12. Do good teacher-student relationships help you teach? If so, how? If not, why not?
Probe: Do negative relationships interfere with teaching? How? Why?
13. Do good teacher-student relationships help students learn? If so, how? If not, why not?
Probe: Do negative relationship interfere with student learning? How? Why?
14. Could HTMNC be doing anything different to better foster teacher-student relationships?
15. Could HTMNC be doing anything differently to foster better student learning?

Appendix B
Student Survey

Please circle the number under each statement which best identifies with your opinion of the following statements:

Defining Teacher-Student Relationships

1. My teacher knows my personal interests

Disagree				Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2. My teacher treats me with respect (like an equal)

Disagree				Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. My teacher talks to me about things other than academics

Disagree				Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4. My teacher cares about how I'm doing/ My teacher cares about my personal needs

Disagree				Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

5. I have positive interactions with my teachers

Disagree				Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

6. I have positive relationships with my teachers

Disagree				Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Sources of Teacher-Student Relationships

7. My teacher helps me and gives me a lot of directions

Disagree				Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

8. I have a good relationship with my teacher because of their personality

Disagree				Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

9. My teacher knows how to teach me in a way that I understand/ My teacher knows my academic abilities/skills

Disagree				Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

10. SLCs help me have good relationships with my teachers

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Roles of Relationships in Student Learning

11. My teacher cares about my academic needs

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

12. My teacher cares about my personal future

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

13. My teacher cares about my academic future

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

14. My teacher has high expectations for me

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

15. My teacher has high expectations for others

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

16. My teacher is strict

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

17. My teacher provides me with the support I need

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

18. My teacher provides each student with the support they need

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

19. My teacher wants what is best for me

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

20. My teacher communicates with me everyday

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

21. My teacher works closely with me on schoolwork

Disagree					Neutral					Agree
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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
22. My teacher spends time with me in the classroom											
Disagree						Neutral					Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
23. My teacher supports a caring classroom environment											
Disagree						Neutral					Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
24. My teacher supports a caring school environment											
Disagree						Neutral					Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
25. I know my teacher well											
Disagree						Neutral					Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
26. My teacher knows my family											
Disagree						Neutral					Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
27. My teacher appreciates me as an individual											
Disagree						Neutral					Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
28. My teacher shows a personal interest in my life											
Disagree						Neutral					Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
29. My teacher cares about his/her job											
Disagree						Neutral					Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
30. I have learned a lot from my teacher this year											
Disagree						Neutral					Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Appendix C
Coding Scheme

CATEGORY/SUBCATEGORY NO.	CODE
<i>HTMNC Pedagogical Model Defined</i>	<i>PM</i>
1.0	
Instructional Strategies	PM-INS
1.1	
Curriculum/Assessment	PM-CRS
1.2	
Role of Teacher/School	PM-RLT
1.3	
Role of Student	PM-RLS
1.4	
Culture/Community	PM-CLT
1.5	
<i>Influence of HTMNC pedagogical model described</i>	<i>IP</i>
2.0	
Instructional Strategies	IP-INS
2.1	
Curriculum Design	IP-CRD
2.2	
School Structure/CULTURE	IP-SST
2.3	
Design Principle	IP-DPR
2.4	
<i>Personal Pedagogy Defined</i>	<i>PP</i>
3.0	
Instructional Strategies	PP-INS
3.1	
Epistemology	PP-EPY
3.2	
View of self	PP-VSF
3.3	
View of student	PP-VST
3.4	
Relationship	PP-RTS
3.5	
<i>Alignment of Personal Pedagogy to HTMNC Ped. Model Described</i>	<i>AM</i>
4.0	
Philosophical	AM-PHL
4.1	
Practice	AM-PCT
4.2	

<i>Positive Teacher-Student Relationships Defined</i>	<i>PR</i>
5.0	
Communication	PR-CMT
5.1	
Collaboration	PR-CLB
5.2	
Respect/value	PR-MRV
5.3	
Comfort	PR-CFT
5.4	
Teacher Support/Care	PR-TST
5.5	
Teacher expectations	PR-TEX
5.6	
Rapport	PR-RPT
5.7	
Teacher demeanor	PR-TDM
5.8	
Personalization	PR-PZN
5.9	
Parental involvement/communication	PR-PTI
5.10	

<i>Negative Teacher-Student Relationships Defined</i>	<i>NR</i>
6.0	
Outside Factors	NR-OTF
6.1	
Lack of respect	NR-LRT
6.2	
Lack of collaboration	NR-LCT
6.3	
Lack of communication	NR-LCM
6.4	
Lack of comfort /trust	NR-LCF
6.5	
Focus only on academics	NR-FAD
6.6	
Lack of knowledge of student	NR-LKS
6.7	

<i>Factors that facilitate teacher-student relationships described</i>	<i>FR</i>
7.0	
School structures	FR-SST
7.1	
School philosophy/pedagogy	FR-SPY
7.2	

Personal PEDAGOGY	FR-TPH
7.3	
Classroom climate	FR-CCT
7.4	
<i>Factors that Constrain Teacher-Student Relationships described</i>	<i>CR</i>
8.0	
School structures	CR-SST
8.1	
External Mandates	CR-EXM
8.2	
Teacher Pedagogy	CR-TPY
8.3	
Student personality	CR-STP
8.4	
<i>Student “Learning” defined</i>	<i>SL</i>
9.0	
Ability to articulate knowledge	SL-AAK
9.1	
Longevity of knowledge	SL-LKD
9.2	
Individual academic growth/progress	SL-IAG
9.3	
Socio-emotional growth	SL-SEG
9.4	
<i>Significance of relationships described</i>	<i>SR</i>
10.0	
Classroom climate/culture	SR-CCT
10.1	
Personalization	SR-PZN
10.2	
Motivation/engagement	SR-MTN
10.3	

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