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A descriptive qualitative study of how caring teachers' behaviors impact students' perceptions of their own academic learning

Donna Elizabeth Denney Brown
University of Dayton

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A DESCRIPTIVE QUALITATIVE STUDY
OF HOW CARING TEACHERS' BEHAVIORS IMPACT
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR OWN ACADEMIC LEARNING

THESIS

Submitted to

The School of Education and Allied Professions of the

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment Of
The Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

by

Donna Elizabeth Denney Brown

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

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APPROVED BY:



Official Advisor /



Faculty Reader



/ Faculty Reader

ABSTRACT

A DESCRIPTIVE QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HOW CARING TEACHERS' BEHAVIORS IMPACT STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR OWN ACADEMIC LEARNING.

Name: Brown, Donna Elizabeth Denney
University of Dayton, 1999

Advisor: Patricia Grogan, Ph.D.

The study was designed to investigate how caring teachers' behaviors impact students' perceptions of their own academic learning. Specifically, the research question was: What are the caring teacher behaviors that students view as important? The study was conducted in a junior high school with twenty-four seventh grade students. The students filled in a survey about a particular caring teacher they had had in the past, and the students answered *Always*, *Usually*, *Sometimes*, or *Never* in response to certain teacher behaviors. The last question asked the students how much they learned in the class because of the caring teacher. The results showed that the teacher behavior of *listening to students* had the greatest number of *Always* responses. The responses also fell into emergent themes, with the theme of *helping* getting the greatest number of student responses. The researcher recommends that further research be done due to the inconclusiveness of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the enthusiastic and constant support of my parents, Don and Sheila Denney, and my children, Jesse and Rachel Brown. This thesis would never have been born had it not been for them.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Patricia Grogan, who always made me believe I could accomplish all things.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all teachers who practice their profession with mercy and grace.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"No one has yet realized the wealth of sympathy, the kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of a child. The effort of every true educator should be to unlock that treasure."

Emma Goldman

How do educators unlock these treasures as well as add the treasure of academic achievement? The answer is "caring." According to Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden (1995), "Caring...is something that teachers did because they understood that, without a relationship with a teacher, a student has little reason to commit to the instructional activities required by the curriculum" (p. 681). Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden further state, "These caring relationships between teachers and students create possibilities - opportunities for academic as well as interpersonal learning to occur" (p.681). This, of course, is supported by Lev Vygotsky's belief that interpersonal learning and academic achievement are inseparable (Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden, 1995).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how caring teachers' behaviors impact students' perceptions of their own academic learning. The catalyst was this researcher's observations of several teachers who have sound theory and methods, care deeply about their students' learning and lives, spend a great deal of time planning and reflecting on teaching and learning, yet their students report hating to go to class and view class work and homework as drudgery. Somehow, the teachers' caring and concern got lost in the transmission of the lesson, much to the detriment of both teachers and learners.

Research Question

The central focus was students' attitudes regarding an individual teacher's caring behaviors and their influence on students' perceived academic achievement. Specifically, the researcher explored the following research question: What are the caring teacher behaviors that students view as important?

Assumptions

To conduct this study, several assumptions were made. First, it was assumed students would understand the concept of caring in close enough approximation to the researcher's

understanding of the concept of caring so that the students were thinking of the correct concept when they answered the survey. Second, it was assumed that the field test of the survey resulted in changes to the survey that ultimately yielded a survey that provided accurate results. Finally, it was assumed that the students would answer honestly.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, the sample sizes of the field test group and the study group were small. The field test group consisted of 19 students, and the study group consisted of 24 students. Second, the gender make-up of the classes were very different; the field test group was 90% male and 10% female, whereas the study group was about 50% male and 50% female. Third, the ethnic make-up of the two classes was very different. The field test group (of 19 students) had three students who were first-generation American (two of the students' families were from India, one was from China/Taiwan), whereas the study group had one first-generation student (from India) and one African-American student. The remainder of both classes were Caucasian Americans. A final limitation was the reliance on memory in order to answer the survey. Because the survey was given in

the beginning of the year, the students could not be asked to reflect on current teachers, but had to remember past teachers.

To recapitulate, the sample size was obviously a limitation because it may not have sampled enough of the population to reflect accurate results. The gender differences may have been a limitation because of the innate differences between males and females. The ethnic backgrounds may also have been a limitation because of cultural differences that may have impacted how caring was understood and reported. Finally, relying on memory was a limitation because memories can be less than accurate.

Definitions of Terms

Perceived Achievement.

Perceived achievement is the student's opinion of his/her own learning, using his/her own unspoken definition of learning.

Summary

Chapter One introduced the purpose of this study: to examine how caring teachers' behaviors impact students' perceptions of their own academic learning. The central focus was students' attitudes regarding an individual teacher's caring behaviors and their influence on students'

perceived academic achievement. Specifically, the researcher explored the following research question: What are the caring teacher behaviors that students view as important?

The next chapter, Chapter Two, will review the related literature and form the valid basis for this research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, the review of the related literature is divided into five sections: emotions and caring, relationships and caring, environment and caring, teacher behavior and caring, and students' perceptions of caring.

The knowledge of caring and its effect on students is not new knowledge, as evidenced by the old saying, "Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." However, not all educators are convinced by this, as evidenced by an equally-old saying, "Don't smile until Christmas!" While there is plenty of research evidence to dispel the "don't smile" entourage, perhaps the available evidence has not been disseminated in a palatable, convincing, accessible format. Therefore, this chapter will attempt to remedy this situation by organizing pertinent information in a teacher-friendly format.

Emotions and Caring

Maslow (1979) acknowledged a student's need for human contact, intimacy, and for community as he recalled a college seminar, "The World of Abraham Maslow," he taught in 1969. Early in the course, many of the undergraduates and several of the graduate students wanted to break into

self-actualization groups rather than attend Maslow's seminar. Maslow (1979) allowed this, but discovered these students learned little about the course content. Further, Maslow (1979) suggested that if self-actualization (or need for human contact, intimacy, and community) was available earlier in life, then "...graduate education would be far more efficient than it now is- and far more fun..." because it could be entered into without all the unmet emotional needs getting in the way of learning (p.15). Maslow (1979) does warn against a trend of self-actualization educators toward "anti-intellectualism, anti-science, anti-rationality, anti-discipline, anti-hard work, etc." (p.19). According to Maslow (1979), "Learning of content is not the enemy of personal growth" (p. 24). In summary, Maslow believes in a holistic approach; the need for human contact, intimacy, and community must be meshed with the learning of content.

In Texas, however, according to White (1998), the criterion for teacher certification (i.e. the authentication of quality teachers) is based entirely on cognitive abilities, either ignoring or assuming equality of personal characteristics. White (1998) states that the passing score for teachers is 70%, and that this mediocre

score is also considered a passing score for students on their standardized tests, including the test to graduate from high school. White (1998) suggests that the missing factor in Texas' method of evaluating and teaching (stimulus/response) is the emotional function. White (1998) cites Mowrer's theory which says the autonomic nervous system (ANS) is the "essential element in the psychology of learning" (p. 121). This nervous system is made of two main parts: sympathetic and parasympathetic. Mowrer links the sympathetic system with fear, and the parasympathetic with hope. White (1998) further cites Mowrer as believing Pavlov's dogs salivated in response to hope, not merely a stimulus/response. The educational significance of this, according to White (1998), is that things in the classroom (stimulus), such as teacher talk, classroom activity, teacher personality, etc., evoke hope in students. In addition, there are at least four other emotional feeling which impact the learning in the classroom, and these are learned best through modeling. The first of the four feelings is the self social feeling, which is a reaction about how others see the student. White (1998) says teachers must make an emotional connection with students here before any cognitive learning can take place. The

second of these other emotional feelings is empathy. White (1998) says empathy is a learned trait, and "the ability of students to know and be aware of their own needs and feelings, and the ability to know how others feel, is at the root of caring about others" (p. 123). White (1998) says empathy is learned by watching role models, and a lack of empathy will limit learning. Anger and frustration are listed as the third emotional feelings, and White (1998) says it occurs when paths to personal growth are blocked, with the physical brain as well as emotions playing into it. According to White (1998), teachers need to model how to manage frustration, as well as take action to defuse it, such as talking about it, initiating a cooling off period, and meditation. The fourth emotional feeling is self-competence. White (1998) says teachers need to provide strategies for students to accomplish this, such as setting reasonable goals and monitoring progress. In summary, White (1998) says, "Every professional teacher should be a master in teaching cognitive and affective processes" (p. 125).

Another avenue which teachers need to explore in bringing together the cognitive with the affective is the avenue of mental health. Just as White (1998) states that roadblocks to personal growth will create anger and

frustration, certainly mental health problems could be those roadblocks thereby exacerbating student's anger and frustration, and therefor this subject is worthy of attention. Goodwin, Goodwin & Cantrill (1988) researched unmet mental health needs of elementary students in 1987 in a large Colorado school district. There were 79 elementary schools serving about 75,000 students, mostly white middle-class, though all socio-economic groups were included. The study stratified the school populations according to socio-economic status, then rank-ordered the schools, placed them in quadrants, and finally selected five from each quadrant (for a total of twenty) as representative schools for this study. No attempt was made to actually measure a student's mental health; educators' perceptions of unmet mental health needs were used and gained primarily through questionnaires, and secondly through interviews. The questionnaires contained a total of 48 behaviors/characteristics: 10 dealt with self image; 11 dealt with relationships with peers and adults; 15 dealt with school skills and competencies; 12 dealt with other behavioral/emotional concerns. Two five-point rating scales accompanied each behavior/characteristic. One scale rated

the percentage of students who display the particular behavior/characteristic and the other scale rated how much the particular behavior/characteristic interfered with effective teaching. Respondents were also asked to indicate which mental health issues were not given enough attention in their school. The top 12 behaviors/characteristics which exist and are not given enough attention are: (1) Poor decision-making skills, (2) Poor self-image, (3) Low self confidence, (4) Unable to resolve interpersonal conflicts, (5) Depressed, (6) Poor refusal skills; overly influenced by peers, (7) Manipulative, controlling, (8) Lack motivation, (9) Cannot concentrate, inattentive, off-task, (10) Poor study and planning habits, (11) Disobedient, disrespectful, stubborn, and (12) Argumentative, verbally abusive. Possible causes were cited as parent or home related, whereas most (50%) of solutions were cited as school based, such as more resources for new initiatives, one-issue counseling, and affective education. This supports White's (1998) belief in Mowrer's theory that in between *stimulus* and *response* must be the *emotional function* (represented here by mental health issues) in order for learning to take place. Goodwin, Goodwin & Cantrill (1988) conclude by saying, "Positive mental health for students and teachers

represents an essential ingredient for schools to achieve their important goals" (p. 286). One activity Goodwin, Goodwin & Cantrill (1988) suggest is someone to be "listener of the day" (p. 286).

"Listener of the day" fits in with Noddings (1995) belief that "Personal manifestations of care are probably more important in children's lives than any particular curriculum or pattern of pedagogy" (p. 676). Noddings (1995) contends that we should want more from our educational system than adequate test scores. Moreover, adequate test scores do not measure success if the students do not believe they are cared for and care for others. Further, Noddings (1995) says, "...caring is not just a warm, fuzzy feeling that makes people kind and likable. Caring implies a continuous search for competence...To have as our educational goal the production of caring, competent, loving, and lovable people is not anti-intellectual. Rather, it demonstrates respect for the full range of human talents" (p. 676). Just as Goodwin, Goodwin & Cantrill (1988) pointed out that schools need to do more to meet students' mental health needs, Noddings (1995) says schools should be careful not to rely on "experts," such as grief counselors, but to utilize teachers who represent continual

constancy and care in the lives of the students. According to Noddings (1995), "Artificially separating the emotional, academic, and moral care of children into tasks for specially designated experts contributes to the fragmentation of life in schools" (p. 678). To this end, Noddings (1995) maintains it should be legitimate for teachers to spend time talking to students about problems in their lives and helping them to develop caring relationships.

Relationships and Caring

Noblit, Rogers & McCadden (1995) assert that *caring* cannot be seen on its own, but can be seen through the relationships between students and teachers. The research conducted by Noblit, Rogers & McCadden (1995) involved Martha, a Caucasian female fourth-grade teacher and Pam, an African American female second grade teacher. They taught in an inner-city K-5 school with 307 students, 22 teachers, and eight teacher assistants during the 1989-90 school year. Sixty-five percent were low-income African American, thirty-five percent were middle- to upper-class Caucasian. Pam organized her instruction around collective rituals whereas Martha was more discovery centered. The key common features of these two teachers are what Noblit, Rogers &

McCadden (1995) identify as *continuity* and *constancy*, and define as "...assuming moral responsibility for oneself and one's interaction with others" (p. 684). One of Martha's success stories was a student named Robert who came to her class from a special school for students with severe behavior problems. For two years prior to Martha's classroom, Robert had often been removed from classrooms for outbursts and other inappropriate behavior. This situation gives credence to Goodwin, Goodwin & Cantrill's (1988) assertion that good mental health is an essential ingredient for success in school. Demonstrating continuity and constancy, Noblit, Rogers & McCadden (1995) report "Martha invested herself in helping him" (p. 681) by talking to him everyday about things outside the classroom, insisting he participate in the classroom, and reminding him constantly to turn in his work. The outcome was an improvement in Robert's behavior and academic achievement. Noblit, Rogers & McCadden (1995) also reported on John, a mainstreamed student in Pam's classroom. Pam, like Martha, decided it was her responsibility to help John, so through a process of keeping John's desk close to hers, touching his shoulder (which gave John confidence to participate), eye contact, and other caring behaviors, Pam made the

classroom a safe place for John to participate in class and grow academically. Noblit, Rogers & McCadden (1995) further report on one of Martha's students, Rhonda, whom Martha retained from the year before. Martha felt Rhonda was not ready, academically or socially, to move on to the fifth grade, and Martha took responsibility for Rhonda's failure to pass the fourth grade. Because of their relationship, Martha was able to help Rhonda (who had been inattentive, had poor peer relations, and poor academic skills) become a caring, competent classroom leader who was promoted at the end of the year. Noblit, Rogers & McCadden (1995) have concluded, "Genuine caring is expressed by a teacher's attempt to assist students in reaching their full potential" (p. 683). Another benefit noted by Noblit, Rogers & McCadden (1995) is a domino effect of caring, where students in a class begin to show caring/helping behaviors toward each other thereby making large classes more manageable. Also, discipline becomes less and less of an issue as students want to learn and remain orderly so as not to interfere with their relationships. In fact, Noblit, Rogers & McCadden (1995) say that experienced teachers, like Pam and Martha, know that "control and caring are threads of the same tapestry" (p.684). Finally, Noblit,

Rogers & McCadden (1995) believe "teachers should heed the children and consider how helping, talking, and touching can be used to construct a caring culture" (p. 684).

Environment and Caring

Constructing a caring classroom, according to Agne (1992), depends on a teacher's belief system. To gather information, Agne(1992) collected brief questionnaires about teachers' belief systems from a large sample of Teachers of the Year (years 1987-1990) and from inservice, not novice, teachers. The findings show excellent teachers prefer flexible and democratic classrooms, value personal relationships with their students, and are non-punitive and non-judgmental in their attitudes. Agne (1992) goes on to suggest adding *student belief* to an already existing chain of teacher effectiveness: (1)teacher belief,(2)teacher behavior,(3)*student belief*,(4)student behavior, and(5)student achievement. To Agne (1992), the essential part of (1)teacher belief is *caring*, and in time it will become the essential part of (3)student belief. Confirming White's (1998) belief that students learn best from models, Agne (1992) says caring teachers always strive to better themselves because they know they are modeling for their students. Agne (1992) also makes the point that students

will vary in the time needed to understand and trust what a caring attitude can do, because of their own background. For example, a student from a loving home environment will view the caring environment as usual whereas a student from an abusive home will require more time in order to understand, trust, and therefore benefit. Finally, some specific characteristics of caring, according to Agne (1992), are: competition, not with others, only with yourself; sharing; finding joy in someone else's success; listening; and being responsible for yourself and others.

Deiro (1997) provides strategies for building a caring environment, although she rarely uses the word "caring," but instead refers to it as "nurturing healthy connections with students" (p.192). However, many of the same ideas are laced throughout her research, such as sharing, constancy, and using rituals. Deiro used a case study of six excellent teachers from inner-city, suburban, and rural areas; each site used one male and one female; diverse ethnic backgrounds were represented; all taught traditional subjects in secondary schools; and each teacher had approximately 150 students. Deiro used teacher interviews, observations, students interviews, and student surveys. The first finding Deiro reported is the importance of teachers

spending on-to-one time with students. Suggestions for doing this for teachers who have upward of 150 students would be to make themselves available before and after school, standing in the hallway greeting students as they come and go, attending and /or participating in out-of-school activities, and being open for conversation on any topic. This supports Agne's (1992) notion that teachers need to be non-judgmental toward students' personal lives in order to build a caring relationship, and Noddings' (1995) suggestion that teachers should be the ones to spend time talking to and supporting students, not "experts" who tend to further fragment school culture. Noblit, Rogers & McCadden further validate this by concluding, "Talk became the currency of caring; each opportunity to talk came to have a history and a future" (p. 684). Deiro's second finding, using appropriate self-disclosure, coalesces with Agne's (1992) belief on sharing. Agne says that when teachers share who they are, students see them as trustworthy and will likewise share. This gives the teachers clues on how best to teach. Deiro further defines teacher sharing as "self-disclosure appropriate for a teacher-student relationship...the act of sharing and exposing the teachers' own feelings, attitudes, and

experiences with students in ways that are helpful to the students" (p. 197). This type of sharing will, according to Deiro, strengthen the learning process and build a strong connection between teachers and students. Deiro's next finding of having high expectations and believing in students parallels with Noblit, Rogers & McCadden's (1995) concept of constancy. Deiro says students will connect emotionally with teachers who have high expectations for students and believe the students can achieve them.

Networking with family and friends is another means for building relationships with students because students will come to view teachers as an authentic part of their world. Validating the need for a safe learning environment, Deiro says students need a sense of community among themselves, as it will help them become tolerant and accepting of each other and create a feeling of belonging. Another way to build community, according to Deiro, is to use rituals and traditions. Rituals are defined as activities, which are done the same way each time; for example, the last fifteen minutes on Fridays are reserved for open discussion.

Traditions are defined as customs, practices, or events (such as Martin Luther King Day) which are regularly acknowledged or celebrated, but not necessarily the same

way each time. Deiro says rituals and traditions build community because they provide common ground for the students and teachers. Common ground will facilitate a caring community.

Teacher Behavior and Caring

Bulach, Brown & Potter (1998) identified specific teacher behaviors that will create a caring classroom community. The method was to administer a final survey of 26 caring behavior items and four demographic items to 99 teachers. The data were analyzed for which behaviors occurred and the frequency of occurrence. These behaviors were grouped into five broad categories. The first one, the ability to reduce anxiety, is accomplished by behaviors such as greeting students at the door, maintaining eye contact, and calling students by name. The second category, willingness to listen, was defined as letting students make decisions and ask the teacher questions, making time for students, and taking an interest in students' personal lives. While *listening* is a reoccurring found in caring literature, Bulach, Brown & Potter have identified two which appear to be new to the literature, although they may be embedded or implied elsewhere. These two are rewarding good behavior and correct use of criticism. These two were

rated by teachers as seldom used, which may also explain why caring literature does not refer to them. The final category, according to Bulach, Brown & Potter was the friend factor. Two interesting ways cited as a way for teachers to express this to students was by promptly handing back work, graded with comments, and by allowing students to have fun at the teacher's expense. In fact, Bulach, Brown & Potter say that having fun at the teacher's expense was a test of friendship for the students. Concluding the study, Bulach, Brown & Potter acknowledge it would be beneficial to get student input to compare it to the teachers' input. Also, Bulach et al (1998) noted that the "use of behaviors identified by this research effectively operationalizes Maslow's (1954) theory of motivation" (p. 450), and "With this awareness, they [teachers] will be able to help create learning communities in which students and staff can experience success and self-actualization" (p. 451). Bulach, Brown & Potter reiterate another theme of caring literature, which says there should be a balance between instruction and caring. This addresses Maslow's (1979) concern of a trend toward anti-intellectualism, anti-hard work, etc. Finally, Bulach,

Brown & Potter confirm that "genuine care can raise student achievement" (p. 451).

Another strong theme that has emerged in caring literature is *democracy in the classroom*, as noted by Agne (1992), and others. However, Noblit (1993) states "...caring in classrooms is not about democracy- it is about the ethical use of power" (p. 24). In his research, Noblit spent one full day a week observing in a second grade classroom during the 1989-90 school year. The class consisted of a female African American teacher, and twenty-four students (70% African American, 30% Caucasian). Teacher characteristics Noblit (1993) observed were responsibility for the students' learning, humor, enjoyment of students and teaching, use of collective rituals, and a form of assertive discipline. Noblit noted this teacher used a teacher-centered approach to learning, and the students always seemed eager to participate and connect with the teacher. Noblit suggests it was the teacher's ability to connect with the students and make them believe in their own ability that gave her power in the classroom. Further, Noblit states that not only was the teacher's power used to keep order, set up lessons, evaluate, etc., but it was also used to make sure that every person in her

classroom, Noblit included, had a place, and that place was secure. Noblit goes on to say he has rethought the concept of power, and that this teacher understood her authority not to come from power, but from moral authority- "an authority not only legitimated by the usual mechanisms of our society but also by reciprocal negotiation between people, in this case people of unequal power and knowledge" (p. 37). In conclusion, Noblit suggests it may be time for educators to reevaluate the concepts of child-centered and teacher-centered learning.

Another study, conducted by Dillon (1989), looked at a teacher who, like the teacher in Noblit's (1993) study, made sure every student in his classroom had a place and that place was secure. Dillon's study was a microethnography that looked at how one teacher, Mr. Appleby, a white 38-year-old New Yorker, showed care to his low-tracked class. The school was located in the southeastern part of the United States, rural, low-income, mostly non-white (51%), with less than 35% of the population finishing high school. Dillon was a participant-observer and used field notes, audio and videotapes, and interviews to gather data. The classroom itself was an eleventh-grade English-reading class with 17

mostly black, poor, low-reading ability students from a variety of home situations. Adding to the students' risk factors, according to Dillon, was the difference in belief/value systems between the students' homes and school. Dillon reports Mr. Appleby deals with these differences by studying the backgrounds of his students to know how to bridge the contrariety of cultural diversity in the classroom, thereby making a place for every student and making that place safe. Dillon also reports Mr. Appleby made bridges between the school and the community and the homes. This validates Deiro's (1997) findings that "networking with parents, family members, and friends of students" (p.195) builds caring bonds with students. Dillon additionally reports that Mr. Appleby "believes that learning cannot occur successfully without students' feeling good about themselves and their ability to learn" (p. 238). Bulach, Brown & Potter (1998) have also shown that care can increase student achievement. Dillon further states that part of Mr. Appleby's success was the fact he did not try to conform to someone else's teaching model, but rather created his own based on a synthesis of his beliefs. Agne (1992) also speaks of beliefs and says, "...caring is...a deep emotional belief which pervades every

teacher's thoughts and behaviors" (p. 123). And, just as Agne (1992) found *taking joy in someone else's success* to be a powerful component of care, Dillon found Mr. Appleby's joy and sensitivity to be two driving forces in his teaching. All seventeen of Mr. Appleby's students passed his class with percentages ranging between 76% and 94%.

Students' Perceptions of Caring

Moving from adults' perceptions of care to students perceptions of care, Bosworth (1995) suggests that knowing how young people feel about caring will help the adults create formal programs to promote care. In a yearlong study at two middle schools, Bosworth conducted a study exploring how adolescents viewed caring. The first school of 800 students was located in a large Midwest industrial city. The other school was about ten miles away and the school population was from the suburbs, rural area, and inner city. More than 100 students were interviewed in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. A wide range of socio-economics was represented, and about one-third were non-white. According to Bosworth, regardless of gender, race, grade, etc., most students agreed that care involved helping of some sort. Some of the examples students gave as caring/helping examples, like helping an elderly person,

suggests to Bosworth that there is a kind of sensitivity that should guide a person's act of caring. This supports Dillon's (1989) research that found one of the driving forces of the successful teacher, Mr. Appleby, was sensitivity. Another aspect students reported as caring was listening. Goodwin, Goodwin & Cantrill (1988) in speaking about good mental health even suggested a "listener of the day" as a strategy to help students. Additionally, Bulach, Brown & Potter (1998) also cite willingness to listen as a key ingredient in a caring classroom. In describing caring teachers, Bosworth reports students first list classroom behaviors, such as helping with difficult assignments and verbally encouraging students. Next, students list after-school help and guidance. This would be one way to spend one-on-one time with students, as suggested by Deiro (1997), as a way to bond with students. Finally, students see care demonstrated through relationships. While this is well documented in research literature, White (1998) says it well when she says teachers must make emotional connections with students before cognitive learning can take place. Interestingly, Bosworth reports that few students, where teachers were concerned, saw caring as a

reciprocal affair. The students viewed caring teachers as teachers who help students.

Alder & Moulton (1998) conducted another study that looked at middle school students' perceptions of caring. The context was a southwestern metropolitan school, specifically four eighth grade classrooms averaging 36 students each, but only 25 students total participated due to consent forms, etc. The ethnic background was 77% European, 11% Hispanic, 5% African American, 5% Asian American, and 0.2% Native American. Data were collected by interviews, focus groups, observations, shadowing, and informal communications. According to Alder & Moulton, students identified five key areas. The first is care as control. Students related incidents where the teacher protected them and/or disciplined (i.e. controlled) a student or the class. Noblit (1993) confirms this finding as the teacher in his study was in control of the class, not as an unethical use of power, but as an obligatory moral authority. Students in this study viewed it as caring. Alder & Moulton report the second finding as care as equality. The teacher in the study demanded the same accountability from all students, including a learning disabled student, and this equal treatment reportedly made

the students feel cared about. This scenario is confirmed by Noblit, Rogers & McCadden's (1995) study that looked at two teachers who invested themselves in difficult students and brought them into equal standing in the classroom. Alder & Moulton report the next finding as care as forgiveness. In this study, a student's need for forgiveness was tied in with his feeling of being cared for. Deiro (1997) addresses this in what she called relational communities, where group members are tolerant and accepting of one another. The fourth finding by Alder & Moulton was care as concern. Students viewed this as teachers taking time to listen and talk, both attributes well documented in caring literature. Finally, Alder & Moulton report care as "good teaching." Students reported this to be situations when the teacher made sure students understood a concept, made learning fun and interesting, and did not embarrass students about grades. Noblit, Rogers & McCadden (1995) refer to this as constancy, or the "assuming of moral responsibility for oneself and one's interactions with others" (p. 684).

To recap, this chapter reviewed the related literature that was divided into five sections: emotions and caring, relationships and caring, environment and caring, teacher

behavior and caring, and students' perceptions of care.

Some key ideas in the literature were that caring is necessary for learning to take place, teachers are catalyst for this caring, and students have specific notions as to what caring is.

In the next chapter, the subjects and setting are described, and data collection and analysis are presented.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how caring teachers' behaviors impact students' perceptions of their own academic learning. The focus was students' attitudes regarding an individual teacher's caring behaviors and their influence on students' perceived academic achievement. Specifically, the researcher explored the following research question: What are the caring teacher behaviors that students view as important?

In this chapter, the subjects and setting are described, and data collection is presented in two sections: (1) Construction of the data collection instrument, and (2) Administration of the data collection instrument.

Subjects

Field Test Group

The students who participated in the field test of the survey were 19 seventh grade language arts students. Two students were female; 17 were male. Sixteen students were Caucasian Americans, 2 were Asian-Indian Americans, and 1 was Chinese American. The class was a randomly computer

generated heterogeneous learning group, with the exception of learning disabled students with Individual Education Plans [IEP'S] who were in a separate class.

Data Collection Group

The students who took the final version of the survey for the purpose of this research were 24 seventh grade language arts students. There were 12 males and 12 females. Twenty-two students were Caucasian Americans, 1 was African American, and 1 was Asian-Indian American. The class was a randomly computer-generated heterogeneous learning group, with the exception of learning disabled students with Individual Education Plans [IEP'S] who were in a separate class.

Setting

School

The school in this study is part of a small suburban school district containing 3 elementary schools, one middle school (grades 6-8), and one high school (grades 9-12). The particular school in this study was the middle school (grades 6-8) with a population of about 570 students.

Community

The small Midwestern community in this study was in transition from a small farming community to a bedroom

community, resulting in a mix of suburbia and rural farm land with the full spectrum of socio-economic levels represented. Most of the population was middle- to upper-middle income, but government subsidized-housing and high-income housing were represented. The ethnic make-up was mostly Caucasian, with a small Asian population mainly in the upper-income level, and a small African American population mainly in the low-income level. The community was highly involved in the schools, and the school system was rated as one of the best in a three county area.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collection Instrument

The data collection instrument used for this research was a student survey (see Appendix A). The survey questions were generated by finding major common ideas in the caring literature. Originally, 10 questions were generated, each with a four choice response ranging from *Always* to *Never*, along with space for comments. This survey was field tested, and several changes were made: First, the order of the responses originally was *Always*, *Sometimes*, *Usually*, *Never*. The students found this confusing, so the final survey reversed *Sometimes* and *Usually*. Second, the original question #6 said, "My teacher believed I was a good

student." The field test students said this was impossible to answer because it would require them to read the teacher's mind. Third, the original #7 said, "My teacher did not keep my homework long, but handed back graded papers quickly." Even though this was a caring characteristic cited in the caring literature, the field test students said that couldn't apply it because their experience with their most caring teacher did not involve handing back graded papers. Third, the original question #8 said, "My teacher was not afraid to make mistakes." This confused the students because they again said they didn't know how the teacher felt, and the concept of "laughing at oneself" seemed to escape them. Therefore, questions #6, #7, and #8 of the original survey were dropped. In addition, on the advice of the field test students, the font was slightly enlarged, and in the directions students were given the choice of circling or check-marking their responses, as well as adding any needed comments. The surveys were anonymous.

Field Test of the Data Collection Instrument

The field test was administered on August 26, 1999 at 9:00 a.m. Permission was obtained to allow students to participate in the survey, and students were given the

option of not participating, but all chose to answer the survey. Students first read the survey to themselves and answered the questions. Then, this researcher read each question aloud and the students articulated anything that made the question difficult to answer. Students and this researcher did not discuss their individual responses. This researcher made notes on an extra copy of the survey. Then, this researcher collected all of the student surveys. Later, this researcher read each survey and compared the information with the notes taken during the discussion. Appropriate changes were made to the survey, and a final copy was constructed for the data collection group.

Administration of the Data Collecting Instrument

On Friday, August 27, 1999, at approximately 1:00 p.m., the final version of the survey was administered to the 7th grade language arts class. Permission was obtained for the students to answer the survey, and the class was given the same instructions as the field test group. The students were given the option to not participate, but all chose to answer the survey. Students read the surveys to themselves and answered the questions. When all students had completed the survey, they were collected. Later they were analyzed for results.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in several ways. First, data were graphed. Question #1 was graphed separately because it asks what grade the students were in, and doesn't ask about caring teachers' behaviors. Then, questions #2 through #7 were graphed showing the number of responses for each choice (*Always, Sometimes, Usually, Never*).

Next, the questions were rank ordered, with the question having the greatest number of *Always* responses being first. Then, the researcher looked for patterns in student responses for each question that settled into emergent themes.

Finally, the questions and the emergent themes were presented in a chart showing the number of students' responses for each theme.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The role of the researcher in this descriptive qualitative study was that of an objective data collector. Since the data were collected during the first week of school, the students had not yet had any significant interactions with the researcher. Therefore, even though the student respondents were members of the researcher's

classroom, their answers were regarding teachers other than the researcher.

SUMMARY

In Chapter Three, the procedure for collecting the data was presented in two sections: (1) Construction of the data collection instrument, and (2) Administration of the data collection instrument. Also, the composition of the Field Test Group, the Data Collection Group, the school, and the community were described. Finally, data collection, including construction of the Data Collection Instrument, field test of the Data Collection Instrument, and administration of the Data Collection Instrument were also described.

In Chapter Four, the results are presented in graphs, a list of student survey questions with responses, and a table showing which questions yielded which emergent themes.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Presentation of the Results

This chapter presents the results from a survey that was constructed from the basis of the purpose of this study: to examine how caring teachers' behaviors impact students' perceptions of their own learning, with the central focus on students' attitudes regarding an individual teacher's caring behaviors and their influence on students' perceived academic achievement. This survey addressed the specific research question: What are the caring teacher behaviors that students view as important?

The results of the survey are presented in: (1) two graphs, (2) a list of the questions, and (3) a table showing which questions yielded which emergent themes.

Graphs

The first graph (see Figure 2) shows each question in the order it was presented on the student survey, with the exception of question #1. Question #1 is presented on its own graph because it asked which grade the teacher taught, and did not address a particular teacher behavior. The first graph also shows the number of each response (*always, usually, sometimes, never*) for each question. The student

survey questions that correspond to the graph are listed in Figure 1.

The second graph (see Figure 3) shows which grade the students were in when they experienced their caring teacher, which was question #1. Question #1 was included on the survey for two reasons: (1) to help the student focus on a particular teacher, and (2) to provide information for the possibility of future research on the effects of age and perceptions of caring behavior.

#1.) The teacher I'm thinking of was my _____ grade teacher.
#2.) My teacher listened to me.
#3.) I felt free to ask my teacher questions.
#4.) My teacher made sure I understood what was being taught.
#5.) My teacher made sure I did my homework.
#6.) My teacher made this class interesting.
#7.) I learned a lot in this class because of my teacher.

Figure 1: Student Survey Questions

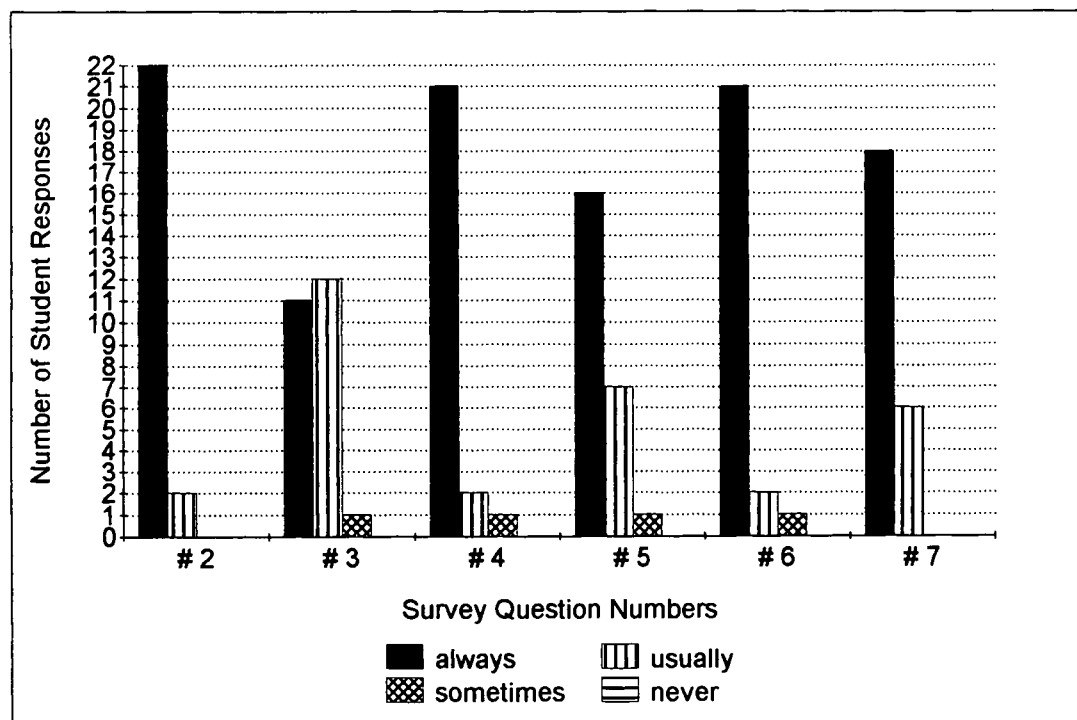


Figure 2: Survey Responses

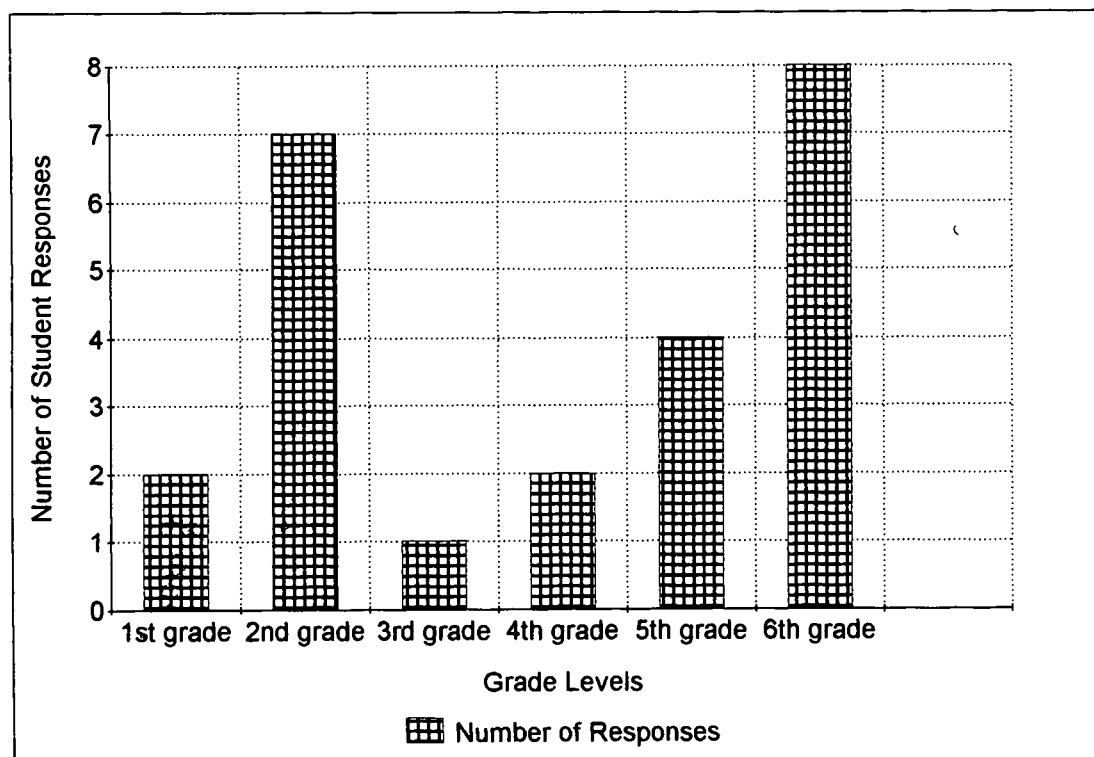


Figure 3: Grade Levels of Caring Teachers

Survey Questions

Students' comments for each question have been grouped under each question, with the groups having a separate heading. Each heading represents an emergent theme. The first group of comments presented here are for question #7 because it is the pivotal question. Then, comments are presented for the remaining questions in rank order, beginning with the question that received the highest number of *Always*.

Students' Responses

Question #7: I learned a lot in this class because of my teacher.

HELPING:

"She taught us a lot."

"... she teaches very well and prepares you for the next grade."

"She would make sure the point was getting across to me."

"She always made sure you understood..."

"She seemed to go at a good speed for me."

"He was the best I ever had because he would always repeat & give you extra help."

PERSONAL CONNECTION:

"She was so nice you wanted to listen."

"I really liked my 4th grade teacher."

"She was/is a great teacher, I had her and so did my 2 little brothers..."

"I will always remember this teacher."

FUN:

"She acted things out in Social Studies and made it interesting."

"... and were having fun."

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS:

"It was from her and the other students."

SUCCESS:

"That was the first year I got all A's."

Question #2: My teacher listened to me.

EQUALITY:

"She always listened to everyone equally no matter who they were."

"He listened to everybody and that made it nice."

AVAILABILITY, INCLUDING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM:

"She was always willing to listen."

"She let you come in at Eagle (class period) and talk to her."

"She always had time to listen, I even went to her house to talk with her."

"Whenever I had something to say she listened."

"She was always very open and a great listener."

"She would say hi to me outside the classroom. She helps me with my outside hobbie."

"My teacher would stop what she was doing to listen to me."

"I remember asking her questions lots of times."

HELPING BEHAVIORS:

"If I ever got a bad grade she would always try her best to help me bring the grade up."

SENSITIVITY:

"She could tell if I needed to talk to her."

CELEBRATING ANOTHER PERSON'S JOY OR SUCCESS:

"She would make you feel good when you did something good by giving you treats and aplauding you."

Question #4: My teacher made sure I understood what was being taught.

EQUALITY:

"She'd always make the assignment very clear to everyone."

"She'd go around and talk to each person and make sure I understood."

"He went around the room to each person and made sure we understood what we

were doing."

"She would always take time out to make sure everyone understood!"

AVAILABILITY, INCLUDING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM:

"She would let me stay after and she'd help me and all that stuff."

HELPING BEHAVIORS:

"We reviewed in class a lot."

"She would always do examples on the board..."

"She always asked did we understand the lesson..."

"She would always read the directions and write the stuff on the chalkboard."

SENSITIVITY:

"...she knew when we didn't understand."

"Even if you didn't raise your hand for help, if you looked like you didn't get it,

he would still come over to your desk and asked if you were having trouble."

FUN:

"...or (do) something fun with the lesson."

Question #6: My teacher made this class interesting.

FUN:

"She made learning fun."

"She always found a way to put a sparke in it."

"She would always do fun expierences with the lessons and she always had a

fun class to go to."

"She always thought of creative ideas to make the class fun."

"We always learned things in a fun and interesting way."

"She would make it funny and we acked out playes and stuff like that."

"He made up fun games to play with the lesson."

"My teacher was always thinking of new and exciting ways to learn."

"She would always try to make class fun somehow."

"He always made learning fun for me."

ACTIVITIES:

"We went outside and did labs and stuff."

"She always had interesting things to do."

"We would play math games."

"We played a lot of games to help us learn."

"We would play games or learn song to help us remember what she was

teaching. We had show and tell everyday."

Question #5: My teacher made sure I did my homework.

EQUALITY:

"She would always ask for everybody to get our there homework."

"He would always check to see if every had their home work."

AVAILABILITY, INCLUDING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM:

"She would help me after school. She also had study tables, but I never had to go."

HELPING BEHAVIORS:

"If we forgot it she would remind us at eagle [homeroom period]."

"She would always make shure I had it ritten down. In my asighnment notebook."

"She would always check my homework."

"She'd always's check it every day!

ACCOUNTABILITY:

"We checked each others paper so we had to have it."

"We did'nt have very much homework then. And wer'ent as responsible."

PERSONAL CONNECTION:

"Sometimes she assigned us homework but she would say 'in her own

words' that we didn't have to do it."

"sometime if i forgot my homework he would give me an extra day."

Question #3: I felt free to ask my teacher questions.

SENSITIVITY:

"Usually because sometimes I thought it was stupid and she could tell so she

would talk to me after or something."

PERSONAL CONNECTION:

"She was a really nice teacher."

"She listened."

"I would not ask her quesstions though if I thought it would make her mad or

if I would have been interupting."

SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

"She made us feel comfortable to ask her anything."

"She believed no question was wrong to ask."

"I never felt stupid if I asked a question."

"He never yelled at you for asking something he
already explained, so that
made it easy."

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

(Sometimes) "Because I would be embarased."

"Sometimes she was busy so I didn't ask her."

"I would only answer if I was positive I had the right
answer."

The following table shows questions #2 through #7 and
the number of students' responses for each theme.

<= THEMES and (total # of responses)	Q#2.) My teacher listened to me.	Q#3.) I felt free to ask my teacher questions.	Q#4.) My teacher made sure I understood what was being taught.	Q#5.) My teacher made sure I did my homework.	Q#6.) My teacher made this class interesting.	Q#7.) I learned a lot in this class because of my teacher.
Helping	1	0	4	4	0	6
Fun	0	0	1	0	10	2
Availability	8	0	1	1	0	0
Personal Connection	0	3	0	2	0	4
Equality	2	0	4	2	0	0
Activities	0	0	0	0	5	0
Sensitivity	1	1	2	0	0	0
Safe Environmen t	0	4	0	0	0	0
Negative Comments	0	3	0	0	0	0
Accountabil ity	0	0	0	2	0	0
Community	0	0	0	0	0	1
Success	0	0	0	0	0	1
Celebrate Joy/Success	1	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 4: Student Questions and Emergent Themes

The results presented in Chapter IV are from a survey that sought to answer the research question: What are the caring teacher behaviors that students view as important? The student responses were first presented on a graph which showed how each question (and therefore its corresponding caring teacher behavior), with the exception of question #1 that did not related to teacher behavior, was rated by the students using the scale, *Always, Usually, Sometimes, Never*. Then, a second graph presented the results of

question #1, that asked what grade the students were in when they experienced the caring teacher. After the graphs were presented, each question was listed with the student responses grouped under emergent themes. Finally, the data were presented on a table showing the questions, the number of student responses, and the emergent themes.

In Chapter Five, the researcher discusses the results, reflects on the implications for the field, and suggests directions for further research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this descriptive qualitative study, the purpose was to examine how caring teachers' behaviors impact students' perceptions of their own academic learning. The focus was students' attitudes regarding an individual teacher's caring behaviors and their influence on students' perceived academic achievement. Specifically, the researcher explored the following research question: What are the caring teacher behaviors that students view as important?

In Chapter IV the findings were presented in two graphs, a list of the questions with unedited students' comments, and a list of themes with the question number and number of responses for each.

The first graph was a bar graph showing the number of each of the students' responses (*Always, Usually, Sometimes, or Never*) for questions #2 through #7. Question #1 was shown on a separate graph because it dealt with the grade the student was in, and not a particular caring teacher behavior.

First, question #2: My teacher listened to me, will be discussed because it received the greatest number of students' *Always* responses. This "question" resonates with

connotations. First, in order for a teacher to be listening, a student must be speaking. And the fact that students rank this highest indicates more than just their speaking, but that they have "voice." The concept of "voice" attests to the student being recognized and valued as a capable contributing human being. As such, students with "voice" tend to feel cared about, as well as capable.

The next questions discussed (question #4: My teacher made sure I understood what was being taught, and question #6: My teacher made this class interesting) tied for the number of students' *Always* responses and are therefore considered together. These questions link to question #2, as well as each other. First, the idea that a teacher would make sure a student understands what is being taught indicates that the teacher does not move on to new material until the old material is learned. This makes sense if the teacher values the students as capable contributing members of the learning community. Conversely, if a teacher does move on to new material before a student has mastered the old material, it is clear (at least from the student's point-of-view) the teacher has chosen to do so because the teacher does not believe the student is capable of mastering the material. This has major implications for

teachers, who often have such a wide range of abilities and backgrounds in their classrooms that it is impossible to wait for everyone to understand every concept or skill being taught before moving on. Waiting too long either interferes with the curriculum that must be taught, or it perniciously delays the learning of brighter students.

Question #6: My teacher made this class interesting, reasonably links to questions #2 and #4. If students have "voice" in a classroom and consider themselves a valuable element, then they will be interested because they have a vested interest in what happens in the classroom. Likewise, when students feel themselves not listened to and not valuable, they will not be interested in the classroom or learning. Perhaps teachers should look closely at their relationships with disinterested students and see if they (the teachers) are listening to them (the students).

The next question to be discussed is #5: My teacher made sure I did my homework. Perhaps this falls in line with other nurturing/caring concerns for well being exhibited by other caretakers, i.e. parents, such as "Did you eat your breakfast? Tie your shoes so you don't fall. Brush your teeth." While students may not innately like the task, such as homework or brushing their teeth, they

know the questioning adults are doing so because they know the students are capable, and it is something the students need to do for the students' benefit and well being. In other words, the adults care.

Less than half the students responded with *Always* to question #3: I felt free to ask my teacher questions. Most of the other half responded with *Usually*. In light of the high response to question #2: My teacher listened to me, it may be that there were influences outside the behaviors of the teacher that impacted this. For example, the personality of the student, the personality or cultural makeup of the class, or even the age of the student may have affected how the student viewed question #3.

The pivotal question was question #7: I learned a lot in this class because of my teacher. It received 18 (out of 24) *Always* responses. The remainder of the responses was *Usually*. The students were initially told to think of a teacher who cared about them, so this question gets to the purpose of this study, which was to examine how caring teachers' behaviors impact students' perceptions of their own academic learning. Specifically, the focus was students' attitudes regarding an individual teacher's caring behaviors and their influence on students' perceived

academic achievement. Therefore, according to the graph (see Figure 2), students felt that the caring teacher behaviors of listening, making sure the student understood what was being taught, and making the class interesting were the top three behaviors that positively impacted the students' perceptions of perceived academic achievement.

The second graph presented in Chapter IV (see Figure 3) shows the number of responses for the grades the students were in when they experienced the caring teacher. The highest response came in the 6th grade with 8 responses, followed by 2nd grade with 7 responses. Because most of the students have been in this same school system together, they were thinking of the same specific teachers. This may be more of an indication of the personality of the teachers, and less of an indication of the age of the students as it relates to the impact on this study. Although, it may be an indication of each teacher's ability to demonstrate caring behaviors to their respective aged students. In any case, a much larger sampling would be needed before making any assumptions on this topic.

Another outcome from the results was emergent themes. The top three themes were *helping*, *fun*, and *availability*. These themes may be as important as the specific behaviors

that emerged from this study because of the flexibility they provide. While knowing which particular caring teacher behaviors the students view as important was the specific research question of this study, good teaching will never be prescriptive, so one must beware of attaching oneself to dictated behaviors rather than overarching ideas.

Several pressing questions would indicate the need for further research.

- How does the age of the students affect their perceptions of caring teachers' behaviors and their impact on the students' perceived academic achievement?
- Do perceptions change over time?
- How does gender, students and teachers, affect the caring teachers' behaviors and their impact on students' perceived academic achievement?
- What role does culture play?

In summation, it is clear that caring teachers' behaviors do impact students' perceptions of their own academic learning. The specific research question, What are the caring teacher behaviors that students view as important? was explored by this research. But this

research is the tip of the iceberg in regard to how teachers' behaviors impact students. More research, as noted earlier, as well as research into the negative impact of negative teachers' behaviors is needed to get a truly authentic picture of this phenomenon.

APPENDIX A
STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Think of a teacher you have had who cared about you. Please answer the following questions by circling or check-marking the best response. If you want to, you may add comments.

1.) The teacher I'm thinking of was my _____ grade teacher.

2.) My teacher listened to me.

(Always ___ Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Never ___)

Comments: _____

3.) I felt free to ask my teacher questions.

(Always ___ Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Never ___)

Comments: _____

4.) My teacher made sure I understood what was being taught.

(Always ___ Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Never ___)

Comments: _____

5.) My teacher made sure I did my homework.

(Always ___ Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Never ___)

Comments: _____

6.) My teacher made this class interesting.

(Always ___ Sometimes ___ Usually ___ Never ___)

Comments: _____

7.) I learned a lot in this class because of my teacher.

(Always ___ Sometimes ___ Usually ___ Never ___)

Comments: _____

Please circle correct one. *) I am a Boy or Girl

Please fill in answer. *) I am in the _____ grade.

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