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RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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# DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all of the wonderful people who helped me find my voice. My husband, Andy, for the silent hugs allowing me to cry and work through the emotions that were necessary for my growth. Our daughters, Sarah and Hannah, who were always there telling me I could do this and not complaining when the house was a mess and when writing took precedence over dinner preparations. Susan Coats, my mom, allowed me to live through adolescence and allowed me to make mistakes. Mom, you were the best transcriber, and I cherish the conversations that occurred throughout this process – we have a book to write. My dad, Bo Coats, put up with mom and I, and he never faltered in his love and support. My siblings, Cheridan Olson and Jamie Coats, are who I count on when the going gets tough and whose leadership I admire. My strong family of women who I can just think of and know that I am loved and accepted for just being me: Kelly Walker, Cindy Bissett, Julie Jones, Lori Cammack, Jennifer Crook, and Ashley Cammack. My dearest friends who have supplied me with rivers of wine and who knew that I had something important to say: Sabra Westbrook, Rachel NewMoon, Jeramy Westbrook, and Steve Anderson. Throughout my life there have been a handful of inspirational teachers that challenged me in unique ways, and for that I am grateful: Gayle Fischer, Kayla Pennington, Patti English, Janice Willingham, Kim Pennington, Melinda Parks, Jackie Seabourn, and Kate Raymond. Last and definitely not least are all of my students who have become a part of my soul - we will forever be connected.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how caring teachers enact relational pedagogy in higher education. In this study, relational pedagogy was defined as the intentional practice of caring teachers interacting with students to build and sustain positive relationships that cognitively and emotionally support their students throughout their journeys together. This study contributes to existing literature by: answering requests from scholars to include observational data of higher education classrooms, extending relational pedagogy from theoretical discourse to practical application, and introducing relational intention as a necessary concept to the enactment of relational pedagogy. The current study provides an opportunity for institutions to address issues of persistence, retention, remediation, and changing demographics in higher education at the classroom level where teaching and learning occur, and where relationships between teachers and students are built.

The research design followed a constructivist grounded theory qualitative approach with eight caring teachers in a community college setting. The site of the study was a suburban community college located in the Midwest with large non-traditional student enrollment. The study took place during an eight week summer session. Recruitment of the purposeful sample began by contacting division deans at a Midwestern Community College (pseudonym). The division deans were informed of the research purpose and the characteristics of caring teachers. Each division dean nominated caring teachers from his or her division who were teaching during the summer semester and who might be willing to participate in the study. Out of the fifteen nominated teachers, eight teachers who were identified as caring teachers agreed to participate in the study. Five

teachers taught in the mathematics and sciences division, one teacher taught in the health professions division, and two teachers taught in the humanities division. The data sources were teacher interviews and classroom observations. Each teacher had one formal interview and four classroom observations with follow-up interviews between observations.

The findings of this study indicated that a caring teacher was necessary but insufficient; relational intention was found to be necessary for the enactment of relational pedagogy. Relational intention varied, which indicated enactment was on a continuum based on the teacher's purpose and how each teacher devoted time to get to know their students. The major implications of this study involve suggestions for institutions of higher education such as: providing support of faculty on how to relationally charge their practice, developing learning communities, and re-thinking the Carnegie unit. In addition, this study has implications for faculty who work with pre-service teachers such as: modeling relational pedagogy during education coursework and providing opportunities for focused observations of classrooms where relational pedagogy is enacted.

*Keywords:* relational pedagogy, relational intention, higher education, teacher-student relationships

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

I recall the first time I had a real connection with a teacher. I was in the second grade, and the teacher developed a class project that required each student to take on certain roles in a pretend pizza parlor. The teacher assigned me the role of pizzeria manager. This made me feel valued by the teacher and motivated me to do my best. As I reflect on my time as a student, I can recall a handful of teachers who made me feel special in some way; unfortunately, during high school, these connections faded. As an undergraduate student, I often felt alienated and uncared for by my professors. It was not until my final year in my doctoral program that I felt this connectedness again. As an adult learner, I recognized the influence this connectivity had on my willingness to learn and engage in the instructor's course.

Long gone are the days of carefree, traditional undergraduate students who enter higher education directly out of high school with full financial and familial support. Students of all ethnicities, ages, backgrounds, as well as students with children, students with multiple jobs, and even some students who are homeless represent the new norm of undergraduate students in higher education (Roberts, 2011). Persistence, retention, and remediation are issues in higher education that are related to these changing demographics (AlKandari, 2012; Baum, Kurose, & McPherson, 2013; Gentry, 2014). If these issues are not addressed, then higher education becomes ineffective and fails to maintain a just and educated society (Baum et al., 2013; Gentry, 2014; Gutmann, 2015). In order to fulfill the aim of higher education and address the current issues in higher education associated with changing demographics, teachers

need to consider the enactment of relational pedagogy (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Murphy & Brown, 2012; Roberts, 2011).

Relational pedagogy as described by Sidorkin (2000) is a group of people who interpret each other through a lens of past experiences and cultural and social expectations. Other scholars describe the same idea using terms like ethics of care, pedagogy of care, and connectedness (Gilligan, 1982; Goralnik, Millenbah, Nelson, & Thorp, 2012; Noddings, 2005). Relational pedagogy, in this study, is defined as the intentional practice of caring teachers interacting with students to build and sustain positive relationships that cognitively and emotionally support their students throughout their journeys together. My definition of relational pedagogy is unique and was constructed as a way to synthesize the multitude of views regarding the practice of teachers who emphasize the importance of teacher-student relationships in education.

## Purpose of Higher Education

Higher education institutions are dynamic and play a significant role in producing graduates who can financially contribute to society and participate as global citizens (Baum et al., 2013; Gentry, 2014). Gutmann (2015) stated that the overall general aim of higher education is to provide opportunity through equal access for all students, to enhance creative understanding, and to enable students who can act and think critically in a way to benefit society. She suggested that a liberal arts curriculum integrated within subjects through ethics is one way to connect creative understanding (intellectual work) and contribution (practical work). Creative understanding is an interdisciplinary approach to learning that goes beyond a single subject; it promotes student recognition of problem complexities that enhances their understanding of their

world, which "enables educated individuals to make key contributions to society" (Gutmann, 2015, p. 22).

Students use creative understanding to connect what they are learning with their personal beliefs in order to contribute to society. In the past, higher education has left this to professional schools, and if students did not attend professional schools, then they were left to make these connections for themselves (Brighouse, & McPherson, 2015; Noddings, 2005; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). Noddings (2005) stated that "departmentalization leads to 'passing the buck' on moral issues or decisions that require sound judgment" (p. 39). It is the responsibility of every instructor to address affective and ethical components. This is a paradigm shift from normative higher education teaching practices that are not aligned with affective and ethical components (Gentry, 2014). In order to meet the general aims of education and address higher education issues, teachers need to find ways to engage students, enhance creative understanding, and develop relationships of care; ethics should not be left out of the curriculum (Brighouse & McPherson, 2015; Gentry, 2014). In order to address issues of persistence, retention, and remediation related to changing demographics to enhance creative understanding in higher education, and maintain a knowledgeable society that will act for the good of our planet and all people, relational pedagogy needs to be better understood and enacted in the classroom.

## Higher Education Issues

Persistence, retention, and remediation associated with changing demographics are three main issues in higher education (AlKandari, 2012; Baum et al., 2013; Gentry, 2014). Hartley (2011) surveyed 605 undergraduate students to determine how

interpersonal resilience (social support), intrapersonal resilience (tenacity, tolerance of stress and negative emotions, control, acceptance of change, spirituality), and mental health measures explained variance in grade point average (GPA) and university sense of belonging. He found that intrapersonal resilience accounted for variance in GPA. This finding was important because it indicated that academic persistence was the interplay between the student and her ability to integrate academic and social dimensions of college (Hartley, 2011). In addition to intrapersonal resilience affecting persistence, mentors also influenced persistence. Hu & Ma (2010) conducted a quantitative study over two years (high school senior to college freshman) with 452 students, some who had mentors and others who did not. The mentors offered support and encouragement. They found that students who had mentors were 1.6 times more likely to persist in college. The extent to which students integrate academically and socially was important for them to persist and succeed at the college level (Hu & Ma, 2010).

Related to persistence is retention. Retention and graduation rates serve as key indicators of performance for institutions in higher education (Titus, 2004). Gentry (2014) reviewed the literature on persistence and the impact of students not completing college, and one of his major findings was that retention increased and drop-out rates decreased when faculty were actively involved in assisting students. Retention of students and their abilities to persist in college have an affective component that relies on personal characteristics and social support from mentors or faculty members (Gentry, 2014).

Caring teachers care about the interests of their students, show respect for their

students by the way they listen to their students, provide positive feedback in a timely manner, and use positive praise in the classroom when interacting with individual students (Micari & Pazos, 2012; Walker & Gleaves, 2016; Yair, 2008). Teachers who care about relationships approach students with open mindedness and are willing to provide support to students through informal interactions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Zell, 2010; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). Pascarella & Terenzini (1977) conducted a study to investigate the patterns of relationships between informal interactions with faculty and persistence versus voluntary attrition. The longitudinal study was conducted with 344 freshmen, and they found that students who persisted had significantly higher number of faculty interactions than students who did not. Out of the six types of student-faculty interactions that were factored into the study only one clearly contributed to discrimination of the groups: faculty conversations with regard to course or intellectual matters.

Zell (2010) conducted a qualitative study that looked at the psychological and affective experiences of Latina/o students that contributed to persistence of academic goals. She interviewed 15 community college students, and each student was asked to reflect on their educational experiences prior to and during college. The students reported that they were motivated to develop relationships with faculty whom they perceived to be open-minded, enthusiastic about their content, and who not only had high academic expectations, but also provided meaningful feedback. Informal interactions with faculty made them feel cared for and comfortable to ask for help when they needed it which contributed to their persistence. Lundberg & Schreiner (2004) conducted an analysis by race/ethnicity with regard to the quality and frequency

of student-faculty interactions as predictors of learning. They used college student experience questionnaire data from 4,501 undergraduate students with 643 students representing each of the following race/ethnic groups: African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Mexican American, Hispanic/Puerto-Rican, Native American, White, and Multi-ethnic. The quality of relationships with faculty was the only predictor of learning across all groups. In addition, they described the effects of social support as increasing retention with Latino/a students, increasing persistence with Native American students, and when the teacher discusses students' abilities to succeed there were significant student gains in science reasoning, career development, intellectual development, and problem solving abilities for all students regardless of ethnicity.

Baum, Kurose, and McPherson (2013), in a fifty-year overview of postsecondary education in the United States, reported that approximately one third of students required at least one remedial course. They conjectured the increase in remediation was due to demographic changes such as more non-traditional students and more creative solutions to help financially assist lower income students. Roberts (2011) identified non-traditional students as students who were commuters, minority, ethnic, lower socio-economic status groups, disabled, and mature students. He conducted a study with five self-identified non-traditional students at an institution with high non-completion rates. The five students were interviewed as a group and were asked to discuss the teaching/learning environment, positive/negative experiences, institutional support with regard to the ease or difficulty of higher education transition, and whether the environment was appropriate for their needs. The students reported they often felt alone and unsupported by higher education faculty.

Roberts (2011) hypothesized that it may be possible to increase retention and decrease alienation of non-traditional students through positive experiences in the classroom using pedagogy modification. This redirects retention attention from support services available to non-traditional students to how pedagogy in the classroom may influence experiences of the non-traditional student. Murphy and Brown (2012), in a theoretical paper, supported this idea by arguing for a shift in higher education from "governmental codified statements of teaching" (p. 644) to inter-relational experiences that address academic, intellectual, and social agendas with an emphasis on values.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) stated the number one principle in good undergraduate teaching is the relationship between faculty and students. At the core of educational philosophy is the idea that when working with people it is imperative to engage students using a pedagogy that emphasizes cognitive and emotional engagement in order for meaningful learning to occur (Goralnik, Millenbah, Nelson, & Thorp, 2012). Addressing the changing demographics issue in higher education calls for faculty to provide support outside of the academic domain; students need to feel supported and a teaching pedagogy that is relational may have positive impacts on retention (Murphy & Brown, 2012; Roberts, 2011). In addition to these issues, higher education faculty lack formal training in the art and science of teaching, so they are often unsupported and left to figure out how to teach through trial and error (Austin, 2002).

## Interpretative Lenses

There are three interpretative lenses that frame this study. The first lens is relational pedagogy which is focused on relationships, the second lens is

constructivism which is focused on how individuals construct meaning through relationships, and the third lens comes form social learning theory and brings together relationships within the context of learning. Relational pedagogy, in this study, is defined as the intentional practice of caring teachers interacting with students to build and sustain positive relationships that cognitively and emotionally support their students throughout their journeys together.

**Relational Pedagogy**

The relational pedagogy lens is like a pair of 3D glasses – one side is cognitive and one side is affective, and when looking through both sides simultaneously a teacher can see the whole student – the human student – and relationships can be built (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). The emphasis of relational pedagogy is placed on student-teacher relationships and how the interactions between students and teachers influence student engagement, persistence, and learning. Noddings (1984, 1988, 1993) used the term connectedness which develops between teachers and students through caring relationships. Caring relationships promote authentic conversations as teachers and students engage in the formulation and understanding of concepts (Robinson, 1996). Robinson (1996) discussed the story of a high school student named Sally who stated that she was more willing to learn the subject if she felt her teacher cared. She also stated that she was dissatisfied with her physics teacher because he used sarcasm and aggressive talk, which intimidated her and caused her to disconnect from the material. Starting in upper elementary schools and continuing into higher education content becomes departmentalized along with teacher specialization, which decreases student engagement, alters learning behaviors, and negatively affects academic performance

(O'Connor & McCartney, 2007). A relational pedagogical lens expands the view of teaching and learning in higher education beyond outcomes or proficiency to include the affective domain, the importance of relationships in higher education, and provides a pathway for addressing issues in higher education.

Relational pedagogy is used alongside various teaching modes to motivate and engage students in core content that may otherwise be viewed by students as uninteresting (Yair, 2008). Teachers who enact relational pedagogy do not adhere to one type of teaching method (Noddings, 2005). It can be enacted by teachers who use traditional teaching techniques, such as lecture, or by teachers who use progressive teaching techniques, such as inquiry.

Noddings (2005) argued that pedagogy of care does not replace traditional or progressive modes of teaching; rather it is an understanding that a relationship exists between two humans. The teacher is intentional with her actions and interactions in the classroom to build and maintain relationships with and between her students. For example, a teacher who uses traditional teaching methods may greet every student by name, maintain a friendly disposition throughout lectures, provide students with timely feedback, and encourage students to attend informal meetings, such as office hours. In addition to these actions, a teacher who uses progressive methods may design specific collaborative activities that engage students in meaningful discourse. As students work together, the teacher interacts with small groups and individual students, thus getting to know students on a more personal level. In both of these examples, the teacher is intentional about trying to meet the affective needs of students. Caring, according to Heidegger (1962), is a human capacity that develops individually and it is the ultimate

reality of life. This aligns education with a moral purpose and an ethics of care that should be integrated into the current system (Noddings, 2005).

An ethics of care, from a feminist perspective, is a needs-and-response based normative ethical theory; it is an ethic of relation (Noddings, 2005). Noddings (2005) notes how "caring teachers listen and respond differentially to their students" (p. 19). An ethics of care is contextually situated and relies on a view of the world as a series of relationships (Gilligan, 1982). Care is promoted in a classroom through the processes of Modeling, Dialogue, and Practice in which the teacher and the learner embark on an academic journey together rather than two separate entities in a hierarchical environment (Freire, 1970; Noddings, 2002). Through daily Dialogue with students, teachers must Model what it is to care about other humans by listening and responding to the needs of students (Noddings, 2005; Palmer, 2007). The classroom space is designed to allow students time to Practice the act of caring, such as the participation and reification that is involved in Communities of Practice. The teacher also affirms and encourages the best in students through the process of Confirmation, which "lifts us toward our vision of a better self" (Noddings, 2005, p. 25). Confirmation allows for students, peripherally located in a Community of Practice a trajectory, to become fully participatory in the community. Dialogue, as envisioned by Freire, is open-ended without knowledge of what the possible outcome may be. Leaders who commit to true dialogue must constantly re-examine themselves, remain curious, and create spaces for learners to critically reflect (Freire, 2000; Freire & Macedo, 1995; Noddings, 2005). Dialogue allows students the opportunity to engage in reflective thinking, and it allows for teachers and students to further their own

understandings of mutually constructed meanings (Gentry, 2014; Kahu, 2013; Noddings, 2005; Wenger, 1998). The process of Dialogue "connects us to others and helps maintain relationships" (Noddings, 2005, p.23). While there are no set methods or instructional techniques on how to enact relational pedagogy, there are at least some actions a teacher can take to be mindful of the space where relationships reside. Caring is a special way of being in relation – minding the gap – not a specific set of behaviors (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Noddings, 2005). The instructor must open "the gap" where relationships reside so that students may choose to be in relation. The gap is where the teacher's authority begins and from which mutual trust can be developed (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004).

For Palmer (2007), relational pedagogy is enacted through trust built on compassion, patience, empathy, and the capacity to forgive. Palmer (2007) discussed vulnerability as a key factor to develop relationships and to connect students with content. Students are more likely to invest time and energy on less interesting content if the relationship with the teacher is positive (Palmer, 2007). Bingham and Sidorkin (2004) stated that knowledge arises as a by-product of relationships, interactions among people, and interactions with texts. Moreover, to have knowledge is to be able to respond to people in particular circumstances. Teachers who believe that relationships with students should involve care are important to students because they address the affective nature that is essential to learning; they recognize that teaching goes beyond subject matter. Caring is a connection between two people, whose roles as carer and recipient of care are mutually active (Noddings, 2005). The carer is characterized by motivational displacement, and the recipient of care is characterized

by reception, recognition, and response. However, one should not view relational pedagogy as simply the transmission and reception of care; there is individual meaning making that occurs during the transmission and reception of care that is constructivist in nature (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004).

**Constructivism**

The constructivism lens focuses on how individuals make meaning through interactions with content, experiences, and people (Palmer, 2007). The growth of the student is kept in view with this lens (Schiro, 2012). Constructivism is a social theory that promotes the idea that individual meaning is constructed through social interactions with others and with content (Palmer, 2007; Schiro, 2012; Wenger, 1998). The role of the instructor is to facilitate the meaning making process of individuals (Davis, 2004). Knowledge is subjective, received, and constructed. It is subjective to individual experience, and it is constructed through listening to others (received). Personal integration of content depends on whether the individual grants authority to the source of knowledge (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). Students who grant authority are more likely to engage in relationships with teachers, peers, and text while students who are reluctant to grant authority are more likely to disengage (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). Students are more likely to grant this authority for people they like and trust; "subject matter cannot carry itself, relation precedes any engagement with subject matter" (Noddings, 2005, p. 36). If educators want to help students grow in all domains of their lives, teachers need to build relationships with students in such a way that students are willing to grant authority. Teachers need to build caring relationships with students and establish a Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998).

## Communities of Practice

The third lens, Communities of Practice, focuses on the social aspect of our human nature and the social role involved in learning (Wenger, 1998). A classroom is full of diversity, and with this diversity comes sameness. Students are engaged in learning the same content, they have the same teacher, they have the same deadlines. This sameness socially draws people together (Wenger, 1998). An established Community of Practice in a classroom setting honors differences and recognizes sameness to maximize learning (Wenger, 1998). A Community of Practice is founded on the idea that relationships are central to learning and is a social learning theory that has applications in nearly all fields. For example, my sister is a service manager for a car dealership, and she established a morning meeting routine where her employees are invited to openly take part in problem solving organizational issues. She lets her employees know that she cares for them and that their voices are crucial to the success of their business by providing time to listen to them. A participatory environment where individuals feel valued, safe, and cared for is an environment where engaged individuals are found making a difference in their lives and in the lives of others. They belong to a Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998).

People belong to multiple communities of practice: families, friends, coworkers and institutions. The way individuals participate within these communities influences identity and learning. A Community of Practice describes how people engage within a community and how individuals integrate their selves within and across communities (Wenger, 1998). Learning requires reflection. Wenger suggests that by thinking about learning in social terms we may rethink and recognize the importance of relationships

and how meaning is developed out of the participation and reification processes within a community.

According to Wenger (1998), joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire are three characteristics of a Community of Practice. A joint enterprise is a source of coherence within a community in which the participants take ownership of a common goal. Mutual engagement describes a practice in which people negotiate meanings; it is participatory. The meanings become a language that is common to all the members and individuals report that this shared vocabulary builds camaraderie, which is indicative of the third aspect of a community: shared repertoire. The shared repertoire of a Community of Practice includes words, ways of doing things, symbols, and concepts that the community has adopted in the course of being together and which have become part of practice (Wenger, 1998).

The relationships between students and their teachers are important in an educational context. They form a community where individuals feel valued and become engaged in the common goals or objectives of the course (Wenger, 1998). This is similar to when I was a kid and the neighborhood had block parties. All of the adults would get together to socialize and to discuss problems/solutions that were important to them in the community, and all of us kids got together to use our imaginations and play as a large group instead of our smaller groups. If a neighbor was not present at the event, the entire group would walk to the house to find out what was going on and inquire if help was needed. This is the kind of care that is demonstrated in a classroom where a Community of Practice has been developed and relational pedagogy has been enacted. The students and the teacher know each other on a personal level, and they

work together not only to learn content but to also learn about each other and to care for one another.

## Definitions

**Care**: a practice that responds to needs, builds trust, and is evidenced by mutual concern and connectedness between persons (Held, 2005).

A **caring teacher:** characteristics of will, skill, social support, and classroom environment. The terms will, skill, and social support were appropriated from a study conducted by Whisler (1991). *Will,* in this study, was defined as the teachers' passion for teaching & learning and their commitment to work alongside students. *Skill* was defined as teachers being enthusiastic about content, serious about their fields, and committed to the content and processes relevant to their fields. *Social support* was defined as teacher-student interactions that led to the development of relationships. In addition to will, skill, and social support, a caring teacher's *classroom environment* is engaging, collaborative, lively, and safe/non-threatening.

**Relational pedagogy**: the intentional practice of caring teachers interacting with students to build and sustain positive relationships that cognitively and emotionally support their students throughout their journeys together.

**Teacher-student relationships**: the quality (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004) and quantity (Kuh & Hu, 2001) of interactions that occur between students and teachers in formal and informal educational contexts over time (Cotton & Wilson, 2006; Pascarella & Terrenzini, 1977; Stephen, O'Connell, & Hall, 2008).

**Interactions**: antecedents to relationships, defined as two-way verbal and non-verbal communications (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014).

**Professional knowledge**: the body of knowledge and skills from professional and life experiences that is needed to be successful in a profession (Tamir, 1991).

**Engagement**: the behavioral, intellectual, and social participation of students and teachers in the educational environment (Bronfebbrenner, 1977; Dunleavy, Willms, Milton, & Friesen, 2012; Finn, 1993; Newmann, 1992).

## Research Purpose and Research Questions

Empirical research indicates positive effects of enacting relational pedagogy on student engagement, learning, achievement, persistence, and retention (e.g., Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Micari & Pazos, 2012; Murphy & Brown, 2012; Yair, 2008). What appears to be missing – and what is explicitly called for in several articles – is a perspective on relational pedagogy that is grounded in classroom observations (Lundberg, & Schreiner, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Umbach, 2005; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). If research only shows relational pedagogy from theoretical discourses, self-report surveys, and interviews with teachers and students, then the concept of relational pedagogy is incomplete.

The purpose of this study is to understand how caring teachers enact relational pedagogy in the classroom. The overarching research question for this study is how do caring teachers enact relational pedagogy? There are three sub-questions also addressed in this study: 1) What do caring teachers do in the classroom to achieve positive relationships with students? 2) How do caring teachers engage students? 3) How do the interactions in a classroom indicate teacher-student relationships?

The process of how teachers foster relationships with students in higher education has largely gone unstudied. I embarked on this journey with eight caring

teachers to reveal, from personal observations and interviews, the process of how relational pedagogy is enacted in undergraduate courses. Chapter 2 presents a literature review of associated studies that support and at times contradict the findings revealed on this journey. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to answer the overarching and sub-questions associated with this study. In Chapter 4, I present the results of the study through the interpretative lenses outlined in this opening chapter. I conclude this journey by introducing a grounded theory on the enactment of relational pedagogy, discussing the implications, limitations, and future research possibilities associated with this study. Our time together is short, but it is my hope that this dissertation provides you with a "bright spark in the dark" (Juan, Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/14/2017) to embrace the interactions that are vital for the development and sustainability of relationships and our planet.

## Chapter 2

Relational pedagogy is a multi-dimensional theoretical construct. Relational pedagogy is grounded in the theoretical viewpoint of an ethics of care. This construct of relational pedagogy encompasses care, teacher-student relationships, and professional knowledge. Relational pedagogy crosses all educational contexts and is supported by empirical studies. First, I discuss an ethics of care and care. This is followed by teacher-student relationships and professional knowledge. The review concludes with studies on relational pedagogy.

### Ethics of Care

The ethics of care is a distinct moral theory that places emphasis on relations and brings the experiences of women out of the private sphere of the home to the public sphere where the masculine ethics of justice is located (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005). Ethics of care focuses on questions of trust, cultivation of relations, attentiveness and responsiveness to need, whereas ethics of justice focuses on questions of fairness, equality, and application of rules (Held, 2005). People remain interdependent throughout their lives, and an ethics of care recognizes this interdependency as fundamental and encourages the development of social relations through social practices and values (Held, 2005).

Family, social, and political contexts call on people to take responsibility. A person who is motivated by an ethics of care answers the call by establishing caring relations with individuals based on trust, solidarity, mutual concern, and empathetic responsiveness through dialogue that empowers people to express themselves (Held, 2005; Noddings, 2013). An ethics of care is a theory that is needed to evaluate caring

practices (Held, 2005). There are five features associated with an ethics of care proposed by Held (2005): attending to and meeting needs of those we take responsibility for; valuing emotions such as empathy, sympathy, responsiveness, and sensitivity; respect for the views of people with whom we have relations; reconceptualization of public and private domains; and understanding of persons as relational as opposed to self-sufficient individuals. She stated that an ethics of care is to care for others in a way that is not self-serving; rather the care is mutual where the interests of both parties are intertwined (Held, 2005).

## Care

The practice of care is considered both an attitude and a labor (Noddings, 2002; Tronto, 1993). According to Noddings (2002), the carer understands the needs of the cared for, pays attention to the feelings of the cared for, and has the skill to understand from the perspective of the cared for. She feels that these attitudes are receptive-intuitive not logical-analytical. There is an engrossment of the carer with the cared for based on feelings not thoughts (Noddings, 2002). According to Bubeck (1995), caring labor is meeting the needs of another person through face-to-face interactions where the cared for is dependent on the carer because the cared for cannot independently meet his or her own needs. This labor view of caring does not require any emotional bonds and neglects the attitude of the carer (Held, 2005). Held (2005) defined caring as a relation where there is shared interest between the carer and the cared for that is based on the well being of each person. In this way caring encompasses both attitude and labor, consistent with an ethics of care that focuses on social relations (Held, 2005).

The number one complaint of students in schools is “they don’t care” (Noddings, 2005, p. 35). Noddings stated that students learn in communion and listen to people who value them and whom they value. She argued that pedagogy of care does not replace traditional or progressive modes of teaching; rather it is an understanding that a relation exists between two humans (Noddings, 2005). The act of caring involves a carer, who is characterized by an intention to help individuals based on their knowledge and understanding of specific individual needs (motivational displacement), and a recipient of care, who is characterized by reception, recognition, and response. A caring person has intention to care, a disposition to care effectively, and participates in caring relations (Held, 2005). Care is not only a practice engaged in by the carer, but it is also a perceived construct by the cared-for (Tosolt, 2008). Tosolt (2008) explains “for an encounter to be caring, a student must perceive and recognize a teacher’s behavior as caring and respond openly to the approach” (p. 275). Students decide whether or not the actions of the teacher are caring, and Tosolt (2008) found that when high school students perceived teachers as caring then motivation and achievement increased, which is consistent across literature on perceived care with elementary and middle level students (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1997; Goodenow, 1993; Patrick, Ryan & Kaplan, 2007).

Caring teachers take on a dual role, that of teacher and learner, being concerned with the creation and maintenance of trusting relationships with students in order to overcome unequal power relations due to educational structures (Noddings, 2005). There is no recipe for establishing care; however, there are behaviors of teachers that indicate they are caring. A caring teacher, according to Noddings (2005), attends to

students in a nonselective way, has a desire to help, listens, feels, and responds with concern for students. “Time spent developing relations of care is not time wasted. Everything goes better as a result. Telling stories, listening to complaints, deliberating on social problems all have a place in good teaching” (Noddings, 2013, pp. 52-53). All of the six caring higher education teachers interviewed in a grounded theory study conducted by Walker and Gleaves (2016) mentioned that they believed in building and sustaining relationships as necessary to students’ academic persistence and achievement, which was at odds with the views of their colleagues who thought of pedagogic care as a waste of time. The caring teachers often felt alienated and had to defend their positions to individuals who believed they were not behaving as academics, which may be why some teachers resist this approach (Walker & Gleaves, 2016).

According to Held (2005), care is not a disposition but a practice that responds to needs, builds trust, and is evidenced by mutual concern and connectedness between persons. Teaching is a public domain where teachers engage in caring for students based on the needs of the students and the skill of the teacher to effectively meet those needs. Chaskin and Rauner (1995) described caring in an educational context as the “continual expression of caring behaviors that develops the trusting relationships in which growth can occur” (p. 674). Brown (2005) suggested that congruent communication was how trust developed between teachers and middle school students. Congruent communication encompassed the use of active listening techniques, matching verbal and non-verbal language, and responding with empathy to student anxiety and frustration, which suggested that students may perceive care offered by the

teacher through the use of congruent communication techniques to build trust (Brown, 2005).

However, not all teachers implement care. Docan-Morgan (2011) conducted a study with 306 college teachers who were asked to describe a relational turning point and found that there were moments when students took advantage of the caring nature of the teacher, such as the case when a teacher was helping a student one-on-one and another student went through his bag to retrieve course material. This type of violation of trust between student and teacher affected the way the teacher approached not only the individual student but also the class as a whole because students influence how teachers teach (Docan-Morgan, 2011). Emotional investment increases teachers' risk for burnout (Teven, 2007). Burnout is characterized by depersonalization, loss of personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion that may lead to the dehumanization of students and to teachers who are less likely to "want to spend time with their students" (Teven, 2007, p. 385). McLaughlin (1991) pointed to the struggle of one student teacher that wanted to show care for students and create a caring classroom environment, but she experienced conflict between care and an "authoritative professional stance" (McLaughlin, 1991, p. 182). Jeffrey et al., (2013) added that some teachers might be reluctant to care due the teachers' attachment history as well as the personalities and behaviors of their students. Care, as a theoretical construct in teaching and learning appears to be advantageous, but there are personal incidents that may inhibit or change the way a teacher approaches demonstrating care in the classroom, as well as the way students perceive the caring behaviors of their teachers.

## Perceptions of Care

Three levels of perceptions of care that emerged from the literature review on care that spanned across all educational contexts: nurturing care, interpersonal care, and academic care (Banks & Furman, 2009; Garner, 2007; Tosolt, 2008). Perception of care is relevant to education because many scholars claim that when students perceived teachers as caring then students increased performance, engagement, and effort (Komarraju, Musulkin & Bhattacharya, 2010; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Micari & Pazos, 2012; Umbach, 2005; Wentzel, 1997; Yair, 2008)

Nurturing care was described as the dimension of care that emphasized relationships where the teacher demonstrated care for students' general welfare and well-being (Banks & Furman, 2009). Banks and Furman (2009) interviewed 12 college students about their perceptions on caring in their K-12 experiences and found that perceived nurturing care was associated with teachers establishing personal relationships with students, treating students respectfully and positively, being concerned for student welfare, guarding the emotional safety of students, and providing students with a feeling of being cared for. Garza, Alejandro, Blythe, and Fite (2014) conducted a grounded theory study with four elementary teachers on caring for students and found that nurturing care for the teachers meant attending to the physiological needs of their students, which agreed with Jeffrey et al., (2013) who found that both elementary teachers and students perceived nurturing care as attending to physiological needs that included basic needs, such as food and breaks, and safety, such as making sure students were safe if there was a fire or when students go on field trips. There were limited studies in secondary and tertiary education that addressed

nurturing needs. One explanation could be students' developmental needs. Banks and Furman (2009), for example, stated that nurturing care is needed with younger students, whereas pedagogical care is needed with students in secondary and tertiary contexts. Pedagogical care can be seen as interpersonal care and academic care.

Tosolt (2008) defined interpersonal caring as behaviors expected or accepted among family and friends. There were several teacher behaviors that emerged across the literature cohesive with Tosolt's definition of interpersonal caring. The behaviors included getting to know non-academic knowledge of students (Cejda & Hoover, 2010-2011; Chaskin & Rauner, 1995; Garza et al., 2014; Jeffrey et al., 2013; Wentzel, 1997), respect/honesty/trust (Chaskin & Rauher, 1995; Garner, 2007; Garza et al., 2014; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Jeffrey et al., 2013; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2004; Komarraju, 2012), listening (Jeffrey et al., 2013; Wentzel, 1997), emotional support (Garner, 2007; Jeffrey et al., 2013; Teven & McCroskey, 1997; Wentzel, 1997), approachability (Denzine & Pulos, 2000; Hood, King, Coats, Davis, & Stumpf, 2017; Komarraju et al., 2012; Wentzel, 1997), being present (Garner, 2007; Wentzel, 1997), and availability (Hood et al., 2017; Komarraju et al., 2012). The studies cited above ranged from elementary studies with fourth grade teachers and students through surveys and interviews conducted with undergraduate students and faculty. Jeffrey et al. (2013) in their study with fourth grade students and teachers found emotional support to encompass teacher presence, teachers giving nicknames to students, sharing personal stories, and students feeling valued. Wentzel (1997) found in a longitudinal study with 248 students from sixth grade to eighth grade that middle school students perceived care when teachers shared stories and valued students' contributions. Hood

et al. (2017) in a study with ten undergraduate, non-traditional students, found that care was perceived when teachers were open, vulnerable, and being oneself. Denzine and Pulos (2000) also interviewed college students with the purpose to find out their perceptions on what makes a professor approachable, and they found students characterized teachers as being approachable by knowing students' names, by staying in class to talk with students, by smiling, and by having a warm disposition.

Tosolt (2008) defined academic care as behaviors that encouraged students to work at academic tasks. Teacher behaviors included clear communication of expectations (Devlin & O'Shea, 2012; Garner, 2007; Garza et al., 2014; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Kane et al., 2004; Wentzel, 1997), responsiveness (Devlin & O'Shea, 2012; Garner, 2007; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Jeffrey et al., 2013; Teven & McCroskey, 1997), pedagogical skill (Banks & Furman, 2009; Garner, 2007; Kane et al., 2004), knowledge and excitement of subject matter (Kane et al., 2004), feedback (Cejda & Hoover, 2010-2011; Wentzel, 1997), and time for collaboration (Banks & Furman, 2009; Cejda & Hoover, 2010-2011). There were three behaviors that were consistent across all contexts: responsiveness, feedback, and clear communication of expectations. Responsiveness for elementary and secondary students was described as the teachers' willingness to answer questions and provide strategic assistance for student success (Garner, 2007; Garza et al., 2014; Jeffrey et al., 2013). One interesting note in the Jeffrey et al. (2013) study was that students perceived responsiveness as academic care, but their teachers did not perceive responsiveness as related to academic care as a construct within care. In the higher education literature, responsiveness appeared more broadly defined to include listening, class activity

modifications based on student reactions, attentiveness to students, and answering questions and providing strategic assistance (Cejda & Hoover, 2010-2011; Devin & O'Shea, 2012; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Students at all levels perceived academic care when teachers provided constructive feedback and clearly communicated expectations (e.g., Devlin & O'Shea, 2012; Jeffrey et al., 2013; Wentzel, 1997).

Pedagogical skill with respect to academic care described how teachers take the time to make sure students understand the content, and the teachers know effective pedagogy with regard to subject matter (Banks & Furman, 2009). Garner (2007) found that when adults reflected on their academic histories they included hands on problem solving and holding high expectation levels as pedagogy that communicated academic care. Cejda and Hoover (2010) found that faculty of Latino/a students in community colleges used pedagogy that was culturally relevant such as providing time for students to talk to one another during class, and providing positive and constructive feedback to the whole class instead of individuals in class. Academic care was conveyed through culturally appropriate pedagogy that the faculty communicated was essential to "move them from being a passive to an active learner" (Cejda & Hoover, 2010, p. 150). Cejda and Hoover (2010) did not address whether or not faculty of four year institutions adjusted pedagogies based on cultural knowledge of students, even though that was one of their research questions. The studies presented in this section on perceptions of care described behaviors of teachers associated with nurturing care, interpersonal care, and academic care from the perceptions of students and teachers. The question not being explicitly asked in any of these studies is how do teachers establish and sustain

caring relationships with students in the classroom environment. The caring behaviors discussed in this section come from survey data, adult reflections on their academic experiences, and student and teacher interviews. Classroom observations of care in action were under represented in all contexts.

**Classroom Environments**

The classroom environment is defined as the personality or the climate of the classroom (Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999). Zedan (2010) defined the classroom climate as the total of all group processes that take place in the classroom, including all interactions between teachers and students and among students. Cabello and Terrell (1994) stated that the classroom climate provides social and emotional support that makes students feel like they are part of a family. There appeared to be three main dimensions to a caring classroom environment from the literature: relationship dimension, personal dimension, and the system dimension (Trickett & Quinlan, 1979). Cheng (1994) further elaborated on these dimensions breaking the system dimension into the system maintenance level and the system developmental level. Empirical literature was found across all contexts on classroom environments and is organized in this literature review according to the following dimensions that have been adapted from Trickett and Quinlan (1979) and Cheng (1994). The relationship dimension is characterized by affective qualities, interpersonal relationships, affiliation, and teacher support (e.g., Chan & Watkins, 1994; Cheng, 1994; Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999; Trickett & Quinlan, 1979; Vincent & Flake, 2002). The personal dimension, also known as the individual-growth dimension (Cheng, 1994), is characterized by students' task orientations, learning approaches, academic achievement, and efficacy (e.g., Cheng,

1994; Dart, Burnett, Boulton-Lewis, Campbell, Smith, & McCrindle, 1999; Dorman & Adams, 2004; Trickett & Quinlan, 1979). The system developmental and maintenance dimension is characterized by order and organization, rule clarity, teaching methodology, and classroom management (e.g., Cheng, 1994; Cabello & Terrell, 1994; Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis, & Hunt, 2010; Trickett & Quinlan, 1979).

**Relationship dimension.** Studies focused in elementary schools associated with the relationship dimension of the classroom environment primarily focused on the social interactions that communicated care for students (e.g., Cheng, 1994; Vincent & Flake, 2002; Zedan, 2010). Cabello and Terrell (1994) observed 10 elementary teachers and interviewed 30 elementary students and found that caring classrooms were not all the same with respect to how the teacher communicated care. They found that some teachers maintained a social distance in the classroom, but they still demonstrated care and built caring classroom environments based on the way they listened to their students and supported the needs of their students. The authors contrasted those teachers with other caring teachers who lessened social distance by interjecting themselves into lessons using personal anecdotes, verbalizing affection, and using humor (Cabello & Terrell, 1994). Vincent and Flake (2002) in an ethnographic teacher as researcher study with 21 kindergarten students found that developing a community of care involved respect; kindness; vocalizing feelings such as empathy, love, and comforting others; and daily and sometimes multiple class meetings where students and teacher engaged in dialogue. They stated that through these actions positive relationships were built (Vincent & Flake, 2002). Ratcliff et al. (2010) observed 34 second and fourth grade classrooms of strong teachers and needs

improvement teachers. They also interviewed 588 elementary students. They found that strong teachers had over three times the number of interactions with students than the needs improvement teachers (Ratcliff et al., 2010). Zedan (2010) surveyed 3786 students in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades and found teacher-student and student-student interactions as two of five factors that supported a caring classroom environment. Teacher-students interactions were described as supportive, warm, personal, and professional (Zedan, 2010).

Classroom environments that support care are well represented in the literature on elementary classrooms, but studies are limited at the secondary and tertiary levels. Dorman (2004) found that perceived teacher support accounted for 28% of the variance on academic efficacy for 2651 students in eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades. Chan and Watkins (1994) found that affiliation within the relationship dimension of classroom environment supported secondary students' deep approach to learning in secondary science. The literature on higher education classroom environments was not as abundant when compared to literature within the elementary and secondary domains, but Pulvers and Diekhoff (1999) looked at how the classroom environment influenced cheaters and non-cheaters by analyzing survey results from 280 undergraduates (ages 17-50) from two liberal arts universities. They found that personalization was a deterrent to cheating. Personalization was described as the social distance between the teacher and the student. As personalization decreases (or the social distance increases), students "become less interested in pleasing the instructor through honesty. Indeed, cheating may occur in an attempt to punish the instructor for his or her distance" (Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999, p. 495). Sheppard (2010) conducted an

ethnographic study on a history teacher by participating in the teacher's undergraduate course and interviewing the teacher several times throughout the study. She found that the undergraduate history professor established a caring classroom by inviting students to share opinions and experiences not only during class but also during the planning of lessons in informal contexts (Sheppard, 2010).

Institutional and personal barriers were mentioned as reasons why some teachers emotionally distance themselves from developing relationships with their students (e.g., Holcomb, 2007; Jeffrey et al., 2013; McLaughlin, 1991; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). Research found within the elementary context mentioned high stakes testing as an institutional barrier. Jeffrey et al., (2013) stated that high stakes testing environments pushed elementary teachers away from caring relationships and toward more rigorous, academic relationships. One elementary teacher participant said this about high stakes testing: "How do we create a homelike community when we have to teach to all of those standards? We don't have time to do all of that" (Holcomb, 2007, p. 163, 166). In higher education, where the norm is professor-centered/lecture based, teachers like the one studied by Sheppard (2010) felt unsupported by her department when she requested a room more conducive to student dialogue. Walker and Gleaves (2016) called this institutional dissonance, and they found caring as resistance as a theme from their qualitative study with six higher education faculty.

The relationship dimension is clearly represented at the elementary level, but the majority of studies at the secondary and tertiary levels relied on quantitative methods using survey data or small ethnographic case studies with limited interpretations of how secondary and tertiary teachers build a classroom environment

with respect to the social interactions between teachers and students.

**Individual growth dimension.** The second classroom environment dimension is individual-student growth characterized by students, academic achievement, efficacy, task orientations, and learning approaches (e.g., Cheng, 1994; Dart, Burnett, Boulton-Lewis, Campbell, Smith, & McCrindle, 1999; Dorman, 2004; Trickett & Quinlan, 1979). Ratcliff (2010) found that students in classrooms with strong elementary teachers were on-task 90% of the time, which related to more learning opportunities for elementary students as opposed to 30% of on-task time with needs improvement teachers. Vincent and Flake (2002) found that elementary students' self-confidence was higher in caring classroom environments. Dorman (2004) found that for secondary students academic efficacy was promoted by functional, task oriented, collegial working environments with task orientation accounting for 50% of the variance. Task orientation was one of the deterrents of cheating behaviors for higher education students that was related to classroom environments (Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999). Chan and Watkins (1994) and Dart et al. (1999) found that secondary students who have deep approaches to learning were strongly associated with their perceptions of the learning environment than students who had surface approaches to learning. Much of the literature on individual student growth was related to approach-avoidance motivation research and achievement goal theory research.

**Development and maintenance dimension.** The third dimension to classroom environment is system development and maintenance, which was described earlier as order and organization, rule clarity, teaching methodology, and classroom management (e.g., Chan & Watkins, 1994; Cheng, 1994; Cabello & Terrell, 1994; Ratcliff, Jones,

Costner, Savage-Davis, & Hunt, 2010; Trickett & Quinlan, 1979). Order and organization, rule clarity, and teaching methodology were common across all contexts. Order and organization was described as "the extent to which students behave in an orderly and polite manner and classroom activities are well organized" (Cheng, 1994, p. 222). The literature in higher education described order and organization as basics and course clarity. Klinger, Finelli, and Budry (2000) reported on a round table discussion with experienced higher education faculty that basics, stance, and management characterized the classroom environment. Basics referred to clear course and daily objectives (Klinger et al., 2000). Whereas Sheppard (2010) conducted an ethnographic study in an undergraduate history course described order and organization as course clarity. Trickett and Quinlan (1979) in their study on perceived classroom environments with 3480 high school students found that order and organization accounted for 14.4% of the variance on perceived classroom environment, and rule clarity accounted for 18.7% of the variance. They described order and organization and rule clarity as the authority function of the teacher's role in the classroom, which appeared to be important to high school students (Trickett & Quinlan, 1979). One interesting note was that rule clarity was also found to be important for students in class sizes over 17 (Trickett & Quinlan, 1979). Cheng (1994) found in a study at the elementary level that order and organization and rule clarity were aspects within initiating structure, which was a component of leadership behavior. Initiating structure referred to how a teacher sets up classroom communication, rules, and procedures (Cheng, 1994). Elementary teachers who were considered strong as opposed to needs improvement had fewer student misbehaviors

because of how they communicated rules/expectations and provided structure for students that were conducive to teaching and learning (Ratcliff, et al., 2010).

Teaching methodology was a factor commonly mentioned in the literature across all contexts with regard to system development and maintenance. Specifically, methodologies were student-focused and engaged students in learning, such as small groups (Ratcliff et al., 2010), asking whole class questions (Ratcliff et al., 2010; Sheppard, 2010), and encouraging students to participate in class activities through implementation of inquiry based lessons (Cabello & Terrell, 1994; Dart et al., 1999; Klinger et al., 2000; Trickett & Quinlan, 1979; Vincent & Flake, 2002). Teaching methodologies were not the focus of these studies but were secondary pieces of results that emerged from data analysis. Additional research is needed to clarify how teaching methodologies influence the system development and maintenance dimension associated with caring classroom environments across all contexts.

There were few studies that mentioned classroom management as related to the system development and maintenance dimension of the classroom environment. Cheng (1994) discussed leadership style and power as two components of classroom management that were important in elementary students' affective performance (efficacy, attitudes, homework overload, drop out intentions). Both components were highly correlated with classroom environment and affective performance. The leadership style of the teacher included initiating structure and consideration, mentioned previously in the system dimension and relationship dimension respectively (Cheng, 1994). The power bases were reward, coercive, position, personal, and expert (Cheng, 1994). The first three were associated with school structures, whereas the last

two were associated with teacher personality and professional knowledge (Cheng, 1994). The three strongest measures that influenced students' affective performance were teachers' personal and expert power and students' perceived classroom physical environment (Cheng, 1994). In Sheppard (2010), physical environment was also important to the higher education teacher who was met with administrative resistance when she requested a classroom that was conducive to dialogue.

The classroom environment is the condition under which teachers and students interact. A positive, caring classroom environment is similar across all contexts with the relationship dimension emphasizing the affective importance in building and sustaining relationships; the individual growth dimension emphasizing learning; the system dimension emphasizing order and organization, as well as rule clarity and teaching methodologies. The way these dimensions overlap and interact has largely gone unnoticed and in the context of teaching and learning they all appear fundamentally important with empirical results indicating positive influences on increasing student academic achievement, increasing student self efficacy, and supporting individual student growth by meeting developmentally appropriate needs of students (e.g., Chan & Watkins, 1994; Cheng, 1994; Dart, et al., 1999; Dorman & Adams, 2004; Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999; Trickett & Quinlan, 1979; Vincent & Flake, 2002). Relationships are important as indicated by the results of these studies, but unknown is how teachers build and sustain relationships within the classroom environment.

## Teacher-Student Relationships

Goralnik, Millenbah, Nelson, and Thorp (2012) stated, "implementing the ethic

of care in educational contexts relies on the development of attentive relationships between a carer and a cared-for (student-student, student-instructor, student-content, participants-learning environment)" (p. 420). Kuh and Hu (2001) stated, "educators at all levels believe that frequent, meaningful interactions between students and their teachers are important to learning and personal development" (p. 309). The organization of the literature on teacher student relationships was represented differently depending on the age of the students. Studies with elementary teachers and students focused on the effects of closeness and conflict on school adjustment, achievement, and engagement (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Jerome, Hamre, & Pianta, 2009; Newberry, 2010; O'Connor, 2010). The literature with secondary and higher education students and teachers also focused on student achievement and engagement as related to positive teacher student relationships (Engels, Colpin, Van Leeuwen, Bijttebier, Van Den Noortgate, Claes, Goossens, & Verschueren, 2016; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Micari & Pazos, 2012; Wentzel, 1998), but there was also a focus (not found in elementary studies) on teacher characteristics that promoted the development of positive teacher student relationships (Brown, 2005; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Micari & Pazos, 2012; Tevon, 2007; Uitto, 2012), and interactions between teachers and students that supported positive teacher student relationships (Doherty & Mayer, 2003; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Komarraju, Musulkin & Bhattacharya, 2010; Kuh & Hu, 2001). Interactions are antecedent to relationships and can be thought of as two-way verbal and non-verbal communications, and as individuals have more interactions, relationships develop (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014).

**Relationships in Elementary Grades**

Studies that included grades kindergarten through sixth grade emphasized two concepts associated with teacher student relationships: closeness and conflict (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Jerome et al., 2009; Newberry, 2010; O'Connor, 2010). Birch and Ladd (1997) defined closeness as the "degree of warmth and open communication that exists between teacher and child" (p. 62). Furrer and Skinner (2003) did not use the term closeness; instead they used the term relatedness, which they described as belongingness. Conflict was described as discordant interactions and lack of rapport between teacher and child (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Dependency was a third concept that Birch and Ladd (1997) described as a students' overreliance on the teacher as a source of support; students did not interact often with their peers, and often the students felt lonely in the classroom environment, but this concept was not explored in other studies.

Closeness was positively related to academic achievement (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Jerome et al., 2009) and engagement (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Jerome et al., 2009). Birch and Ladd (1997) interviewed 206 kindergarten children from eight elementary schools to find out how closeness, conflict, and dependency were related to school adjustment factors such as performance, progress, achievement, attitude, and engagement. They found that closeness was a significant correlate of children's performance, attitude, and engagement. They also discussed that closeness allowed children opportunities to express their feelings and concerns. Jerome, Hamre and Pianta (2009) also found that for students in kindergarten through third grade closeness was positively correlated with higher academic achievement.

They followed 878 children from kindergarten through the sixth grade with teachers reporting on students' closeness and conflict each year with the intention to describe how relational quality changes over time. They found that from kindergarten to sixth grade closeness generally decreased, relationships with teachers exponentially became less close as the child aged (Jerome et al., 2009). O'Connor (2010) who studied 870 families in a longitudinal study of teacher student relationships from first grade to fifth grade also found that relational quality generally decreased throughout the elementary school years. She stated that relational quality decreased because closeness decreased and conflict increased, both of which she found to have a negative association with achievement (O'Connor, 2010). Furrer and Skinner (2003) studied how relatedness for 641 students in third through sixth grades influenced emotional and behavioral engagement. They found that students who had a higher sense of relatedness also had higher levels of emotional and behavioral engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Emotional engagement depended most heavily on relatedness to teachers as opposed to parents or peers, and relatedness to teachers was a more salient predictor of behavioral engagement for younger students when compared with older students (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Jeffrey et al., (2013) found that positive relationships between teachers and elementary students positively influenced their academic behavioral engagement, which resulted in fewer suspensions.

Birch and Ladd (1997) stated that conflict might promote alienation along with feelings of anger and anxiety in elementary students. They found that teachers had more negative attitudes towards children with whom they had conflicts, and the researchers stated that this lead to a cyclical process where students avoided school

engagement, which then triggered negative responses from the teacher, which then fed into the student's negative perception of school. In turn, this cycle lowered students' engagement, cooperation, and participation (Birch & Ladd, 1997). O'Connor (2010) found that conflictual or lower quality relationships between students and teachers increased classroom behavior problems for fifth grade students. Jerome et al. (2009) found that conflict between students and teachers was highest between kindergarten and first grade, although it generally increased until fifth grade at which point conflict decreased. It was also at the fifth grade level that O'Connor (2010) found teachers and students began to view the quality of their relationships with each other differently. There was a discrepancy between how the teachers rated their relationships with students and how the students rated their relationships with the same teacher. Teachers rated relationships as high quality with some students, but those same students rated their relationships with their teacher as low quality (O'Connor, 2010). She also found that students who had high quality relationships with teachers in kindergarten also had high quality relationships with teachers in the fifth grade, indicating that there might be a carry over effect with early positive teacher student relationships (O'Connor, 2010). In addition, she observed the fifth grade classes in her study and found that in classrooms where the teacher maximized time invested on instruction there were higher quality relationships with students and positive classroom climates that were emotionally supportive of students with more reciprocal interactions between the teacher and students (O'Connor, 2010).

Newberry (2010) conducted a case study with a second grade teacher and a student who had a history of conflict and identified four phases teachers go through

when developing positive relationships with students. The first phase was the appraisal phase where the teacher and the student are getting to know each other, followed by the agreement phase where teacher and student are negotiating routines and relational patterns are established. The third and fourth phases happened throughout the rest of the time that the teacher and student were in relation with one another. The testing phase described how the student explores boundaries and limits with the teacher, followed by the planning phase where the teacher reflected and prepared for future interactions with the child. Newberry (2010) said that these phases were essential as teachers "shift from relationships of duty to relationships of care" (p. 1698). This was the only empirical study conducted at the elementary level that was somewhat aligned to the studies found at the secondary and higher education levels, which focused on teacher characteristics/behaviors and interactions. Studies at the elementary level were focused on the effects of closeness and conflict, but there was a lack of focus on what teachers actually do in the classroom to promote closeness and minimize conflict. The Newberry (2010) study was informative with regard to the phases of relationship building with elementary students, but there were no classroom observations or clear examples of teacher behaviors within each phase. Knowing what teachers do at each phase of relationship building for each domain (elementary, secondary, and higher education) may provide educators with pathways to building relationships to enhance student learning and engagement.

**Relationships in Secondary and Higher Education**

Studies in secondary and higher education contexts were separated from the elementary studies because the studies did not rely on the concepts of closeness and

conflict in the same way as the elementary studies. However, the effects of positive teacher-student relationships on engagement, effort/persistence, interest, and achievement were similar to the results discussed with regard to closeness at the elementary level.

Engels et al. (2016) found that positive teacher-student relationships were associated with more behavioral engagement at a time in adolescents' lives where peer relationships become more influential. They defined behavioral engagement as effort, attention, and persistence during learning activities. Popular students had lower behavioral engagement, and the researchers suggested that teachers work on building relationships with popular students so that when these students engage in class activities, less popular students will be more likely to engage (Engels et al., 2016). Kuh and Hu (2001) found in their review of undergraduate student-faculty interactions in the 1990s that there were positive net effects of student faculty interactions on the amount of effort students put forth. Lundberg and Schreiner (2004) also found that faculty members had a positive influence on undergraduate student investment in academic matters, and they added that feedback from the instructor was a factor that encouraged African American, Hispanic, and Puerto Rican students to work harder. Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) investigated patterns of relationships that influenced college persistence, and they found that persisters had significantly higher frequency of interactions than leavers. Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) found in their study of 242 undergraduates that students who perceived faculty as being approachable, respectful, and available for interactions were more likely to report feelings of academic confidence and motivation, whereas students who conveyed a

lack of motivation and alienation felt distant from faculty members. Wentzel (1998) in a study with middle school students found that perceived support from teachers was a positive predictor of class interest and interest was a significant predictor of students' grades. Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, and Lun (2011) in a two-year study with 78 secondary school teachers from 12 schools found that when interactions between teachers and students were enhanced, student academic achievement increased. Micari and Pazos (2012) had similar results with students in higher education when they reported that students who felt they had positive relationships with the professor also had higher final grades. Lundeberg and Schreiner (2004) found that quality of relationships was the only variable that significantly predicted learning across all racial/ethnic groups. Closeness between elementary students and teachers and positive teacher student interactions that lead to positive relationships positively influences learning, but what is missing is how these relationships develop within a classroom setting and whether or not the teachers are intentionally promoting the development of relationships through pedagogy.

**Shifting Relationships**

In the literature there appeared to be critical grade levels where teacher student relationships shifted: the fifth and sixth grade levels (Ang, Chong, Huan, Quek, and Yeo, 2008; Jerome et al., 2009; O'Connor, 2010). Ang, et al. (2008) looked at teacher student relationships with 420 upper elementary students, 635 junior high students, and 17 classroom teachers and found three reasons why teacher student relationships shifted between elementary school and secondary school. There was a shift in the how students perceived the teacher's role. Students perceived their junior high teachers as

caring less, and students indicated an increase in mistrust, which decreased the quality of teacher student relationships (Ang et al., 2008). The second reason for the relational shifts between the grades was that students experienced more autonomy and independence from sources of authority, which changed their interpersonal relationships (Ang et al., 2008). The third shift was that students increased dependency on their peers for support (Ang et al., 2008). Riley (2009) administered questionnaires to 258 pre-service teachers and 50 experienced teachers to explore attachment styles. He found that elementary teachers were more secure in relationships with students than secondary teachers and suggested this may due to the number of students in each teacher's care. Riley (2009) further suggested that adult attachment theory might offer a perspective to examine the relational processes that exist between teachers and students who are older. One major difference between attachment theory with children and attachment theory with adults is the roles of care seeker and caregiver are reversed. Teachers who work with older students become the care seekers in the relationship, and this shifts the power in the relationship to students who ultimately decide the nature of that relationship by granting authority to the teacher (Riley, 2009).

Lee and Schallert (2008) conducted a case study on two higher education students and their teacher. They found that authority was a factor as to how the two students perceived the same teacher and how they received and utilized feedback from their teacher, which ultimately influenced their overall performance in the class. They found that the student who granted the teacher authority was more likely to make adjustments from teacher feedback than the student who did not grant the teacher authority (Lee & Schallart, 2008). The student who did not grant authority questioned

the competence of the instructor and did not agree with the way she personally provided feedback to her students. Whereas the student who granted authority believed the teacher to be competent perceived their personal interactions as an opportunity for growth (Lee & Schallart, 2008).

**Teacher Characteristics/Behaviors**

The majority of literature conducted at the secondary and higher education levels appeared to key into the personal authority concept as a way to develop positive relationships between teachers and students (e.g., Brown, 2005; Micari & Pazos, 2012; Teven, 2007; Uitto, 2012). Micari and Pazos (2012) surveyed 113 undergraduate students and found three factors correlated to positive teacher-student relationships: students looking up to the professor, the professor being approachable, and the professor showing respect for students. They also outlined several behaviors of professors that were associated with the three factors such as the use of personal anecdotes, bringing themselves to the classroom, sharing personal experiences, demonstrating genuine interest in helping students learn, encouraging students to visit them during office hours, and showing genuine interest in students as people (Micari & Pazos, 2012). Data from surveys lack personal student accounts of specific teacher behaviors that could help define the categories that emerged from the data. Van Praag, Stevens, and Van Houette (2017) described humor as a way to facilitate bonding between teachers and students and a way to "cut through the impersonal ways of institutional norms and roles" (p. 399). They observed over 80 hours of classes, interviewed over 129 students between 16 and 23 years old, and interviewed 27 teachers over a course of two years to determine the role of humor in teacher-student

relationships (Van Praag et al., 2017). Humor is only one of the many teacher behaviors that help build relationships with students, and additional research using classroom observations on other behaviors such as approachability, sharing stories, and using personal anecdotes could provide a deeper understanding of how teachers build relationships with students. Uitto (2012) collected 141 stories from people aged 16-87 that described their memories of their teachers' behaviors; only 24 stories were selected for analysis. The 24 stories selected for analysis were focused on stories that involved recollections of how the participants got to know the personal side of their teachers, which was through the teacher telling students directly, indirectly, or in private contexts outside of school. This study revealed that students find out personal information about their teachers regardless of the boundaries set by the teacher (Uitto, 2012). This study elicited many questions about how teachers merge their personal and professional lives within the classroom, such as why teachers distance themselves or try to set personal and professional boundaries, is there a balance between personal and professional, and at what point does a teacher share too much or too little, which may cause students to disengage. Recollections, while providing an interesting perspective, do not provide information on context specific teacher-student interactions. Additional research grounded in observations and interviews with teachers and students in the same context could provide a better picture on how teachers balance the personal and professional.

Teven (2007) investigated the effects of teachers' caring behaviors on perceived competence and trustworthiness using two-way multivariate analysis of variance. 170 undergraduates ranked behaviors of higher education teachers as

appropriate or inappropriate and caring or not caring. Teacher care was defined by a set of behaviors such as empathy, understanding, responsiveness, and availability to meet. The results indicated that when teachers' behaviors were caring and appropriate, they were perceived as significantly more competent and significantly more trustworthy than teachers from other combinations of behavior and care (Teven, 2007). The researcher did not allow the undergraduates to justify or elaborate on their scenario rankings, and in this way the study was confined to the preset variables constructed by the researcher, which may not fully represent all of the possible behaviors and characteristics found in a higher education context.

**Interactions**

There were two studies (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004) looking into the effect of interactions on students' perceived learning, and they came to different conclusions. Both studies relied on data from the college student experience questionnaire, which provides self-report data on various educational aspects such as general knowledge gains and intellectual gains. Self-report data is not the same as assessment data, and although the two studies state the importance of interactions, there remains the question of what is being learned from these interactions with faculty. Kuh and Hu (2001) conducted a study that included 5,409 students from 126 colleges and universities who were randomly sampled from the overall pool of 54,488 students who completed the college student experience questionnaire between 1990 and 1997. All undergraduate levels were represented; however, the majority of the random sample were women, white, and freshman. The authors' purpose was to examine the character and impact of student-faculty interactions on student learning

and personal development in the 1990s. They found that students who reported frequent substantive faculty interactions had positive gains in general knowledge, personal development, vocational preparation, and intellectual development (Kuh & Hu, 2001). The authors suggested that the frequency of overall student-faculty interactions influenced the amount of effort students extended toward educational activities but did not directly influence student satisfaction (Kuh & Hu, 2001). The large amounts of data came from survey results and indicated positive gains by undergraduate students with increased student-faculty interactions, but there were no direct observations of these interactions in the classroom.

Lundberg and Schreiner (2004) conducted a study with 4,501 undergraduate students that investigated how student involvement with faculty (frequency of student-faculty interactions or quality of student-faculty relationships) influenced learning. They analyzed data obtained from the administration of the college student experience questionnaire between 1998 and 2001. Multiple regression analysis revealed that the quality – not frequency – of relationships with faculty was the only predictor of learning across all racial/ethnic groups (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). In addition, Native American and African American students reported the least level of satisfactory relationships with faculty even though they had the highest frequency of interactions with faculty. There is an apparent discrepancy between the Kuh and Hu (2001) study and the Lundberg and Schreiner (2004) study as to whether frequency or quality of interactions is more important with regard to teacher student relationships. Neither of the studies looked at where or how these interactions occurred, and both studies used data from the same questionnaire at slightly different time periods. What could have

enhanced both studies would be interviews with some of the students that completed the questionnaire. Instead, both studies relied on quantitative analyses, which complicated the importance of teacher-student interactions with regard to frequency and quality.

Cotton and Wilson (2006), in a qualitative study on interactions with 49 students from a public research university, looked at reasons and locations of interactions between undergraduate students and faculty. They found that class size was a factor for frequency of interactions; larger class sizes meant fewer interactions in the formal setting. They also found that informal interactions were infrequent because of space and time. Teachers often had offices that were not located near the classroom, and students felt that teachers were too busy to interact with them (Cotton & Wilson, 2006). These results were consistent with Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall (2008), who conducted a qualitative study on tutoring with 24 undergraduate personal tutors and 37 second or third year students. The site required that students remain with their personal tutor for the duration of their studies, and the tutors advertised availability for three hours per week. Students reported that they felt their tutors were often too busy with other activities to make meaningful connections with them, and the students felt guilty about taking up the tutors' time. The tutors felt they had insufficient time to build connections with students due to other professional obligations, and they did not feel prepared to help students who expressed personal problems. The tutors expressed their anxieties with comments such as "I am not a counselor, I don't want to be a counselor, it is not my job…" (Stephen, O'Connell, & Hall, 2008, p. 456). Pascarella and Terrenzini (1977) looked at the reasons why students visit teachers outside of formal

class settings. They found, in a longitudinal study of 344 freshman undergraduate students, that the reasons why students interacted with teachers outside of formal settings was to discuss academic programs, discuss future career matters, resolve personal problems, discuss course related matters, discuss a campus issue, or socialize informally (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 1977). Research on interactions in the higher education setting were limited with studies focused on the effect of frequency or quality of interactions on learning by using questionable results from a self-report instrument, or the studies focused on reasons why students did or did not interact with teachers during formal and informal meetings. There were no studies that included observations of teacher-student interactions in a formal higher education setting.

The literature was also limited at the level of secondary education. There was one study on interactions conducted with 70 middle school students. Doherty and Mayer (2003) qualitatively investigated how email interactions between teachers and middle school students influenced the development of teacher student relationships. They found that email provided a new communicative space for students to build relationships with teachers, and this space was distinct from face-to-face interactions that occurred in the classroom space (Doherty & Mayer, 2003). Middle school students were less inhibited and expressed their feelings and concerns more openly with their teachers. Email also provided teachers an opportunity to bring their worlds into conversations with their students (Doherty & Mayer, 2003). The researchers drew upon higher education research that indicated email communication could build supportive and intimate communities (e.g., Lapp, 2000; Snyder, 2000). Missing in these studies was how informal interactions, whether in person or through digital media, influenced

the building of face-to-face relationships with these students and their teachers in the classroom.

The literature provided a picture of relationships in the elementary context through the concepts of closeness and conflict and a picture in secondary and higher education contexts where students gain authority in the development of relationships along with teacher characteristics/behaviors and interactions that promote positive teacher-student relationships and how these relationships influence student learning. What does not appear in the literature on teacher-student relationships is the role of pedagogy in developing relationships within the classroom during instructional activities. In addition, it is unclear how the role of individual teachers contribute to students' abilities to develop relationships with future teachers and whether or not there is stability over time with regard to students' abilities to form relationships across secondary and higher education contexts. Where and why interactions occur between students and teachers is represented in the literature, but what is not apparent is how these interactions occur during formal and informal interactions and whether or not these interactions help teachers build and sustain relationships with students.

## Professional Knowledge

Professional knowledge is the body of knowledge and skills from professional and life experiences that is needed to be successful in a profession (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Paulick, Groβschedl, Harms, & Möller, 2016; Shulman, 1986/2013; Tamir, 1988). Personal practical knowledge appears to be situated between content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge. Most higher education faculty, who do not have access to teacher training programs, begin their teaching career with content

knowledge, and they learn general pedagogical knowledge from trial and error and/or their personal practical experiences (e.g., Åkerlind, 2003; Åkerlind, 2007; Austin, 2002; Oleson & Hora, 2013; Sutherland & Markauskaite, 2012).

**Personal Practical Knowledge**

Practical knowledge, craft knowledge, and teacher competency are just a few of the names that were used in the literature when referring to personal practical knowledge. What all of the names have in common is that they describe a component of professional knowledge that is gained through teaching and life experiences that are blended with personal beliefs (e.g., Clandinin, 1985; Graber, 1995; Blömeke et al., 2016; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002; König, Blömeke, & Kaiser, 2015; König & Kramer, 2016). Clandinin and Connelly (1996) described personal practical knowledge as teachers' landscapes. These landscapes are "the sum total of teachers' experiences" (Connelly, Clandinin, & Ming Fang He, 1997, p. 666). Research in the area of personal practical knowledge is difficult because teachers' stories change depending on the context, and narrative inquiry can provide a pathway to understanding what teachers know along with how and why they do what they do in a classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Two relevant aspects of personal practical knowledge are beliefs and knowledge in action. The ways these aspects interact with content knowledge and with general pedagogical knowledge paint the picture of a teacher's professional landscape.

Unlike other professions, teachers enter their profession as insiders as opposed to strangers (Pajares, 1992). Kember and Kwan (2000) stated, "lecturers will normally adopt the approach which is consistent with their deep seated beliefs about teaching" (p. 487). Preconceived beliefs hinder educational research in this area of professional

knowledge as teachers often have difficulty expressing their individual beliefs about teaching because their beliefs are deeply entrenched within their identities, which means researchers must infer beliefs from what teachers say and do (Freeman, 2002; Pajares, 1992). Knowledge in action describes teacher decisions that are associated with adjustments to lessons that occur spontaneously during teaching such as perception, interpretation, and decision-making (König, Blömeke, & Kaiser, 2015). Professional vision was the term used by Meschede, Fiebranz, Möller, & Steffensky (2017) to describe knowledge in action as "the teacher's ability to notice and interpret classroom events that are relevant to learning" (p. 158-159).

Meschede et al. (2017) conducted a study with elementary science teachers (113 pre-service teachers and 110 in-service teachers) to explore professional knowledge by investigating the relationships of teachers' knowledge in action, pedagogical content knowledge, and beliefs. They found that knowledge in action and pedagogical content knowledge were positively related but different constructs (Meschede, et al, 2017). Knowledge in action was also positively correlated with beliefs, and they stated that beliefs appeared to be filters for how teachers respond to classroom situations. In-service teachers outperformed pre-service teachers on pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge in action, which lends support to the role of experience in the development of professional knowledge (Meschede et al. 2017). Their research augmented Blömeke, Busse, Kaiser, König, and Stuhl (2016) who investigated various models of professional knowledge with 171 secondary mathematics teachers. Blömeke et al. (2016) originally investigated knowledge in action as a stable dimension within content knowledge and pedagogical content

knowledge. However, knowledge in action was the only dimension that the researchers could not rectify in their two-dimensional model of professional knowledge. The placement of knowledge in action was not stable, which meant that knowledge in action was contextually bound. In addition, they found that teachers who indicated stronger knowledge in action skills on video assessment of classroom situations had higher quality classroom performance as indicated by grades on a practical teaching exam (Blömeke et al., 2016).

Ethell and McMeniman (2000) used a cognitive intervention in pre-service education attempting to link learning to teach with knowledge in action. The intervention was designed to address differences between expert and novice teachers and how to help novice teachers access the tacit knowledge of expert teacher, making the hidden observable. The nine student teachers attended two, two-hour workshops where they engaged in reflective practice alongside a master teacher. The student teachers expressed that they were exposed to a way of teacher thinking that they had not encountered, and they recognized that just observing teachers was not enough; they had to start having conversations with teachers in order to better understand the teachers' knowledge in action. The student teachers also reported that it was not until this workshop that they recognized how personal beliefs and attitudes of teachers were exemplified in practice (Ethell & McMeniman, 2000). Unfortunately, teachers in higher education settings rarely get the same opportunities to learn about the art of teaching as teachers in education programs (e.g., Åkerlind, 2003; Åkerlind, 2007; Austin, 2002; Oleson & Hora, 2013).

A teaching career in higher education often begins as a graduate student

fulfilling the role of teaching assistant (Austin, 2002). Austin (2002) conducted a four-year qualitative study with graduate students who were preparing to be faculty members. She found that the development of professional knowledge for graduate students was minimal. There was a lack of feedback from faculty with regard to teaching practice, lack of professional development opportunities for graduate students to learn about teaching, and no planned time for the graduate students to interact with faculty or their peers with regard to the betterment of their teaching (Austin, 2002). All of these factors are associated with the development of pedagogical content knowledge and how future faculty members are often left to figure it out for themselves (Austin, 2002). The graduate students often reported they felt prepared to handle the research duties affiliated with the profession such as writing research proposals and securing grant funding. They also expressed that they lacked experience and guidance in the area of teaching, curriculum development, and using technology in teaching (Austin, 2002).

Oleson and Hora (2013) analyzed interviews from 53 higher education STEM faculty members and found four factors that influenced their teaching: experiences as a student, experiences as a teacher, experiences as a researcher, and experiences from their personal lives. The authors selected two faculty members for in-depth analysis using interviews and classroom observations to further examine class design. The purpose of the study was to expand the view of higher education faculty and the perceptions that "teachers teach the way they were taught" (Oleson & Hora, 2013, p. 29). They found teachers' experiences as an instructor and trial and error teaching methods were the two most influential factors in the way teachers taught. The teachers'

experiences as students and their participation in professional development along with feedback from formal and informal evaluations were also influential factors to the way the teachers taught (Oleson & Hora, 2013).

University teachers' beliefs about good teaching were not consistent with the way they actually taught (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2007). Kember and Kwan (2000) examined the relationship between university teachers' lecture approaches and their conceptions about good teaching. They interviewed 17 university teachers and found there were two main orientations – transmissive and facilitative. Teachers who believed that good teaching was transmitting knowledge used a content-centered approach, whereas teachers who believed good teaching was facilitating knowledge acquisition used a learner-centered approach. The authors concluded that changes to the quality of teaching and learning were unlikely to happen without changes to the teachers' beliefs about good teaching (Kember & Kwan, 2000). The authors did not report on how the orientations, motivation, and dimensions broke down across their participants. In addition, they only used three participants when describing their results, and there was no mention of whether the teachers actually taught the way they described good teaching. Parpala and Lindblom-Ylänne (2007) conducted 20 interviews with university teachers across four disciplines and found discrepancies between the teachers' descriptions of their beliefs on ideal teaching versus their descriptions of their own teaching. They found that the teachers' beliefs were consistent with their teaching descriptions on interactive teaching practice and their role as being inspiring experts in their content areas. The teachers' beliefs were not consistent with their practice

descriptions on the student's role, described as motivated and processing knowledge; the classroom atmosphere, described as encouraging student participation where students feel equal; and the physical environment, described as "being cozy and functional" (Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2007, p. 365). The limitation of this study is that without observation of these teachers actually teaching, we are only getting their espoused theories of their practice. The study did not address how or why the teachers held the beliefs they described as consistent with ideal teaching.

Beliefs and knowledge in action, as two aspects of personal professional knowledge, vary depending on context. Literature on elementary and secondary teaching focused on how experience was important in the development of personal practical knowledge, whereas literature situated on teacher education focused on how pre-service teachers gained personal practical knowledge to develop their own beliefs based on their experiences during teacher education, prior to their first teaching assignment. The commonality across the literature in elementary, secondary, and teacher education was the role of experience prior to and during teaching. In the higher education setting, there was a lack of experience prior to teaching, which meant faculty developed personal practical knowledge through trial and error often without mentoring. In addition, the literature in higher education focused on what teachers believed to be good teaching and compared that with descriptions of teachers' practice without observations. Regardless of context, personal practical knowledge serves as a bridge between content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge by weaving beliefs and knowledge in action into the fabric of teachers' professional landscapes.

**Content Knowledge and General Pedagogical Knowledge**

According to Shulman (1986/2013) content knowledge is the process and structure contained within certain domains of subject knowledge. Subject matter knowledge refers to the depth and breadth of knowledge a teacher has with regard to subject matter. There was a lack of literature on how teachers gain subject matter knowledge, outside of degree attainment in a particular field as is the case with teachers in secondary and higher education (e.g., Blömeke, Busse, Kaiser, König, & Stuhl, 2016; Shulman, 1986/2013), but there was research that indicated teachers continue to grow and develop with respect to their subject knowledge (e.g., Åkerlind, 2003; Åkerlind, 2007; Graber, 1995; Hobbs, 2012; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2007). In addition to subject matter knowledge, content knowledge describes pedagogical content knowledge and curriculum knowledge (Shulman, 1986/2013).

Pedagogical content knowledge is associated with subject specific strategies, methods, and approaches for teaching certain content. Each discipline has unique language and processes associated with it, and the way pedagogical content knowledge is attained varies by level. For the majority of primary and secondary teachers, pedagogical content knowledge was addressed in their general education coursework and methods coursework (Graber, 1995; Hobbs, 2012; König, Blömeke, & Kaiser, 2015; Shulman, 1986/2013). Curriculum knowledge includes lateral and vertical knowledge of all resources available to teachers of specific subjects (Shulman, 1986/2013). There was a lack of empirical studies with regard to how curriculum knowledge is developed or attained outside of contextual/site dependencies. General pedagogical knowledge is the "generic principles of classroom organization and

management and the like" (Shulman 1986/2013, p. 14). Engagement appeared to be an essential construct within general pedagogical knowledge (e.g., Dunleavy, Willms, Milton & Friesen, 2012; Graber, 1995; Hickey & Zuiker, 2005; König, Blömeke & Kaiser, 2015)

**Engagement.** Engagement research has a long history from a focus on alienation and at risk students to a more recent focus on meeting the needs of diverse 21st century learners (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). Traditional theories of engagement include cognitive, behavior, and/or psychological processes within social frameworks (e.g., Brofenbrenner, 1977; Finn, 1993; Newmann, 1992). A more recent theory proposed that student engagement occurs on intellectual and social levels (Dunleavy et al., 2012). Dunleavy et al. (2012) investigated over 63,000 students in grades 4-12 in a multi-year study, which began in 2007. Intellectual engagement referred to types of instruction, 21st century skills, and feedback. Social engagement referred to constructivism, identity, and connective instruction (Dunleavy et al., 2012). The themes found in the literature on engagement relevant to this study were related to teaching methods and engagement strategies.

***Teaching methods.*** Teaching methods are related to the quality of instruction because it is through methods that teachers work to engage students with and about content matter. The literature on teaching methods indicated that students preferred mixed methods (e.g., Benzing & Christ, 1997; Griffin & Howard, 2017; Hora, 2015; Laronde & MacLeod, 2012).

Benzing and Christ (1997) examined the teaching methods utilized by 207 undergraduate faculty members and found the most prominent method was lecture with

support of class discussions, blackboard use, and text, with 54% of the faculty reporting their classes as participatory as opposed to directive or democratic. Laronde and MacLeod (2012) found that 291 pre-service teachers preferred interactive methods, such as stations, to virtual methods or traditional lecture methods. Griffin and Howard (2017) found that 35 undergraduate students were more engaged during classes that implemented a mixed lecture design (lecture with discussion) over in class presentations, on-line discussions, and jigsaw methods. The authors rationalized that the mixed lecture design held students' attention due to the change in tasks every 15 to 20 minutes as the reason why students were more engaged (Griffin & Howard, 2017). It appeared that students preferred lecture alongside interaction as opposed to methods that are all lecture or all interactive (Griffin & Howard, 2017). Several studies mentioned that college students were adept at adjusting to various teaching methods as long as the teacher was able to clearly communicate expectations (e.g., Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Dubin & Taveggia, 1968; Griffin & Howard, 2017).

***Engagement strategies.*** Teaching strategies that encourage interactions and provide students with a safe environment were consistently found across the literature to increase student engagement (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Hickey & Zuiker, 2005; Taylor & Parsons, 2011; Umbach, 2005). Taylor and Parsons (2011) synthesized the empirical literature on engagement primarily with secondary students from 1993 to 2011. Their review focused on finding teaching strategies that can be utilized in the classroom to increase engagement, regardless of how you may theoretically view the plethora of engagement dimensions (academic, cognitive, behavioral, social, institutional, intellectual, emotional, psychological). The strategies were not specific

but were rather descriptions of what students need in order to develop 21st century skills and maximize engagement levels (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). The authors stated that students wanted stronger, positive relationships with the instructor and with each other. Additionally, students wanted teachers to know how they learn and provide space/time for exploration and collaboration in a safe environment. Exploration, relevancy, design of learning tasks, and multimedia and technology strategies created learning environments that were positive, safe, rigorous, and challenging, which increased student engagement (Taylor and Parsons, 2011). Taylor and Parsons' review of engagement literature provided teaching strategies that can be used to increase engagement and enhance relationships; however, there is no direct observation of how these strategies are enacted in the classroom, nor did they outline a rationale for which studies they selected to include in their review (2011).

Hickey and Zuiker (2005), in a three-year project with secondary students, found that students do not want to remain on the periphery of learning, but rather they want to be on a trajectory that is directed toward the center of a community where knowledge is constructed. Umbach (2005) conducted a large quantitative study of 42,259 students in higher education and 14,336 faculty members across 137 institutions to find out if faculty create a context of learning through their behaviors and attitudes that related to student engagement, students' perceptions of environment, and students' self-reported learning gains. They used data from the national student survey of engagement and a survey designed to explore how faculty members of the institutions where the national student survey of engagement was administered structured their classroom and their expectations of student engagement (Umbach,

2005). Using hierarchical linear modeling they found classroom related interactions between students and faculty were positively related to engagement. Students were more challenged and engaged in collaborative activities in institutions that reported higher interactions between students and faculty. In addition, they found that students perceived positive environmental support and personal/academic gains in institutions with high levels of student faculty interactions (Umbach, 2005). Survey data indicated increased levels of engagement and learning with positive student-faculty interactions, which does not provide a clear picture of how these interactions increase engagement. There were no observations of interactions or follow-up conversations with faculty members to fully explore why or how they promote interactions.

Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) conducted a study of 1,058 undergraduate students from 14 four-year colleges to examine student engagement and academic performance. Student learning was assessed by a critical thinking assessment developed by an outside agent, graduate record examination scores, and reported grade point averages. A set of engagement measures was selected from the national survey of student engagement. Student-teacher relationships accounted for 23% of variance in GPAs and 30% of the variance on critical thinking performance. Moreover, low ability students benefitted more from supportive environments than did high ability students (Carini et al., 2006). Although, the results were not as robust as the researchers expected, the results indicated that student-teacher relationships have a place in engagement theory and do influence learning in higher education (Carini et al., 2006).

Umbach (2005) suggested that faculty do matter; they can have positive effects on student engagement and learning. He suggested that classroom-based studies are

needed to provide more information on pedagogical techniques used by faculty (Umbach, 2005). Engagement-focused pedagogy that places emphasis on methods that are diverse with strategies to increase student interactions in a safe learning environment appeared in the literature to positively influence student engagement, but what is missing are descriptions of how and why teachers implement these methods and strategies in the classroom.

## Relational Pedagogy

Relational pedagogy is an organic process that is responsive to the needs and desires of learners, with relationships, interactions, and community at the heart of this pedagogy (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). The dynamic nature of relational pedagogy and the fact that relational pedagogy is primarily seen as a theoretical construct makes the topic difficult to research. Only five peer reviewed articles appeared when searching all databases using relational pedagogy as a title filter and education as a subject filter. Out of those five only one was an empirical study, and if the peer reviewed filter was removed, seven additional resources became available. What all of these resources have in common is that relational pedagogy relies on receptivity with a "we" focus as opposed to a teacher or a student focus. There was a difference in language between studies with younger students and studies with older students. Play was used to indicate the concept of receptivity with the younger students. Teacher behaviors that indicated receptivity were listening, observing, talking, and joining students (e.g., Fiori et al., 2012; Friesen, 2011; Na & Rogers, 2012; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009; Schettino, 2013). Studies focused on teacher-student relationships were not the only relationships found in the literature on

relational pedagogy. Studies also focused on student-content relationships, student-place relationships, and student-symbol relationships (Fiori, et al., 2012; Na & Rogers, 2012; Schettino, 2013).

From the book edited by Papatheodorou and Moyles (2009) there were three empirical studies relevant to relational pedagogy as viewed within the context of this study. Papatheodorou (2009) discussed her observations of how relational pedagogy was enacted at the Reggio Emilia preschools in Italy. The school focused on individual contributions to the collective group, and in their classrooms each student was praised for how they contribute to the whole. Georgeson (2009) researched four preschools for a period of 10 months to investigate the differences in utterances from children who were attending a preschool with dominant instructional discourse or dominant relational discourse. She found that children who attended the relational dominant preschools had more inclusive utterances, using 'we' more than using 'I', and they were more likely to build off of each other's ideas. In contrast, the children from the instructional dominant preschools used the word 'I' more frequently, and they were more likely to disagree with each other's ideas (Georgesen, 2009). In the two previous studies, there was a relational focus as opposed to a more traditional individual focus. Goouch (2009) conducted a case study with two preschool teachers to investigate how they utilized play. The two teachers shared common aspects about teaching and learning that were confirmed by observations from the researcher. The two teachers differed in their behavior when children were engaged in play. One teacher acted as a narrator and was actively involved with the children during play. The other teacher was mainly silent during play, only occasionally asking the children a question, and she

closely observed the children while at play. Both teachers, through play, were able to better understand and recognize the individual needs of their students (Goouch, 2009).

Friesen (2011) used his research with high school and higher education students in a book about relational pedagogy and how online and offline environments differ in place and space. Offline was discussed as traditional, face-to-face classroom environments with physical presence in the same place, whereas online had no physical presences in the same place but shared the same space. He stated that whether online or offline, receptivity and response were the foundation of relational pedagogy and that relational pedagogy had non-specialized and personal dimensions such as setting the tone/environment for the class by communicating clear expectations, the purpose for chat rooms, shared documents, and the like. In both environments, the receptivity of the teacher was important to setting a positive tone for the class. He said that the dominant view of online learning as digital and non-personal was an incorrect assumption because care can be communicated with students and relationships can be developed by the way the teacher sets the tone for the online class (Friesen, 2011). The author stated that the book was from decades of research, yet this research was not explicitly discussed nor referenced.

Schettino (2013) investigated a different type of relationship and how teachers may influence students' relationships with content. The author did not utilize the term relational pedagogy as it is defined in this study, but rather she called it relational problem based learning. Five adolescent girls in secondary math classes were the sample for this narrative inquiry. The author assessed their attitudes, self-confidence, and agencies in the classroom where they were able to share/discuss math content with

each other and with the teacher. What she found was that the girls experienced positive influences with regard to their attitudes, self-confidence, and agency in mathematics. She concluded that a relational approach to teaching mathematics might increase equity across all underrepresented groups in this domain (Schettino, 2013). In this study relational pedagogy was not enacted based on developing caring relationships between teacher and students but was enacted to enhance the relationships between students and math content by allowing student discourse (Schettino, 2013).

Fiori et al. (2012) used the term meta-teaching in outdoor education to describe how he took the ideas of observation, inference, and transference in a learning cycle to an outdoor space and coupled these activities with self-reflection to enact relational pedagogy. He found that students were able to develop relationships with place and discover that meaning also exists in non-human relationships, such as the place where one lives (Fiori et al., 2012). Na and Rogers (2012) used seven relational pedagogy principles (open safe environment, conflicts, mutual impacts, the use of life experience in the classroom, a teacher with relational sensitivity, various forms of teaching, and relational images as the contents of teaching) to empower Korean-American women in church leadership. The authors found that by using relational pedagogical principles the participants began to envision themselves as leaders in the church as opposed to their prior views of being wives and mothers. In addition, through the workshop, the authors found that the participants began to view their relationships with church symbols differently (Na & Rogers, 2012). Relationships with content, place, self, and symbols were influenced through the use of a pedagogy where teachers listened and allowed for discourse and meaningful experiences within the classroom.

Relational pedagogy is different than traditional practice where knowledge is viewed as static facts and skills based on information processing, which describes the teacher-student relationship as bound by control, expertise, and authority (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). It is also different from the viewpoint where knowledge is described as the understanding born of inquiry with the teacher acting as a guide (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). Relational pedagogy poses a shift from investigating individuals, groups, and educational processes to investigating relationships: "we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words, we learn" (Wenger, 1998, p. 45). Freire and Macedo (1995) stated the knowledge embedded in the curriculum is that of both teacher and learner who share the intrinsic characteristics to learn, to know, and to teach with an undefined curiosity. The teacher and the learner are in relation with one another, and a relational pedagogy provides time and space for this relationship to develop and grow (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). Relational pedagogy relies on building and sustaining relationships between students, students and teachers, students and content, and maintaining a safe, collaborative learning environment (Goralnik et al., 2012). The literature in education on relational pedagogy, although limited, suggests a need for strategies in this domain if we want to achieve deep, lasting learning; increase engagement levels of learners; and support academic achievement (Goralnik et al., 2012).

## Conclusion

Relational pedagogy is grounded in an ethics of care where caring teachers interact with students to build positive relationships that influence students' learning

and growth, as has been shown throughout this literature review. However, there are few empirical studies that focus on developing the theoretical construct of relational pedagogy in terms of how teachers, in practice, build and sustain the relationships that are deemed important within the literature. There is also a lack of studies that include classroom observations of what teachers do within the formal setting to build relationships, or studies that investigate teachers' perspectives on how they build relationships with students. This study contributes to our understanding of how relational pedagogy is enacted, specifically in a higher education setting, through classroom observations and interviews with teachers, to provide a picture of how relational pedagogy fits within the context of teaching and learning.

# Chapter 3

The purpose of this study was to understand how relational pedagogy was enacted in higher education. The overarching research question was How do caring teachers enact relational pedagogy? There were three sub-questions considered within the scope of the overarching question: What do caring teachers do in the classroom to achieve positive relationships with students? How do caring teachers engage students? How do the interactions in a classroom indicate teacher-student relationships? Relational pedagogy, in this study, was defined as the intentional practice of caring teachers interacting with students to build and sustain positive relationships that cognitively and emotionally supported their students throughout their journeys together. The context of these relationships and how these relationships are formed and sustained needs to be examined through observation and interpretation of these relationships in the field (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Umbach, 2005; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). A qualitative approach was used to answer the research questions and uncover trends among caring teachers from interviews and classroom observations, which allowed for a more in depth investigation into the processes underlying relational pedagogy than allowed by a quantitative approach. In this chapter I present the methodology followed by the methods where I describe recruitment, sampling, participants, data sources, data collection, data analysis, and data convergence. At the end of the chapter, I present my subjectivity statement, along with a description of how I addressed my biases, followed by trustworthiness and ending with a section that addresses ethical considerations.

## Methodology

Grounded theory was the qualitative methodology selected for this study because the intent of grounded theory is to move beyond description and discover a unified theory for a process or action (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, constructivist grounded theory aligned with the purpose of this study and with my personal views on relational pedagogy. A constructivist grounded theory methodology was selected instead of a case study or ethnography because I was most interested in how relational pedagogy was enacted; it was the process of fostering relationships that was of interest. An ethnographic research with the same purpose and questions would focus on the attributes of caring teachers, which may not illuminate the processes the teachers use to foster relationships. A case study, while providing rich descriptions of a few cases, may not provide enough data on how relationships are fostered. A grounded theory approach allowed for more diverse data from multiple sources and allowed for a focus on the process of relational pedagogy, thus filling the gap in the literature on interactions and actions between higher education students and their teachers in the classroom.

Grounded theory relies on an interpretivist theoretical perspective, which emerged as an attempt to understand human reality (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory as a way to qualitatively generate theory through a systematic process of verification using constant comparison of data that is applicable in and to practice. Corbin and Strauss (1990) stated that the theoretical underpinnings of grounded theory came from pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. There were two main ideas drawn from these perspectives that are

embedded into grounded theory. The first is that determinism and non-determinism were both rejected, and the second is that phenomena were viewed as changing. Corbin and Strauss (1990) explain how "grounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to their actions. It's the responsibility of the researcher to catch this interplay" (p. 5). The key features of grounded theory are focus on process(es) or action(s) to develop a theory based on data, constant comparison during data collection, and data analysis that brings together meanings. Through constant comparison the researcher generates conceptual categories from data; these categories are defined by evidence and the researcher's personal insights and experiences to generate substantive or formal theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Substantive theory describes concepts in a specific area, whereas formal theory describes conceptual areas. Glaser and Strauss (1967) used the example of an inquiry on dying as a nonscheduled status passage; substantive theory explains the process of dying for specific cases, and grounded theory explains status passage. They remarked that both theories can inform the other; the generation of a substantive theory can be informed by existing formal theories in the area, and the generation of formal theories in a given area can be influenced by substantive theories from specific inquiries within that area (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

There are two general types of grounded theory: systematic and constructivist (Creswell, 2013). Glaser and Strauss (1967) provide the framework for systematic grounded theory. Data collection involves a back and forth process between field observations and interviews, and data analysis follows systematic procedures of

constant comparison. The first phase in analysis is the coding of data, where the researcher reads through the data and identifies properties of categories. During this process certain conflicts/ideas will arise, and it is at this point that the researcher stops coding and writes a memo. The next phase is the comparison of categories with incidents in the data that will integrate the data and develop schemes. In more recent literature this process has been labeled as axial coding, and there are several categories used during this process: conditions, context, strategies, and consequences (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The third phase of constant comparison was originally called delimiting the data but is now referred to as selective coding. Selective coding is the process of defining core categories that form propositions of the theory. These core categories develop a story that the researcher then presents as a narrative, visual pictures, or series of hypotheses (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Constructivist grounded theory is more interpretive than systematic grounded theory; it "advocates for a social constructivist perspective" (Creswell, 2013, loc. 1890). Charmaz (2006) developed constructivist grounded theory as a way to see that data and analysis are created from relationships with participants and other sources of data, which is aligned with constructivists who study how and why individuals construct meanings in various contexts. There are two major differences between systematic grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory. The first is that constructivist grounded theory places more emphasis on affective process such as feelings, values, and beliefs of both participants and researcher. The second is that constructivist grounded theory does not use preconceived categories for axial coding. In response to the axial codes proposed by Strauss and Corbin, Charmaz (2006) stated

that, "…relying on axial coding may limit what and how researchers learn about their studied worlds and, thus, restricts the codes they construct" (p. 62). She suggested that researchers remain open to the data and use their interpretations of the data to form these categories. This study adhered to a constructivist grounded theory approach because of the interpretative emphasis allowed during the coding process. I did not want to limit the categories that emerged from the data to the axial codes prescribed by systematic grounded theory. The interpretative emphasis associated with constructivist grounded theory aligned with my own belief that the source of knowledge (mental constructions) arises and develops in the mind of the individual, which is informed by interactions with objects (content) and subjects (context).

## Methods

Prior to the start of this study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the site where data were collected and from my personal research site. Upon IRB approval I set out to recruit participants. The selection of participants that formed the sample for this study were based on nominations of caring teachers by division deans in science, math, health professions, and the social sciences. There were eight teachers identified as caring who agreed to participate in this study. Each teacher participated in a formal interview that occurred at the beginning of the summer semester, and they participated in four follow-up interviews that occurred between classroom observations throughout the duration of the study, which was eight weeks. The data sources for this study were interview transcriptions and field notes from classroom observations. Data was analyzed simultaneously with data collection and followed a constructivist grounded theory approach. Data convergence provided

answers to the overarching research question and to the three sub-questions. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, I had a person outside of the study check my data analysis for bias. Trustworthiness was addressed by triangulation, validation, and verification. Ethical considerations on the research of human subjects included the use of pseudonyms throughout the project's duration to protect the identity of the teachers. In addition, the one file that contained information linking teacher identity and pseudonyms, along with all email correspondences, were deleted upon completion of data collection.

**Sampling and Participants**

The phenomenon of classroom interactions between teachers and students cannot be isolated from contextual factors; a holistic approach is needed in order to uncover characteristics of relational pedagogy as it occurs in a natural setting (Merriam, 2009). This study utilized purposeful sampling with the intention of selecting participants that offered "atypical, perhaps rare attributes or occurrences of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). Purposeful sampling was based on recommendations to select eight teachers recognized as caring who teach at the undergraduate level in a suburban community college located in the Midwest. There were two general criteria for participant selection: a caring teacher and a teacher of a subject in higher education at the undergraduate level who was teaching in the summer of 2017.

The characteristics of a caring teacher in this purposeful sample, and as defined in this study, were described within the concepts of will, skill, social support, and classroom environments. Will described the teachers' passion for teaching and learning

and their abilities to ignite student curiosity by asking intriguing questions (Whisler, 2016). Skill described the teachers' enthusiasm and seriousness about their content. They used personal anecdotes and embed other disciplines into their teaching. Social support described the teachers' genuine concern for students; they provided timely feedback to students and interacted with students in positive ways (Whisler, 2016). The classroom environment of a caring teacher was described as engaging, safe, and collaborative. The interactions in the classroom were lively and respectful, and the teacher maintained high expectations of students (Cooper, 2014).

The sample was selected from a two-year community college. The community college is situated in a suburban area in Midwestern United States and serves over 28,000 students. They offer over 80 associate degree programs, technical and professional certification programs for skill attainment or fast track career options. This site was selected because of the diverse, non-traditional student population that they serve and their flexible course schedules. The site does have a maximum enrollment for their courses. For most on campus courses the maximum enrollment was 35, but an instructor can issue as many as five overrides to this seat capacity. I also had an insider advantage at this site because I have been an adjunct faculty member at this institution for over a decade, and I am familiar with their mission statement. As an adjunct instructor, I did not know or interact with many of the instructors at this institution. The few instructors that I did know were not considered for this study.

**Recruitment**. The recruitment process began with an email to the division deans three weeks prior to the start of the summer session to recommend caring teachers in their departments who demonstrated will, skill, social support, and

maintained a positive classroom environment. The email briefly described the nature of the study, and the characteristics of a caring teacher (Appendix A). The division deans that were contacted were associated with the following academic subjects: science and math, English and humanities, arts, health professions, and social sciences.

The deans of the arts division and English and humanities division did not return my email. The dean of science and math, during a face-to-face meeting, recommended eight teachers. The dean of health professions recommended five teachers by email correspondence. The dean of social sciences recommended five teachers by phone conversation and email correspondence. Of those eighteen recommended teachers only fifteen met the criteria for inclusion in this study because three of the teachers only taught on-line courses during the summer session.

An email was sent to all fifteen possible participants. The email contained a brief introduction of the study and how they were nominated (Appendix B). The possible participants were asked to respond to the email if they were interested, so that we could meet face-to-face to discuss the study in more detail. The initial round of emails yielded four interested teachers. After one week, a follow-up email was sent to the remaining eleven possible participants. The second round of emails resulted in two more interested teachers. At this time, the semester was to start in a few days. On the first day of classes, I met face-to-face with two more possible participants. I decided to meet in person with them because one teacher was out of town until the day classes started, and the other teacher was highly recommended by his division dean, so I thought meeting him face-to-face would possibly persuade him to be involved in the study. Both of these teachers decided to participate in the study. The recruitment phase

lasted three weeks with a total of eight interested teachers.

I set up an initial face-to-face meeting with six of the eight participants to discuss the possibility of their participation in the study before the beginning of the summer semester. This was also done with the other two participants except the face-to-face meetings were conducted on the first day of classes. At this initial meeting, I discussed the nature of the study and outlined responsibilities and activities associated with the study. We also discussed the class I wanted to observe. I had already looked at the teachers' schedules on-line, so I knew which class would be compatible with my own summer schedule. At the end of this meeting, I asked the teachers if they were willing to participate or if they would like time to think about it. There was one participant who wanted a few days to think about her participation. I contacted her the next week, and she agreed to participate, so we set up a time for her to sign the record of consent associated with this study. The other seven teachers signed the record of consent at the initial face-to-face meeting. I emailed seven of the participants a digital copy of the signed record of consent and provided one participant a hard copy for her records.

**The participants.** The eight participants were from three academic divisions. The teachers who participated selected pseudonyms, and these were used throughout the duration of this study. Bob, PB, Lenny, Juan, and Bernard were from the math and sciences division. Ann was from the health professions division. Alvin and Winston were from the social sciences division. The range of teaching experience among the participants was 18 to 30 years. Winston was the only adjunct instructor, while all other teachers were employed full time at Midwest Local College (pseudonym).

Winston and PB were the only teachers with high school level teaching experience.

***Alvin.*** Alvin, a male who had a PhD in psychology, has been teaching for thirty years. He taught part time for nineteen years while working full time in the field of psychology. He taught Personality Theories, which I observed, and he taught two sections of Introduction to Psychology during the summer session. Most days I observed there were eight students in attendance. Alvin said on multiple occasions that he is "the professor who professes" (Formal Interview, 6/7/17). He believed that knowledge "is more than just facts; it's an understanding on more of a personal level. Probably from personal needs that individuals have" (Follow Up Interview 3, 7/17/17). He liked being on the stage, and his purpose in teaching was personal: "I want to be in front of students, tease them a little bit, push them a little bit, shock them, get them thinking about stuff – that is enjoyable to me" (Follow Up Interview 3, 7/17/17). In terms of relationships with students, Alvin respected their privacy and did not initiate personal conversations with students. He stated, "I am in a superior subordinate relationship. I am not their buddy, not their pal" (Follow Up Interview 1, 6/7/17). He took student feedback seriously and personally reflected after class on how he could improve. The three words he used to describe his teaching were realistic, passionate, and methodical.

***Ann.*** Ann, a female who worked in her chosen profession, was an adjunct instructor before joining the faculty. At present she was the program chair for one of the health sciences departments and a full time instructor. She had her master's degree and had been teaching for 28 years. She taught Geriatric Care, the only class she taught this semester. All students were present every time I observed her class. Ann's

response to where knowledge comes from was based on experience and application. She stated, "Knowledge comes from a thirst for knowing something, getting to know something with an awareness and experience of applying it" (Follow Up Interview 4, 7/27/17). Ann was often moved to tears when discussing her profession and her students. She told her students at the beginning of every semester, "We're going to take this journey together. I'm here for you to learn, but I'm here to learn also" (Formal Interview, 6/8/17). The three words she used to describe her teaching were interactive, genuine, and open.

***Bernard.*** Bernard was a female who had worked at the Environmental Protection Agency. She had a master's degree in Biology with 20 years of teaching experience, and she started teaching when a car accident hindered her ability to do field work. She taught Introduction to Nutrition, which I observed, as well as two sections of General Biology for non-majors and one section of Human Anatomy & Physiology. On average, I observed 25 students in attendance across the four observations. She stated that knowledge comes from "a good foundation that is fed into us as children" (Follow Up Interview 3, 7/19/17). She felt that people use that knowledge "to find answers and recognize answers when you find them" (Follow Up Interview 3, 7/19/17). Her purpose in teaching was that it biochemically made her feel good; "that dopamine feeling of having knowledge and passing it on… it gives me a feeling of being content and that feeling makes me happy" (Follow Up Interview 3, 7/19/17). When asked to give three words to describe her teaching she provided three words that she had heard students use when describing her: weird, funny, and hard.

***Bob.*** Bob was a male who had a PhD in chemistry and had been teaching for 23

years. He taught Survey of General & Organic Biochemistry, a course that is a requirement for students in the nursing program, which I observed, and two sections of General Chemistry. There was an average attendance of 31 on the days I observed. He had a total of eight students drop his class, and several of those students did not drop until the sixth week of the semester. When asked about where knowledge comes from he said, "Knowledge comes from a process of experience, questioning, and testing" (Follow Up Interview 4, 7/24/17). The attainment of knowledge, he believed, was similar to the scientific process. Bob's purpose in teaching was "to increase student knowledge and help them reach their goals" (Follow Up Interview 4, 7/24/17). The three words he used to describe his teaching were active, upbeat, and thorough.

***Juan.*** Juan, a male with a master's degree in Zoology, had been teaching for 20 years. He taught two sections of General Biology for majors, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. I observed his afternoon section. On the days I observed he had 18 students on average attend class. When asked about where knowledge comes from there was no hesitation in his response: "Knowledge is most certainly anything that can be shown empirically" (Follow Up Interview 4, 7/26/17). His purpose in teaching was to improve scientific literacy of his students because this led to "improved public health, higher income, and a healthier society" (Follow Up Interview 4, 7/26/17). The three words he used to describe his teaching were energetic, motivating, and creative.

***Lenny.*** Lenny, a male with a master's degree in mathematics, had been teaching for 22 years. He taught Introduction to Statistics, which I observed, and a section of Business Calculus. On average there were 24 students present during my observations. Lenny's response to the question of where knowledge comes from was

"Knowledge comes from the application of facts and these facts can either be given to you or discovered" (Follow Up Interview 3, 7/11/17). His purpose in teaching was to help students develop "the tools to think" (Follow Up Interview 3, 7/11/17). The three words he used to describe his teaching were spontaneous, interactive, and challenging.

***PB.*** PB, a male who had a master's degree in mathematics was originally in the field of computer science. He moved to the United States, attained his master's degree, and then began teaching. He had been teaching for 23 years, both in high school and at one other higher education institution. He taught Calculus & Analytic Geometry II. There was an average of 36 students in attendance during my observations. PB stated, "Knowledge and expertise in a field comes from practice and doing problems and being able to figure out from past experiences what works in certain situations" (Follow Up Interview 4, 7/28/17). His purpose in teaching was "to help society as a whole" (Follow Up Interview 4, 7/28/17). He believed that "education is a way to help people up, not just to make money, but to have a better life. I am glad to be a part of it" (Follow Up Interview 4, 7/28/17). The three words he used to describe his teaching were enthusiastic, interactive, and every day is different.

***Winston.*** Winston, a male with a master's degree in public administration, had worked in local government before starting his teaching career. He had taught for a total of 18 years, both as an adjunct instructor and a high school teacher. He taught American Federal Government, which I observed. There was an average of 34 students in attendance during my observations. Winston struggled to answer the question about where knowledge comes from, but after a few minutes of thinking out loud he settled on "knowledge is whatever satisfies our own curiosity" (Follow Up Interview 4,

7/19/17). His purpose in teaching was to "facilitate the acquisition of knowledge in a way students can relate to" (Follow Up Interview 4, 7/19/17). He wanted students to feel like they learned something and that they could apply that knowledge to what was being discussed on the news. The three words he used to describe his teaching were enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and committed.

**Data Sources and Processes**

Grounded theory does not have any specific methods for data collection, but typically data are collected from interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2013). There were three primary sources of data associated with this study: formal interviews, field notes from classroom observations, and follow up interviews. Table 1, below, shows how the sources of data align to the research questions.

Table 1

*Alignment of Overarching Research Question and Sub-questions with Data Sources*

| **Research Questions (RQ)** | **Data Source** |
|---|---|
| Overarching RQ: How do caring teachers foster relationships with students in higher education? | Formal Interviews<br>Field Notes<br>Follow-Up Interviews |
| Sub-question 1: What do caring teachers do in the classroom to achieve positive relationships with students? | Formal Interviews<br>Field Notes<br>Follow-Up Interviews |
| Sub-question 2: How do caring teachers engage students? | Formal Interviews<br>Field Notes<br>Follow-Up Interviews |
| Sub-question 3: What are the interactions in a classroom that indicate teacher-student relationships? | Field Notes<br>Follow-Up Interviews |

Data collection began with the formal interviews and was completed by the end of the summer semester, which was eight weeks in duration. Memos were written throughout

the data analysis process and became a source of data during data convergence.

**Formal interviews.** The purpose of the formal interviews was to learn about the backgrounds of the teachers, how they prepared for their classes, typical class structure, and how they viewed relationships with their students. The background questions provided me with information on how long and in what capacity they had been teaching. The next two categories provided me with information about how they designed class activities and the purpose of these activities. The last category provided me with information about their beliefs on the importance of relationships with students. The formal interview script is in Appendix C, and Appendix D contains a matrix that relates the research questions with formal interview questions. The interviews were semi-structured which allowed for probing and clarifying questions based on how the teachers responded to the interview questions.

Formal interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher and one other person, approved by the Institutional Review Board, transcribed all audio recordings. There was one formal interview for each participant that lasted between 32 minutes and 43 minutes. The formal interviews took place on campus in the participants' offices with all participants except one, and his formal interview took place in the library at a nearby university.

**Field notes – classroom observations.** The purpose of classroom observations was to collect data on the interactions and behaviors that occurred in the classroom. My role was that of observer only. I sat in the back of the room with a notebook that I used to document my observations. There were several focal points for these observations that were based on the research questions such as the types of

interactions, delivery of content, and classroom environment. I recorded the context and type of interactions between students and between the students and the teacher. There were four general types of interactions: student-to-student, student to teacher/whole class, teacher to student, and teacher to whole class. I recorded each type of interaction, and next to this note I wrote down the context of the interaction. If it was a question, I wrote down the question and the response. If the interaction was a personal exchange, I recorded what I heard. Another area of focus during the classroom observation was on the delivery of content by the teacher. I recorded how the teacher presented content to the students. If the teacher used PowerPoint, I would record how that PowerPoint was being used and if the PowerPoint appeared to be a modified version of publisher's resources or if the PowerPoint was unique to the teacher. I also noted when and what the teacher drew or wrote on the board during the lecture. I made note of how the teacher was timing the lesson and how often they paused or encouraged students to ask questions. If a teacher showed a video, I noted the context of the video and how the teacher used the video. There was one teacher who did not use the projector but instead prepared activity sheets for the students, so for his observations I noted when and how he set-up the activity for the day. This teacher also provided me with a copy of the activity on the days I observed. The last focus was on the classroom environment which included student and teacher behaviors, facial expressions, body language, and signs of enjoyment or frustration. I also noted what students were doing throughout the lecture such as taking notes, working together, or listening to the teacher; in some cases students were on their phones or laptops. If I could see what was on their phones or laptops I would make

note of that observation. For example, one young lady sitting in front of me did a lot of shopping on Amazon. The field notes taken during the classroom observations provided information for the follow up interviews with the teachers between observations.

Field notes were taken during the four classroom observations for each participant. I selected four observations based on my prior experience with classroom observations. Fewer than three observations may not provide enough information to understand how the teachers enact relational pedagogy, and more than four observations will likely not provide any new information. Each classroom observation lasted between 60 minutes and 140 minutes (Appendix E). The amount of time was dependent on how the summer sessions were scheduled and what the teacher had planned for each session. For example, there were two participants who taught four days a week, and the length of class sessions was equivalent to a regular semester class session. The other participants had a double block of time and only met twice per week. In order to observe a single class session for the double blocked teachers I made arrangements with the teachers to observe either the first half or the second half of class. Generally speaking, there was an observation during the first week of class, two in the middle, and one at the end of the semester.

**Follow-up interviews.** The follow-up interviews occurred between observations and were based on classroom observations. The purpose of these interviews was for me to ask about aspects of the observations that needed clarification or observations that sparked my curiosity. Typical categories of questions that I asked about during these interviews were class progress, observed individual interactions,

delivery of content, struggling students, and teacher and student behaviors and relationships. Examples of these prompts/questions include: "Talk to me about how the class is performing," "I noticed that you spent more time with student (insert student description). Describe that interaction with me," "Talk to me about why you showed the video and how you helped students connect the video with content," "How do you reach out to struggling students," "You asked a student to follow you to your office after class. Please talk to me about that," "A student made a joke that countered your joke in class. Describe your thoughts on this interaction," "I noticed you like to joke around with student (insert student description) in class. Please explain why you do that." The interviews followed an open-ended format. I prepared several questions and prompts based on my readings of the field notes or from the analysis of field notes, if the analysis for that observation was ready at the time of the follow-up interview. I also asked the teachers during every follow-up interview to speak freely about any interactions or behaviors they thought were related to building relationships or being a caring teacher. There were three questions I asked all of the teachers during the last two weeks of the semester: describe where knowledge comes from, your purpose in teaching, and I reminded them of the research questions and asked them to freely associate after hearing the questions. The data collection process lasted eight weeks.

Follow-up interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Each follow-up interview lasted between 12 minutes and 43 minutes. Some of the follow-up interviews were shortened because teachers had students waiting outside of his/her office. There were four follow-up interviews per teacher, and they took take place on campus in the participants' offices.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the flexible guidelines provided by constructivist grounded theory and began simultaneously with data collection, which helped me focus on the research questions and provided me with direction during observations and follow-up interviews (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis began with the formal interviews. However, once observations and follow-up interviews began, data analysis occurred simultaneously across all three data sources. I prioritized the coding of field notes because the prompts and questions for the follow-up interviews relied on this analysis being completed before the interviews took place. I coded the formal interviews and follow-up interviews as transcriptions became available.

**Coding.** Qualitative analysis, in general, involves data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions that occur somewhat simultaneously (Punch, 2005). Data reduction began with reading through interview scripts and field notes. After this initial reading, I read through each data source again in order to reduce the data to codes. The three research sub-questions formed the a priori categories used during the coding of all data sources. 1) How do teachers build and sustain positive relationships? 2) How do teachers engage students? 3) How do the interactions in a classroom indicate teacher-student relationships? I called these research categories do, engage, and interact.

Each a priori category was highlighted using a different color. The "do" category included anything in the field notes or transcripts that were related to what teachers do to foster positive relationships with students. The "engage" category included observed engagement techniques or teachers' comments during interviews

that were relevant to how they engage students. The "interact" category included all observed interactions along with the context of those interactions found in my field notes, and teachers' comments from interviews regarding interactions they experienced or observed. This initial reduction process was identical for all data sources.

There were very few codes regarding interactions in the formal interviews because classes had not yet started. However, several teachers did tell stories about interactions they have had with students in the past. There were a few additional features in the engage and interact categories for the field notes that were not included in the interview analyses due to the nature of the data source. The number of interactions for each type of interaction was included in the coding of the interaction category as well as the frequency of engagement practices for each teacher coded in the engage category.

**Categories of codes.** After the initial coding, categories of codes were developed, which is referred to as axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I typed all of the codes from each data source across all of the participants for each category: do, engage, and interact. There were three documents produced: one for formal interviews, one for field notes, and one for follow-up interviews. I printed each document, and, using only the codes in the document, I looked for patterns in the codes across all participants in order to develop categories of codes for each data source. I continued this process until all codes were placed into a category of codes. Then, I wrote a definition for each category of codes that described the codes from the data source (Appendices F-H).

Memo writing occurred throughout the data analysis process. Memos were

written when an idea inspired me to look at the data in another way. Most often the memos resulted in a separate analysis of data or coding one specific interview question to identify trends across participants. There were several memos written during the initial and axial coding processes that led me to analyze the data in a way other than using the research categories of do, engage, and interaction. The memos were typically a question that I had regarding what I was seeing in the analysis process.

There were several memos written based on the formal interview questions that were the same for all teachers. I selected interview questions that were related to the research questions. I segmented participants' responses by cutting the portion of the transcript for the question I was looking at, and then I coded the responses by highlighting key words and phrases. I wrote these codes on a separate piece of paper. Looking only at the codes, I categorized the codes to get a general idea across participants the answer to that specific interview question. The first question I looked at was *Describe a time, in class, when you felt connected to a student.* I selected this question because it was related to relationships. The second question I looked at was *How do you support students, or facilitate student success?* I selected this question because the answer was related to what teachers do in the classroom, and that could possibly influence the development of relationships with students.

From the follow-up interviews there were several questions that I approached the same way. The first question was selected to gain a better perspective of the teachers' backgrounds and to see if there were any trends in the beliefs of the teachers with respect to knowledge: *In your opinion, where does knowledge come from? What is your purpose in teaching? (Why do you teach?)* This question was selected because I

was curious as to how a teachers' purpose may have influenced how they engage students and the types of interactions they had with students. *Free association with research questions* was selected to provide additional information on how the teachers viewed relationships with students. Another question from the follow-up interviews prompted the teachers to *estimate the number of students they had non-academic knowledge about.* I selected this prompt to look at because I wanted to see if the teachers' responses matched my classroom observations and data from follow-up interviews and to see if there was a possible relationship between teaching methods and purpose with the number of students each teacher reported they knew personally.

It is through a memo that I had the idea to include frequency counts during the analysis of field notes for the engage and interactions categories. Once I started counting the frequencies, I wondered if there was a trend across engagement techniques and the teachers' purpose in teaching and if there were any relationships between purpose and number or type of interactions, which led me to analyze the purpose question described above. In addition to these memos, I looked at attendance for teachers because I was curious to see if the teachers' methods or purpose in teaching were possibly related to the whether or not students attended class. The memos were integrated after the initial phase of data convergence and prior to the final phase of data convergence.

Memo writing allowed me to recognize my biases and helped me bracket these throughout the analysis process. Memo writing also allowed me to use creativity in the way I interpreted the coding processes.

**Data Convergence**

The purpose of data convergence was to further reduce the data through the development of research clusters which answered the three sub-questions, the integration of memos into the research clusters, and the development of themes across all research categories to answer the overarching research question. The purpose of the initial phase of data convergence was to further reduce the data, which began with writing all of the categories of codes and their definitions into a single document for each a priori research category across all data sources. I followed a similar process of how I developed the categories of codes, only this time I used the categories of codes across all data sources in order to develop research question clusters. I looked for patterns in the categories of codes that could be clustered based on the definitions I developed during the formation of the categories of codes. This process continued until all of the categories of codes were represented in a research question cluster. The research question clusters were then named and defined based on the categories of codes each cluster represented.

The next step in data convergence was to take each research question cluster and integrate the memos that were written during data analyses. I read through each research question cluster definition and identified data from my memos that further developed the definition of the research question cluster (Appendix I).

The last phase in data convergence was to address the overarching research question of "How do caring teachers foster relationships with students in higher education?". I read through the definitions associated with each research question cluster for key words or phrases that indicated similar ideas. Clusters across the a priori research categories merged and overlapped, which formed themes that were defined

(Appendix J). The final development of themes provided answers to the overarching research question.

**Subjectivity Statement**

I am a woman who has been teaching for 22 years. 17 of those years I was a full-time secondary public school science teacher and an adjunct physics instructor at Midwest Local College. For two years after this, I worked with a university research group in education that was grant funded. I was actively involved in the development and implementation of professional development across the state that was focused on implementing inquiry into the classroom and authentic teaching practices. I currently hold a dual appointment at a private university in the Midwest. I am the program coordinator for secondary education, teaching all required education coursework along with a tests & measurement course. In the natural sciences department, I teach college physics 1 & 2, earth science, environmental science, frontiers of science, and principles of mathematics 1 & 2. I mention my teaching history because it communicates my dedication to the field and demonstrates my familiarity with teaching in higher education.

My epistemological and theoretical perspectives align to a learner centered ideology of curriculum (Schiro, 2012) and intersubjective, structuralist perspectives (Davis, 2004). The theory that underlies a learner-centered ideology is constructivism: "learning takes place when people interact with learning environments" (Schiro, 2012, p. 118). Davis (2004) used the term structuralist (in lieu of social constructionism or constructivism) and stated that structuralist discourses are supported by phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and pragmatism, which suggest that explicit

knowledge is the surface of a tangled web of experiences and interpretations. Meaning is made through the processes of accommodation and assimilation by which new information is combined with existing cognitive structures (Piaget, 1959; Schiro, 2012).

My interest in student-teacher relationships began mid-way through my career as I began to reflect on the successes of my high school students on criterion-referenced exams, such as Advanced Placement exams. I realized that my students appeared to work harder for me than their other teachers, and after informal discussions with students I discovered that they liked me and did not want to disappoint me. Many students remarked that they knew I had high expectations of them, and, because of this, they made sure to complete homework and engage in class activities. A few years later, in a higher education physics summer, I explicitly communicated with undergraduates why in terms of personal beliefs as well as theories of teaching and learning, I designed the course the way I did and why they were being asked to engage in certain activities. The semester was emotionally taxing for me because I was vulnerable every day. I developed meaningful relationships with every student, and they developed meaningful relationships with each other. On the last night of class, after the students completed a cumulative final, they stayed for an additional two hours talking and celebrating the closure of the semester with me. In all of my years of teaching, I had never experienced this with undergraduates. That summer intrigued me as a researcher, and I began to wonder how other teachers built and sustained relationships with and among their students in a higher education setting.

I believe the relationships I form with my students are the most important

aspect of my job. When I plan lessons, I intentionally think of ways to connect with individual students and to engage all students with the content and with each other. I entered this project fully aware of my biases and closeness to relational pedagogy. Throughout this study, I addressed my biases through memo writing and by having a person outside of the research project regularly check my work for bias.

**Bias**

There were times during data collection when I would catch myself dreading or being excited to observe certain teachers' classes. I simply made a note about why I was dreading or looking forward to that teacher's class then continued on with my day. I have experience with classroom observations as a teacher candidate fieldwork supervisor. When I observe teacher candidates in the field, I critique and look for instructional behaviors that the teacher candidates can improve upon. I was surprised that I did not encounter any personal biases during the class observations for this study. This type of observation was different for me, and I do not think biases were an issue because I was so busy trying to record everything that happened during the class that my mind was too preoccupied to do anything else. I also had a colleague read through field notes before initial coding to look for anything that was possibly an interpretation and not an observation. She found none.

Many of the memos written during analysis were in the form of questions because of my preconceptions of how I thought relational pedagogy was enacted in the classroom. I recognized my biases by asking myself: Is this analysis for you and your curiosity or is the analysis for the research questions? If the answer was for myself, or

my curiosity, then I went ahead with the analysis and then thought about whether the information gained was relevant to the research questions. Most of the time this self-indulgent analysis was not helpful to the study. The process of extra data analysis was time consuming, but I found it to be a helpful way for me to refocus on the research questions after I addressed my biases. I also had a difficult time during analysis to not focus on the actions of individual teachers, so I ranked the teachers in every way I could think of and looked for trends in the rankings. Again, this self-indulgent behavior allowed me to stop focusing on the individuals and distance myself from the data. I also removed the pseudonyms from all transcriptions and that helped me focus on the data and not the teachers. Once I did this, I started over with my analysis and compared it with what I had already analyzed, and the results were similar.

**Trustworthiness**

The subjective nature of qualitative research calls for a system of checks and balances. This study is no exception. There were several methods that I used to address trustworthiness: triangulation, validation, and verification. Triangulation is the process of "using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings" (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). Formal interviews, field notes from classroom observations, and follow-up interviews were the data sources used during constant comparative analysis that addressed triangulation. In addition to multiple sources of data, a colleague (Laura), outside of this research, agreed to confirm emerging findings and check for personal biases.

Laura and I met on four separate occasions to discuss data analysis. The first meeting was to establish initial coding agreements for the formal interviews. We each

coded the same interview and compared our codes for each a priori category (do, engage, interactions). We were in agreement on 87% of the codes across all research categories. The second time we met we both coded the same set of field notes for one observation. Our agreement was low, 54%, so we discussed how we coded each page in the field notebook. Laura coded for student engagement and not how teachers were engaging students. Once we realized this difference we then coded another observation and compared our codes. For our second round of coding we had 92% agreement. The follow-up interview coding occurred during our third meeting. Again, we each coded the same transcript and had an 87% agreement. The fourth meeting we looked at the development of categories of codes from the focused coding process for each data source. I had printed out the codes, and we developed categories of codes for each data source on our own and then we compared the categories of codes. Before I could establish agreement, we had to each explain our categories of codes and then decide whether or not we were consistent with one another. We mutually agreed on all categories of codes. During the last meeting, Laura mentioned that I might have a personal bias with one of the participants. Laura noticed I spoke negatively of this teacher when we were casually talking about the study. I asked her to code one of this teacher's follow-up interview transcriptions and field notes for one of the observations. Laura then compared her codes with mine and said she did not see any bias in the way I was analyzing this teacher's data. For the interviews and field notes, Laura and I followed all of the same procedures regarding the process of coding and focused coding. Our meetings typically lasted two hours.

In addition to an outside partner, I sent each participant interview transcripts for

verification. I allowed one week for each participant to review, verify, and/or modify transcripts. Only one teacher had suggestions/edits on two of his follow-up discussion transcripts. It was important to me that each caring teacher had the opportunity to provide additional insights to the interview transcripts, as people often have ideas after an interview takes place.

The Institutional Review Board committee members/advising personnel were contacted with one issue that did arise at the beginning of this study. The issue was to revise my recruitment phase to include disciplines outside of science and mathematics. The host institution did approve this change, but my institution never responded to my request.

**Ethical Considerations**

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was required for this research due to the use of human subjects. Research is defined in the Code of Regulations, 46.102(d), as "a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge." Human subjects is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations, 46.102(f), as "a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information" (HHS.gov). The purpose of the IRB is to protect the rights and welfare of individuals and groups of people from undue harm during the research process. There was minimal risk to the teachers who participated in this study, and IRB approval was obtained at the site where the study was conducted and at the researcher's affiliated institution.

The site of the study conducted an exempt review for this study based on research involving normal educational practices and research involving the use of interview procedures or observation of public behavior. The research was approved on March 24, 2017. The institution affiliated with my research conducted an expedited review of this study. The expedited categories that pertain to this study are 6 & 7, the collection of data from voice recording made for research purposes and research on individual or group characteristics or behavior. My institution approved this research on May 2, 2017. The process of obtaining IRB protected the individuals who volunteered to participate in this study. The teachers selected pseudonyms to protect their identities, and all data collected throughout the duration of this study used only the teachers' pseudonyms. There was one digital file that included the teachers' real names and contact information. The file was password locked, and I was the only person who had access to this file. At the conclusion of this study that file was deleted from my personal computer. All email correspondence that occurred between the participants and myself was also deleted from my computer.

# Chapter 4

The purpose of this study was to better understand how teachers enact relational pedagogy in the classroom. This research addressed the overarching question, How do caring teachers enact relational pedagogy in higher education? There were three sub-questions also addressed in this study: What do caring teachers do in the classroom to achieve positive relationships with students? How do caring teachers engage students? How do the interactions in a classroom indicate teacher-student relationships? The analysis of each data source addressed the sub-questions individually, and the process of data convergence answered the overarching research question. This chapter presents the results relevant to answering each sub-question with the overarching question presented in the conclusion at the end of the chapter.

## Achieving Positive Relationships

Teachers in this study who achieved positive relationships with students emphasized education as a process that was more than just the gathering of facts. The teachers were aware of the need to connect with students while helping students learn content. Smartphone technology allows our mechanical devices to perform several functions simultaneously by focusing on one app while running several other apps in the background. This focus can be shifted at any time with a touch of your finger to the screen. The teachers in this study were like smartphones because they were constantly running two apps while they taught. The two apps that were always on were affect and content. For the majority of the teachers in this study, the affect app was a priority at the beginning of the semester, and, as the semester progressed, teachers continued to run the affect app but switched their focus to the content app. The affect app was a

pathway for most of the teachers to get students interested in learning content. There were two teachers in the study who did not intentionally run the affect app because they achieved positive relationships with their students in another way.

The two pathways of the eight teachers in this study appeared to be influenced by their purposes for teaching. The six teachers who intentionally ran the affect app had a purpose for teaching that was either to impact positive societal change or to promote student growth. These teachers were Ann, Bob, Juan, Lenny, PB, and Winston. An example of a purpose focused on societal change came from Juan when he said, "I guess my purpose is to improve the scientific literacy of my students**.** I think the benefits of improving the scientific literacy of a population are improved public health, higher income, and a healthier society. It really is that simple" (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/26/2017). An example of a purpose for student growth came from Bob when he said, "My purpose for teaching is to increase student knowledge. Basically prepare them for what their goals are. So my purpose is help them reach their goals. Make sure they have the foundation they need for the next step" (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/24/2017). Alvin and Bernard took a different path; they did not intentionally run the affective app and they taught for personal fulfillment. I talk about their alternate paths after the discussion on the teachers who did intentionally run the affective app.

**Affect App**

The affect app helped six teachers in this study build relationships with their students. Just because there were students in the class did not guarantee that individual students would grant the teacher authority. Authority had to be earned, and for several teachers this meant they had to run the affect app to convince students to get "on the

bus" (Juan, Follow-Up Interview 2, 6/28/2017). The teachers communicated that by building relationships, students were more motivated to learn course content. Juan said, "I make an effort to be liked by my students. I learned most from teachers I liked" (Formal Interview, 6/14/2017). PB said, "I just sit down and chat with them. Students will do what you want if they like you" (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/28/2017). In this affect app, teachers were aware of the importance of building trust with students, being emotionally available to students, humanizing students, accepting diversity, and gaining non-academic (personal) knowledge about students to build positive relationships with students.

Trust was defined in this study as the teachers' abilities and personalities to communicate with students, which opened the pathway for students to trust the teachers. Teachers communicated with students formally and informally. Formal communications were interactions that occurred in the classroom, whereas informal communications were interactions that occurred outside the classroom. Formal communications in the classroom that helped establish trust were the teachers' abilities to listen to their students. By listening to students, whether the student was commenting on content, sharing a story, or asking a question, teachers demonstrated that they valued these student contributions. Winston said, "I try to practice active listening and pick up on something they say and comment, 'Oh good point' or 'Very good' or 'Well stated.' I just try to encourage the students to feel comfortable talking" (Formal Interview, 6/14/2017). Connections have two ends, and through the act of listening to students, the teachers allowed the students to be the givers, thus creating two-way communication.

Bob, Juan, Lenny, and PB contacted several students early in the semester when they recognized that a student was struggling with content. These teachers had 100% of the contacted struggling students meet with them informally to discuss why the student was struggling and how they could work together to help the student be successful (Bob, Follow-Up Interview 2, 6/21/2017; Juan, Follow-Up Interview 2, 6/28/2017; Lenny, Follow-Up Interview 3, 7/11/2017; PB, Follow-Up Interview 2, 6/19/2017). The personal feedback from the teachers during these interactions provided struggling students with additional methods and techniques to approach learning course material. The interactions also allowed the teacher to get to know individual students on a more personal level. Again there was giving and receiving of information between teacher and student from which mutual trust developed. Availability overlapped with trust because trust further developed from the teachers being physically and emotionally available for students.

Availability described how the teachers made themselves physically and emotionally available to students with the purpose of connecting with students. Informal communications further amplified connectivity when students emailed or visited teachers during office hours or by appointment. The teachers in this study responded to emails promptly, generally within two hours unless the email was received late in the evening. The prompt attention to student emails helped teachers gain the trust of their students by being available outside of contractual hours. Teachers also took the time before and after class to visit with students about content, students' concerns, and personal interests. Juan demonstrated emotional and physical availability with students when he said, "I have a lot of sit downs in my office with students. In

fact, I call this office the crying room" (Formal Interview, 6/14/2017). He allowed students to express their emotions, and he listened to their concerns. Once the students became emotionally less distraught, he said, "I can have a conversation with them to help them revamp their techniques or refer them to somebody who can help them more than I can" (Formal Interview, 6/14/2017).

Bob was moved to tears when talking to me about one of his students:

> It just amazes me how much some of these people have on their plates. I've got one young lady who is taking care of her parents who are having health problems, and she has a step-sibling who is special needs. She is doing all of that and working and sitting in my class trying to succeed (Follow-Up Interview 2, 6/21/2017).

Ann was also moved to tears during several interviews when she discussed her students and her purpose in teaching. She had a female student who experienced a personal crisis which required her to drop out of her academic program. During our interview, Ann requested that I stop recording due to privacy issues but allowed me to take notes on what was discussed. Before I stopped the recording, Ann said this about the student: "she is an excellent student, very thoughtful, and she is experiencing extreme personal issues in her life right now" (Follow-Up Interview 3, 6/29/2017). Off the record, Ann said the young woman was going through a traumatic event that involved abuse, and the whole situation was heart breaking. As a new mother and now faced with being on her own, the student had to drop out of her educational program for the remainder of the summer while she put her life together. Ann listened to the student's situation and provided emotional support. Ann advised the student that she

would be welcome into the flex track in the fall or spring if her financial situation would allow it. Then, Ann physically walked with the student to speak with a financial advisor on campus to help the student retain her tuition for the summer session. Once Ann allowed me start recording again she said, "we are sad to her leave, but I am happy she has a plan to move into our flex track program" (Follow-Up Interview 3, 6/29/2017). When interacting with students, these teachers were always thinking of ways to help students reach their goals, whether that was being flexible with deadlines, helping a student seek academic accommodations, or helping a student through a life crisis. PB said,

> I think it's like walking a mile in someone's shoes. Your first impressions of what people are like are not necessarily what they are like and they have a lot of stuff going on in the background that you don't know about and so I think it is important to understand that. The instructor has to care about what they're doing, and what they're doing to help students, to help students you need to find out as much as you can about them, relate to them, and treat them properly (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/24/2017).

The emphasis in this quote was not about the cognitive needs of students but on teachers needing to find out about and understand the affective side of students. Lenny said he liked getting emails from students because "they divulge more information about themselves than they want to." This gave him "an opportunity to not just respond back as the instructor, but to say, 'Hey, I'm sorry about your mom. I hope she's ok.' Or 'Congratulations.' I can give them that personal touch" (Formal Interview, 6/8/2017). This personal touch communicated to his students that he cared about them as a person.

The teachers who were intentional in this affective domain knew more non-academic knowledge of their students than the two teachers who were not intentional.

Informal meetings with students were an important part of connecting with students and meeting the affective needs of individuals. Bob and Lenny met with students outside of their regular office hours in order to help students at a time when the student was available. For Bob, this meant that he often helped students who were also parents. “I have a couple of little toys that I can give to kids to hopefully keep them occupied while I am having a chat with mom or dad” (Follow-Up Interview 2, 6/21/2017). Lenny felt like these meetings helped one of his student’s self-confidence. “He needs that kind of one on one validation, even though he is working through problems and doing it correctly” (Follow-Up Interview 3, 7/1//2017), and the student’s performance on exams increased after they started meeting regularly.

The purpose of affect app in building and maintaining positive relationships with students was to help teachers emotionally support their students. The personal knowledge teachers gained about their students allowed the teachers to keep in focus that their students were humans and not grades or stagnant objects in a classroom. The teachers recognized and honored the diversity in their classrooms, and for most of them that was why they enjoyed teaching at Midwest Local College. Juan said, “My students are from all walks of life and are all at different points in their lives. I can draw on these experiences during class; we all have something to learn from one another because we are all so different” (Formal Interview, 6/14/2017; Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/14/2017). These teachers recognized that their students had lives outside of the classroom, and there was value placed on students’ lived experiences.

With the humanization of students came the realization that students had obstacles and barriers that impacted their course responsibilities. Teachers in this study were flexible and accommodating with students who had "life issues" (Lenny, Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/20/2017) during the semester. The teachers walked with students during emotionally traumatic episodes, and they allowed students to voice their feelings while accepting and valuing what the students said. It was important to all of the teachers to accept students as they were and to not judge them. PB said, "I don't judge them on how they're doing or whether they show up for class or whether they care about the class or not, but I do want them to know that I care about them as a human being" (Formal Interview, 5/30/2017).

The affect app was always on and became more prominent as the teachers learned more and more about their students. The teachers were aware of the dangers of showing students that they care. "Some students will try to take advantage of this and want me to change a grade at the end of the semester" (PB, Formal Interview, 5/30/2017; Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/28/2017). The teachers would rather deal with telling students 'no' at the end of the semester when students try to grade manipulate them than to go through the semester stone cold not knowing their students or hearing their stories. Listening to their students allowed the teachers to emotionally support their students with empathy and compassion.

**Alternate Pathway**

There were two teachers who did not intentionally run the affect app. They believed that students directed the relationship they wanted to have with the teacher, and neither of them felt comfortable initiating personal conversations with students.

Bernard said, “I hate to say relationships, but I have different communications with each student, because each one is different in the way they see me” (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/19/2017). She indicated that students determined the relationship they were going to have with her. Alvin said that he developed relationships with “students who ask questions that are really thought provoking” and that sometimes “because of my counseling background they kind of seek me out” (Formal Interview, 6/7/2017).

Bernard and Alvin demonstrated empathy and compassion with students, but they did not seek out personal information about their students like the other six teachers. For example, Bernard was emotionally moved by a student’s story in class when they were discussing good diets for low-income families. The student told the class that she was low-income and had three children, and the student said that diet wasn’t a matter of income for her – it was location. The student said she lived in a “food desert” and explained to the class that this was when you live so far away from a grocery store and you don’t have enough gas money to get to the grocery store, so you end up walking to the 7-Eleven and buying what you can, and that’s what the children eat for dinner. Bernard said, “It was hard for the student to do that, and another thing that made me happy was the way the rest of the class respected that” (Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/26/2017). Bernard also thought that this helped other students in the class who may be single parents and low-income realize they are not alone. “When students start sharing stuff and start stating that we are all people here, it keeps me feeling that we’re bonding here” (Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/26/2017).

Bernard and Alvin shared a similar purpose for teaching, which was for personal fulfillment. Alvin said,

> I enjoy sharing what I know, the experiences, trying to see the fascination with human behavior, how it all connects, how it all links up. I want to be in front of students, tease them a little bit, push them a little bit, shock them, get them thinking about stuff - that is enjoyable to me. I like being here. I like doing this stuff (Follow-Up Interview 3, 7/17/2017).

Bernard said, "I feel content now. I think that is why I teach. I get a really good feeling from it. It makes me happy – that dopamine feeling – of having knowledge and passing it on" (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/19/2017). So even though these two teachers did not intentionally seek out relationships with their students, they did develop relationships with students who approached them, asked them questions, or shared personal information with the class through compassion and empathy.

**Content App**

The content app was the most observable app because it focused on the actions of the teacher that facilitated students' attainment of course content. Creating a learning community was important for all of the teachers in this study. The content app was about competency, class structure, authentic teaching methods, and feedback. Class structure provided the border for the learning community while methods and feedback occurred within this border.

Competency was defined in this study as the depth and breadth of knowledge the teachers had in their respective content areas. The teachers demonstrated competency in a number of ways. They shared stories from their professional experiences that were directly related to the content they were teaching at the time. Alvin's life experiences as a therapist, supervisor, administrator, hearing officer, and

teacher provided him with a "richness" that helped him make the content "come alive." Students have told him that he could "translate this stuff into real life things" and that they appreciated him sharing those experiences with them (Follow-Up Interview 2, 7/3/2017).

In addition, many of the teachers shared their personal experiences with learning the content. Juan said,

> I remember even though it was twenty years ago, of being a terrified undergraduate. You see it in their faces. I feel empathy for them. I do. I just want to make it less terrifying. I want them to be relaxed enough in class to have an open mind and learn. If they're sitting there in class terrified, their brains are closed, right? That's all there is to it (Follow-Up Interview 2, 6/28/2017).

Juan captured the idea and purpose behind sharing his own personal struggles in learning content and wanted students to know that he too struggled. He believed that he reduced students' anxieties about his class by sharing his own struggles. In this way he was connecting with students on a more personal level.

Outside of sharing stories with their students the teachers also demonstrated their depth of knowledge in their areas of expertise. Lenny, Alvin, and Bernard all mentioned that a robot could do their jobs if education was only about the attainment of knowledge. Lenny said it best when he said,

> If lecture, practice, repeat is the teaching and assessing style, then we are replaceable by technology. You don't need a professor anymore, but if the teaching is about concepts, connecting concepts, depth in the material not just

> surface level memorization, and designing activities and asking sequences of questions to engage students and students to engage each other, then that becomes a more fulfilling educational experience and a more useful one (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/20/2017).

It was important to these teachers that they provided students with different ways to think about content and ways to connect the content to their lives.

As the semester progressed more and more students asked questions, and Juan said in the middle of the semester, "All cynicism about me and this subject is gone." Juan knew he had demonstrated competency when his students started asking him questions in class not for clarification of content, but for satisfaction of their own curiosity. The opportunity for teachers to demonstrate their depth of knowledge also came from how they responded to students' questions. PB, Lenny, and Ann responded to student questions in multiple ways during their active monitoring of group work and during whole class discussions. They explained content to students using different approaches and guided them with questions of their own, thus demonstrating the depth and breadth of their knowledge.

The teachers also presented students with current examples and research in their content areas to demonstrate competency. Juan said that he used current research to not only expand his content knowledge but also to bring excitement to his lectures. Students can tell if you are genuinely excited about something. He said, "If they're excited with you about the material, they'll study. They'll do better. Their grades will improve" (Juan, Formal Interview, 6/14/2017). Sharing current research demonstrated to students that the teachers were still learning about their content, and this provided an

opportunity for teachers to mutually connect with students as learners.

Class structure was the teacher-created space where learning occurred that formed the border for the learning community. It was important to these teachers that students felt safe to ask questions and voice their opinions. In order for students to feel safe, the teacher needed to feel comfortable, which meant that the structure and methods they set for their classrooms needed to be authentic to their own personalities.

Two teachers were most comfortable in "the professor who professes" role, which was a traditional structure where the teacher enters the classroom, fires up the projector, and lectures until class is over. Two other teachers were comfortable being "a showman and putting on a performance," which was evident by the way they presented themselves to the class – cutting up, acting, wild arm gestures, and fluctuating voices – even though the methods used by these two teachers were different. One teacher developed a character for herself:

> My character is different when I teach than when I come home. I wanted to start being able to be somebody that would interest the student because the subjects I teach are kind of boring to a lot of students. I try to make it exciting, and that's the character I became (Bernard, Formal Interview, 6/24/2017).

PB said, "Everyone has different ways of teaching. You don't have to be a friendly person to be a good teacher. I think you should always be authentic to who you are" (Formal Interview, 5/30/2017). Even though Bernard developed a teaching character, she was still being authentic because her character felt comfortable to her and allowed her to relax and teach.

Class structure also included the communication of expectations, which

reinforced and helped define the border of the learning community. The expectations were related to institutional and course objectives, course grading policies, and course syllabi. Overall course and behavior expectations were explicitly stated on the first day of class. This first day was imperative for teachers to set the tone for the semester. Bob said,

> I do try to have a positive classroom environment, and I do believe the very first class period is really important for setting up that atmosphere. And so the first day I try to make it clear that I am there for them and I encourage them to come to my office during office hours. And I do start the process of trying to learn their names so that I can know them as individuals (Formal Interview, 5/30/2017).

Expectations were reinforced throughout the semester as teachers verbally reminded students of assignment deadlines and sent reminders through email notifications. The teachers also reminded students of the benefits of forming study groups and to visit them during office hours. There were three teachers that incorporated the affect app into their class structure. They intentionally devoted class time to get to know students. Ann and Juan both commented that other people thought of this "as time wasting," but they found value in this activity because it helped students relax and allowed them an opportunity to get to know their students (Ann, Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/8/2017; Juan, Formal Interview, 6/14/2017).

Methods and class structure were two settings for the content app that the teacher predetermined before the start of the semester, and these settings did not change. There were three methods used by teachers in this study: collaborative, mixed,

and lecture. Collaborative classes were primarily activity or problem based with limited lecture. There were many more student to student interactions in these classes, as well as more opportunities for teachers to individually assist students with content. Lenny was the teacher who had the most collaborative class. A typical day in his class started with him asking students to go over their reading assignments with each other. He then introduced the first activity for the day and provided students with a handout. Students worked together in small groups on the activity with Lenny actively monitoring each group. Students took a short break after the first activity. Upon their return, Lenny addressed the whole class with new material and explained how the second activity related to or extended the first activity. He passed out the second activity and students set to work through the activity together, again with Lenny actively monitoring each group. I never observed Lenny lecture for more than 15 minutes. PB was the other collaborative teacher, and his format was similar to Lenny, but students worked on a single problem for about 5-7 minutes each time, and after each problem session PB addressed the whole class for a few minutes before moving to the next problem.

In mixed classes, there was time for collaboration and time for lecture. Bob used learning checks throughout his lecture. This allowed students to work together and Bob to gauge student understanding. Ann was similar, but she did not use learning checks; instead, she would ask questions of the whole class and allow for students to share out their ideas. She encouraged all students to participate in these mini class discussions. Winston allowed for student collaboration during the first half of class. The second half of class was devoted entirely to traditional lecture. The mixed teachers

used student collaboration as a way to break up lecture. Alvin, Bernard, and Juan used the lecture method, which limited student to student interactions because the teachers did most of the talking. This is not to say that the lecture classes were not full of lively discussions, bit the directions of these discussions were limited to student to teacher and teacher to whole class.

Within the borders of the learning community there was constant flux with feedback bouncing in all directions off the walls of the class structure. Teachers provided students with written and verbal feedback on exams, assignments, and during lectures or during group work. Students were generally concerned about their grades/progress in the course, and the teachers addressed these concerns by providing students with positive, timely feedback on assignments and exams. Exams were returned to students within two days, and on-line assignments were graded upon completion. The teachers provided students with exam class averages, and they addressed difficult exam questions or content areas during class. Juan best exemplified the importance of feedback when he said,

> Students need feedback. You can seem like a great guy or person in the room, but if you're not doing your homework while they're doing their homework they're not going to get on the bus, or they're getting off the bus, and they're going to start thinking of you as a jerk basically (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/26/2017).

Students also provided teachers with feedback during class. Students' body language, facial cues, and the questions they asked during lectures provided teachers opportunities to gauge understanding and communicated when the teachers needed

slow down or pause for questions. This feedback loop helped teachers develop positive relationships with students.

The content app focused on learning communities, which were developed by class structure, methods, and feedback. The affect app allowed these teachers a bridge to get students more interested in the content. Empathy and compassion were shared affective characteristics across all teachers in this study. The teachers in this study achieved positive relationships with students by building learning communities where the teachers, through compassion and empathy and regardless of class structure or teaching method, valued students' contributions and their lives.

## Engage

The second sub-question was how do teachers engage students? The method of teaching alongside engagement techniques was how teachers in this study engaged students. Regardless of method, questioning was the most observed engagement technique with students asking 662 questions and teachers asking 717 questions (Field Notes, 6/5/2017 – 7/25/2017). The majority of questions in mixed and lecture classes were directed toward the whole class, whereas questions were typically asked of individual students or small groups of students in the collaborative classes. The teachers appeared to enjoy getting questions from students, and they were always quick to respond with an answer and to say "thank you" to the student who had asked the question. They told students they appreciated the questions because they felt that this encouraged other students to ask questions and that it created a safe environment where students felt comfortable to indulge their own curiosities about the subject matter. Outside of questions, all of the teachers physically moved around the class during

lecture and made eye contact with students. There were many other engagement techniques utilized by the teachers in this study, and I summarize these after a brief discussion of the teachers' methods and how these methods were related to the teachers' use of engagement techniques.

**Teaching Methods**

The collaborative method was defined as instruction that focused on students working together during class on problems or activities assigned by the teacher. Teachers engaged students by providing opportunities for students to work together on activities, problems, simulations/role playing, and by providing students time to discuss answers with each other. Lenny had the most collaborative class; he lectured the least, and he did not rely on engagement techniques like the other teachers. The collaborative teachers monitored student progress, provided feedback to students, and extended content to students during group work. Group monitoring included checking in with every group, answering students' questions, asking students questions, getting to know students, and making sure every student was engaged.

The mixed method was defined as instruction that included both collaboration and lecture. Ann, Bob, and Winston had different ways of implementing this method, but they all set aside time for student collaboration every class. Ann used more stories during her lecture, while Bob used more humor during his lecture. Students generally appeared engaged in both Bob's and Ann's classes during collaboration and lecture. Students in Ann's class regularly asked questions, and Ann would redirect the same question to the rest of the students in class, which turned into a whole class discussion with regard to the students' questions. Students in Bob's class were observed taking

notes and asking questions, and they did not hesitate to stop Bob's lecture if they did not understand something. Bob would promptly address students' questions and did not continue his lecture until the students responded that they understood his answer. During learning checks in Bob's class, students would discuss solutions to a problem with each other while Bob monitored their work. Winston allowed for student collaboration only at the beginning of class, and this was the only time his students appeared engaged. I observed many of his students on their phones and laptops, and some students even had headphones on during the lecture portion of the course. The teachers who used the mixed method used the fewest number of engagement techniques, 86 times versus 363 times by the lecture teachers, and 116 times by the collaborative teachers (see Appendix K for frequency counts of engagement techniques for each teacher).

The lecture method was defined as instruction that was more traditional with the teacher doing most of the talking. There was no time built into class for student collaboration, but students often interrupted lectures with questions. The teachers who used the lecture method used the highest number of engagement techniques when compared to teachers who used collaborative or mixed methods. Alvin and Juan used more engagement techniques than any of the other teachers. Alvin was the sage on the stage, and he used engagement techniques 142 times, whereas Juan was the high energy, crazy science teacher who found everything fascinating and he used engagement techniques 177 times. Bernard used engagement techniques only 44 times during her lectures. Ann, PB, Lenny, and Juan had classes where students often appeared to demonstrate emotional engagement by showing excitement with out loud

hoots, by showing dread with out loud sighs, or clapping when the teacher or another student did something impressive. Students in these classes were quicker to laugh and generally had amiable dispositions when entering and leaving the classroom than did students in other classes.

**Engagement Techniques**

Jokes and humor were the most used engagement technique across all participants. This technique was also the most frequently discussed during interviews. Juan said, "I think education just doesn't work without humor. I really, really do - mine and theirs" (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/26/2017). Bob was the king of jokes, using puns around chemistry. He had several jokes planned throughout a lecture, and he said, "I think humor does help release some of the tension in the class especially with the population that's afraid of chemistry. I think it just helps put everybody at ease and makes for a more positive atmosphere" (Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/12/2017). All of the participants shared with me that they used humor or planned jokes during class to help relieve anxiety or reduce stress.

Stories and analogies were the second most used engagement technique by all participants. Professional stories and analogies helped teachers communicate content to students. The professional stories provided students with examples of how content was applied in real life contexts. Personal stories were not always related to content, but they did provide students with a humanistic perspective of their teachers that helped the teachers hold the interests of their students. PB shared a story about when he was in primary school, Ringo Star's son bloodied his nose and bullied him. Bernard liked to share stories about the weird things she ate when she was growing up. Juan discussed

how nature fascinated him when he was young and how he was still fascinated by nature and science. Alvin spoke about raising his daughter and often said jokingly that, "she was his first psychological experiment" (Observation 2, 6/28/2017). These personal stories did not appear planned, and many students appeared to enjoy them.

Voice fluctuations and attention getters were engagement techniques used by some of the teachers. Attention getters were Juan's and Alvin's go to engagement technique. They used shocking pictures and shared wild research with their students to "add some spice to class and interest" (Alvin, Follow-Up Interview, 6/7/2017). Juan was fond of using call & response and thumbs up attention getters with his students. For example, he would ask his students to repeat a word he had just said – this occurred multiple times with the same word during the same lecture – in order to get the students familiar with the word and hopefully getting it "stuck in their heads" and "give me a thumbs up" (Juan, Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/14/2017). He used these techniques to not only keep students active and participating in class but also as a way to form a learning community by providing all students with the same "silly experiences" (Juan, Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/14/2017). Voice fluctuations were another technique used to engage students. Juan used a Scottish accent at least once every class. PB was very animated in class, often changing his voice to direct attention to something that a student said or something he thought was important. Bob's pitch would get higher when he was talking about content that he was genuinely excited about.

The teachers in this study engaged students by their teaching methods and engagement techniques. They engaged students by asking and responding to questions,

moving around during class, and making eye contact with students. In addition, the teachers in this study all used humor, told jokes, shared stories, and used analogies. Students appeared to be more engaged in classes where the teacher had class time devoted to collaboration and utilized many engagement techniques.

## Interactions

The third sub-question for this research was how do the interactions in a classroom indicate teacher-student relationships? Interactions were defined as two-way communications that resulted in students and teachers getting to know each other and content better. Communications encompassed verbal and non-verbal exchanges. In this section, I provide a synthesized version of how the teachers spoke about interactions and how the context of interactions indicated teacher-student relationships.

Teachers spoke of interactions with students as having two effects. One effect was the attainment of academic knowledge about the students that helped the teacher better understand how the student learned. The second effect was a gain of non-academic knowledge that allowed the teachers to get to know students on a more personal level. I provide an example of an interaction between PB and a student that shows both academic and non-academic knowledge attainment by PB as a result of the interaction. PB had a conversation with a male student midway through the semester during his office hours. The student was concerned about his grade because he had done well in the pre-requisite course. After listening to the student for a few minutes PB recognized that the student might benefit from an accommodation and referred the student to support services on campus. The student received an accommodation and the student's grade increased from a 'D' to a 'B' over the next two weeks. As a result of

this interaction PB said, “We talked about other stuff like his background. He wants to be a computer programmer, and he asked me if I would look at some of his code and advise him academically when he transfers to the larger local university” (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/28/2017). PB said the conversation was “a good thing, and I am always open to helping a student” (Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/28/2017). Interactions like these helped teachers build and maintain relationships with students.

**Interactions and Non-Academic Knowledge Attainment**

The observations of interactions in the classroom resulted in a better understanding of how each teacher, within the scope of their teaching methods, used interactions to build relationships with students (see Appendix L for frequency of interactions across all observations for each teacher). Teachers who used collaborative teaching methods had more total interactions in the classroom (3,595) than the mixed method (964) or the lecture method (491). Although the context of these interactions was more important to the indication of teacher-student relationships, there were more student to student interactions and more teacher to student interactions that allowed for more opportunities for teachers to get to know students both academically and non-academically. The collaborative teachers knew all of their students’ names and could tell you a story about almost every student. For example, Lenny reported to know only 50% of his students, but during our second interview, he told me something non-academic about each student in his class (Follow-Up Interview 2, 6/22/2017). I also observed him interacting with every individual during each class I observed. During our interviews, Lenny discussed academic knowledge of students 17 times and non-academic knowledge of students 10 times (Field Notes, 6/5/2017 – 7/25/2017). PB also

interacted with every student in his class during every observation, and he had the second highest number of student to teacher interactions (127). PB mentioned academic knowledge of students 18 times and non-academic knowledge of students 12 times during our interviews (Field Notes, 6/5/2017 – 7/25/2017). The collaborative teachers also had more student to student interactions, and these teachers were more likely to direct questions and comments to students.

Ann, who taught using a mixed method approach, was similar to the collaborative teachers in many ways. She had the most student to teacher/whole class interactions (237) and the highest number of student to student interactions (206). Ann's students asked the most questions and shared more personal information than students in any of the other classes. This could be due to the fact that the students in this program were part of a cohort, so Ann and her students were already familiar with one another prior to this research. Ann mentioned academic knowledge of students 23 times and non-academic knowledge of students 23 times during our interviews (Field Notes, 6/5/2017 – 7/25/2017). Bob, who also taught using mixed methods, had the third highest number of student to teacher/whole class interactions (103). He mentioned academic knowledge of students nine times and non-academic knowledge of students five times during our interviews. Winston mentioned academic knowledge of students seven times and non-academic knowledge of students seven times during our interviews.

The lecture teachers were similar to mixed method teachers in that they had more student to teacher/whole class interactions than any other type of interaction. The lecture and mixed method teachers also had lower instances during interviews of

academic and non-academic knowledge of students with Ann and Juan being exceptions. Juan (lecture method) had almost equal numbers of interactions in the students to whole class category as he did in the teacher to whole class category, almost like a conversation with equal participation. Juan spoke of academic knowledge of students 14 times and non-academic knowledge of students 12 times during our interviews (Field Notes, 6/5/2017 – 7/25/2017). The collaborative teachers (Lenny and PB) along with Ann and Juan knew more academically and non-academically about their students than the other teachers.

Alvin and Bernard relied on students to initiate interactions. They also had the fewest number of teacher initiated interactions. Bernard only discussed non-academic knowledge of her students on five occasions and Alvin only four times (Field Notes, 6/5/2017 – 7/25/2017). All of the teachers, regardless of intention or teaching methods, demonstrated empathy and compassion and valued student contributions. I observed Alvin, prior to one of our Follow-Up Interviews, accommodating a student due to a legal situation. Alvin said, "I'm going to cut him some slack. I think it's trying to understand they're human beings. They're struggling in life. Somebody else down the road is going to make them toe the line" (Follow-Up Interview 3, 7/17/2017). Many of the participants expressed that listening to students and showing empathy was important to developing relationships with students.

**Context of Interactions**

In addition to the frequency of and the types of interactions, the context of the interactions was also observed. There were three contexts of interactions: content, personal, and students only. Content and personal interactions both involved the

teacher, whereas student only interactions did not involve the teacher. After a brief description of each context, I provide an example that I think represents each context.

Content based interactions included conversations between students discussing content with each other or the teacher discussing content with a small group of students, an individual student, or the whole class that resulted in the teacher learning more about how students understand or learn content. Bob said, "The class has turned out to be incredibly interactive. They are raising their hands all the time and asking questions, and if they don't understand something**,** they will let me know" (Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/12/2017). By students asking questions, Bob learned that his students were interested in "how to do things the right way" (Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/12/2017). Bob also observed that students, as the semester progressed, started interacting more with each other, "Some of them are talking to each other. When I'm explaining something on the board or somebody has asked a question in class, that's when I see some people starting to talk together. They'll help each other out" (Follow-Up Interview 3, 6/26/2017).

Personal context interactions involved students discussing with each other or the teacher about non-academically related topics. Non-academic knowledge of individual students was learned through formal and informal conversations with students that allowed the teacher to get to know students on a more personal level. Teachers were driven by curiosity to ask students questions about their lives, and this allowed students to share personal information. PB told me that he asked personal questions because "I like knowing other people's stories" (Formal Interview, 5/30/2017). PB had a student that told him that she had to leave class early. When PB

asked the student why, she said she had to take her horse to the vet, which led to PB and the class going out to the parking lot to see her horse, which happened to be the great grandson of the famous horse Secretariat. PB also discovered that one of his students was couch surfing this summer so that he could take PB's class (Follow-Up Interview 3, 7/6/2017).

A student only context was defined as interactions that occurred in class between students only. These interactions only occurred between students, and their conversations were about grades, homework, or the teacher's management of the course. Ann had a student that, during my last observation, expressed frustration to another student about how the teacher was just making stuff up for them to do this last week of class (Observation 4, 7/27/2017). This was the only time I witnessed a student in Ann's class expressing frustration. Bernard's students often spoke about the workload (Observation 2, 6/29/2017; Observation 3, 7/11/2017). Bob's students were allowed to take an exam in the test center for their second unit, and they discussed before class how they wished they could do that with all of their tests because it freed up class time to get more help from Bob (Observation 3, 6/26/2017). The student only context was not observed frequently.

The teachers who had the most content interactions with students used the collaborative method of teaching (627 versus 26 with lecture and 65 with mixed, from Field Notes, 6/5/2017 – 7/25/2017). Ann, Juan, and PB had more personal interactions with students, and they did not utilize the same teaching methods, but they all built time into their class structure to get to know their students. They conveyed more non-academic knowledge about their students than any of the other teachers. Ann and Juan

both knew something non-academic about 100% of their students, and PB knew something non-academic about 73% of his students (Ann, Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/27/2017; Ann, Observation 2, 6/13/2107; Ann, Observation 3, 6/27/2017; Ann, Observation 4, 7/25/2017; Juan, Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/26/2017; PB, Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/28/2017; PB, Observation 3, 7/3/2017).

Relationships were observed to be developed by a blend of content and personal interactions that occurred inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers who had more personal interactions and knew more non-academic knowledge about their students could tell me more about the lives of their students because they intentionally built time into their class structure to get to know students. The context of the interactions appeared to be more indicative of teacher-student relationships than the total number of interactions.

## Enacting Relational Pedagogy

The purpose of this study was to better understand how caring teachers enact relational pedagogy in the classroom. All of the teachers in this study were caring teachers who demonstrated will, skill, social support, and a supportive classroom environment, indicative of a relational mindset. Will was demonstrated by their passion for teaching and learning and their abilities to ignite student curiosity and ask intriguing questions. Skill was demonstrated by the teachers being enthusiastic and committed the content and processes relevant to their fields. They offered expert perspectives, used personal anecdotes, and connected content across disciplines. The teachers socially supported students by having positive interactions with students. They provided constructive and timely feedback, listened to students, and provided students

with emotional support through informal interactions. The classroom environments of these teachers were engaging with lively interactions in a positive, safe/non-threatening atmosphere that encouraged student persistence. Professional knowledge and a relational mindset were two aspects of caring teachers in this study.

**Professional Knowledge**

Professional knowledge was defined by the actions of teachers and students that resulted in the communication of course relevant information. Building a learning community was important to the teachers in this study. The border of the learning community was defined by class structure and methods. Within the border of the learning community was where teachers engaged and interacted with students. The four research clusters that make up the concept of professional knowledge associated with how each teacher built a learning community were content emphasis, method of content delivery, engagement techniques, and interactions. The class structure was described by how the teachers communicated course expectations and reinforced these expectations throughout the semester. Teacher authenticity was a component to class structure because teachers had to feel comfortable in their roles in order to help create a safe environment where students felt secure to openly ask questions during class. The content emphasis included the teachers' depth and breadth of knowledge in their subject matter, which allowed them to demonstrate competency to their students within the class structure that provided the border for a learning community. The teachers in this study demonstrated competency of content by the way they promptly attended to students' questions. Teaching methods were encompassed with class structure to provide the border of the learning community. Collaborative, mixed, and lecture were

the three methods utilized by the teachers in this study, and the way these methods were implemented varied slightly based on the personal characteristics of each teacher.

Within the border of the learning community, teachers engaged and interacted with students. The way teachers engaged students was varied. Some teachers used a lot of engagement techniques, and some teachers did not use many techniques. Interactive engagement techniques such as whole class questioning, moving around the room, making eye contact, call & response, and thumbs up appeared to be the most frequent techniques used by teachers in this study. The interactions that were important in defining professional knowledge were the interactions that involved an exchange of course material between the teacher and the students or between the students. Another aspect within the learning community border was the way teachers provided and received feedback. Content interactions and feedback occurred in both formal and informal settings. Professional knowledge described how each teacher formed a learning community, which was unique because of the way each teacher defined the border and acted within the border.

**Relational Mindset**

A relational mindset focused on building relationships, which was defined by the actions of the teacher getting to know their students personally in order to meet the needs of the whole person and foster relationships with students. Relational mindset had two aspects: an affect emphasis and personal interactions. The affect emphasis was defined as the process of students and teachers building trust, accepting diversity, and sharing the learning environment to better understand one another, and the teacher's actions were directed at emotionally supporting students. The interactions that occurred

within the concept of relational mindset were personal. These were two-way communications that occurred during formal or informal meetings with the purpose of the teacher and student getting to know one another as individuals. Teachers got to know about their students' lives and hear their stories, as well as show students they were valued as humans and their contributions to class were appreciated. The caring teachers in this study built relationships in different ways, but they all had a relational mindset.

**Enactment of Relational Pedagogy**

The caring teachers in this study all had professional knowledge and a relational mindset, but not all of the teachers enacted relational pedagogy. There was an additional concept – relational intention – that relied on the teachers' purposes for teaching and devoted time to get to know students for the enactment of relational pedagogy. Relational intention described how the teachers went about fostering relationships with students. Teachers were intentional in two ways: teachers who provided time during formal meetings to get to know their students, and teachers who used informal meetings to get to know students. The teachers' personal purposes for teaching appeared to align with the degree of relational pedagogy enactment. There were three general purposes for teaching: societal change, student growth, or personal fulfillment. The enactment of relational pedagogy appeared to rely on teachers not only having the two characteristics of being a caring teacher but also relational intention and a teaching purpose that was not personal fulfillment.

The teachers who fully enacted relational pedagogy had a purpose aligned with societal change, and they used their professional knowledge along with a relational

mindset and relational intention. Ann, Juan, and PB were the three caring teachers in this study who appeared to fully enact relational pedagogy. They were aware of the importance of blending the two aspects of caring teachers, and they made intentional efforts to get to know all they could about their students by providing time in class to build relationships. They recognized the affective aspect of teaching as a way to increase student interest in learning course content.

Lenny, Bob, and Winston had teaching purposes aligned with societal change or student growth, and they appeared to partially enact relational pedagogy. They had relational intention because they each expressed the importance of developing relationships with students during our interviews, but they did not act on this intention during formal class meetings. Instead, they relied on informal meetings to foster student relationships. Alvin and Bernard did not appear to enact relational pedagogy because there was no intentional effort to get to know students, even though they demonstrated professional knowledge and a relational mindset.

The enactment of relational pedagogy relied on the teacher connecting with students during class, and I think Ann exemplified this best when she said,

> You are the connection to their goal. They may not be able to feel like they can make it there. They might see only the barriers, the obstacles. But if you can emotionally connect with them during class, if you can gain their trust, and if you have the competency and the skill, then you are the connection between that person and them reaching their goal. My goal as a teacher is to be that connection, to create some awesome people to go out and help the world (Follow-Up Interview 2, 6/15/2017).

Ann indicated the importance of connecting knowledge and building relationships in a way that helps students achieve their goals and ultimately helps society. Relational intention was found to be relevant to the enactment of relational pedagogy.

## Conclusion

This study on the enactment of relational pedagogy in higher education revealed how the characteristics of caring teachers helped teachers achieve positive relationships with students, how teachers engaged students, and how interactions indicated teacher-student relationships in order to better understand the enactment of relational pedagogy. Positive relationships were achieved by blending affect and content aspects of teaching. Teachers recognized they needed to build trust with their students. They did not all achieve this trust in the same way, but they were all emotionally available for their students, they recognized student diversity as important, and they treated their students as people with busy lives, which led to all of the teachers gaining personal (non-academic) knowledge about their students. Teachers recognized that, in addition to building trust, they had to demonstrate competency. The teachers achieved this by building learning communities that had borders defined by class structure and methods, and within the borders were engagement techniques and feedback. All of these affect and content factors allowed for teachers in this study to achieve positive relationships with their students.

The way the teachers in this study engaged students varied and was based on teaching method and use of engagement techniques. There was not one type of teaching method that engaged students, but rather it was a combination of method and use of engagement techniques. The collaborative teachers did appear to have the

highest levels of student engagement, but there were two other methods that appeared to have levels of student engagement during observations. Ann and Bob both utilized mixed methods and students appeared engaged throughout the class whether or not it was time for collaboration. Juan was a lecture teacher, but he used more engagement techniques than any other teacher in this study. His lectures were lively, and they often felt like a conversation between him and the whole class, as opposed to a lecture class where the teacher taught, usually from a PowerPoint, and students quietly took notes for the duration of the class.

Questioning, physical movement around the room, making eye contact, humor, stories, and analogies were the techniques shared by the participants. Teachers asked and responded to questions, often stopping everything to address a student question. They took the time to say 'thank you' and validate students' contributions. The teachers moved around the room and made eye contact with students, which provided the teachers with feedback on timing of the lesson and student understanding. Humor was observed in every observation; sometimes the teachers had planned jokes and sometimes the humor was spontaneous. Professional and personal stories and analogies helped teachers not only connect content but also connect on a personal level. Students appeared more engaged in classes where the teacher utilized collaborative methods or in classes that were lecture based in which the teacher used many engagement techniques.

Teachers felt like interactions with students helped them gain academic and non-academic knowledge about their students. Academic knowledge helped the teachers better meet the learning needs of their students, and the attainment of non-

academic knowledge helped teachers meet the personal needs of their students. The frequency of interactions was not as important as the context of interactions with regard to interactions indicating teacher-student relationships. Listening to students and expressing empathy were factors that these teachers said were important when interacting with students. The teachers who knew more personal information about their students set aside time during formal class meetings to get to know their students.

The enactment of relational pedagogy relied on the two aspects of a caring teacher (professional knowledge and relational mindset) and relational intention. Professional knowledge explained how teachers built a learning community based on competency, class structure, teaching method, and feedback. Relational mindset explained how teachers viewed building relationships as an important aspect of their teaching. There was an affective emphasis on building trust, humanizing students, and having personal interactions with students. Relational intention explained how the teachers enacted their relational mindset. Teachers who provided time during formal class meetings to get to know their students on a personal level were intentional in building relationships with students. Teachers who got to know students personally during informal class meetings also had relational intention because they often invited students to visit them during office hours or made special arrangements with students to meet outside of class time. Teachers who relied on students to approach them either formally or informally did not have relational intention because they were reactive instead of proactive in forming teacher-student relationships. The teachers in this study who either fully enacted or partially enacted relational pedagogy had similar purposes for teaching. They taught for societal change or student growth. The teachers who did

not enact relational pedagogy also had similar purposes for teaching: personal fulfillment. Caring teachers may not always enact relational pedagogy, but to enact relational pedagogy a caring teacher is necessary. The enactment of relational pedagogy explained how caring teachers interact and engage with students through a relational intention.

# Chapter 5

*I'm honored to be their teacher, you know?*
*I do make an effort to be liked by my students for a couple of reasons, well for about a half dozen reasons. I learned most from my teachers who I liked, I'm sure of that.*
*I am constantly encouraging them, especially the shy ones because I was one of the shy ones honestly, to speak up and to engage and interact, and to not be afraid of making mistakes. If a mistake is made I show commiseration by saying something like 'I remember my making a mistake like this in 1997. I'll never forget it.' Let them know that they're not alone. We're all human. We all screw up, but I know it's not really your fault because I know you're going through yada, yada (Juan, Formal Interview, 6/17/2017).*

The purpose of this study was to explore how caring teachers in higher education enact relational pedagogy. Specifically, the study considered three questions: What do caring teachers do in the classroom to achieve positive relationships with students? How do caring teachers engage students? How do the interactions in a classroom indicate teacher-student relationships? A review of literature in higher education on relational pedagogy yielded studies that explicitly called for research to examine relational pedagogy from observations and interpretations of the context of relationships in practice and to examine how teacher-student relationships were built (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Umbach, 2005; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). This study intended to fill this gap in the literature by providing evidence of how relational pedagogy is enacted by caring teachers in higher education.

The research design followed a constructivist grounded theory qualitative approach with eight participants from a local community college in the Midwestern region of the United States. Grounded theory allowed for a focus on processes and actions with the intention to develop a theory through the systematic process of verification using constant comparison of data that is applicable in and to practice

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The recruitment process started with asking division deans to nominate caring teachers in their departments who were teaching during the summer session. In order for the nominated teachers to be considered for inclusion in this study, their division deans considered them caring based on the characteristics of a caring teacher: will, skill, social support, and classroom environment. The nominated teachers also had to teach a face-to-face course. The result of the recruitment process was eight caring teachers who taught in the areas of science, math, health professions, and social science.

The caring teachers participated in one formal interview and four follow-up interviews over the course of eight weeks, which was the duration of the summer session. The teachers were also observed four times.

Data analysis began simultaneously with data collection and followed the flexible guidelines provided by constructivist grounded theory. Interviews were transcribed; field notes and interviews were coded using a priori categories based on the research questions (do, engage, interact). Categories of codes were developed and defined from each data source for each a priori category. The categories of codes across data sources were further reduced to research clusters for each a priori category, which generated answers to the three research sub-questions.

## Findings

Caring teachers fostered relationships in this study through content and affect emphases. The content emphasis focused on competency, class structure, authentic teaching methods, and feedback to create a learning community. The way teachers

placed emphasis on the affect aspect of building relationships was by recognizing the importance of building trust with students, being emotionally available to students, humanizing students, accepting diversity, and gaining non-academic knowledge about students in order to build positive relationships with students. All of the teachers in this study did achieve positive relationships with students, but the way they went about fostering relationships was different.

Methods of teaching and use of engagement techniques were how the caring teachers in this study engaged their students. Students appeared to be more engaged in classes where the teacher had class time devoted to collaboration and utilized many engagement techniques. Teachers, in this study, engaged students by asking and responding to questions, moving around during class, and making eye contact with students. Emotional engagement was observed in the classes where relational pedagogy was fully enacted. Humor, jokes, personal and professional stories, and analogies were regularly used engagement techniques by all of the teachers in this study.

Teachers spoke of interactions with students as having two effects: the attainment of academic knowledge and non-academic knowledge. Relationships developed by a blend of content and personal interactions that occurred inside and outside of the classroom. The context of interactions appeared to be more important to developing teacher-student relationships with students than did the frequency of interactions.

Caring teachers in this study demonstrated will, skill, social support, and positive classroom environments by the way they blended professional knowledge with

a relational mindset. The enactment of relational pedagogy, though, went beyond being a caring teacher. Professional knowledge and a relational mindset were two aspects of caring teachers, but if they did not have relational intention and a purpose for teaching that was aligned with societal change or student growth, relational pedagogy was not enacted. The enactment of relational pedagogy relied on caring teachers giving and receiving personal information – being in dialogue with students – which was important to the humanization of students and is the fundamental basis of care.

This chapter begins with a proposed substantive theory on the enactment of relational pedagogy that resulted from this research, which is followed by sections devoted to each theoretical construct and describes how the results of this study fit into existing literature. Each section concludes with a vignette written in my voice as an observer of the teachers' classrooms. Lastly, I discuss implications, limitations, and further research associated with this study on the enactment of relational pedagogy.

## Towards a Theory on the Enactment of Relational Pedagogy

Relational pedagogy, in this study, was defined as the intentional practice of caring teachers interacting with students to build and sustain positive relationships that cognitively and emotionally support their students throughout their journeys together. It is a view of education that emphasizes relationships, not individualism or social constructs but rather the view that individuals are in relation with one another, and the communication is two-way between subjects. Authority is granted and received by individuals just as care is given and received. Relational pedagogy is a communication model of education as opposed to the current, prevailing economic model of education (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). The teacher and the student share power without one

individual assuming dominance over another; they are equals negotiating the educational space together. Knowledge arises as a by-product of relationships and interactions among people and interactions with texts, and to have knowledge is to be able to respond to people in particular circumstances. “Knowledge is response-able relation” (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p.141). Relational pedagogy has primarily been a theoretical discourse with little research focused on how relational pedagogy is enacted in the classroom (Aspelin, 2011).

A grounded theory on the enactment of relational pedagogy is proposed as way to explain how the educational theory of relational pedagogy is related to the educational practice of relational pedagogy. The enactment of relational pedagogy, in this study, was found to be the relational intention of a caring teacher with a purpose of societal change or student growth to design a class that engaged students and devoted class time to personal interactions, which utilized the teacher’s professional knowledge along with a relational mindset in an authentic way that supported the development of the whole student.

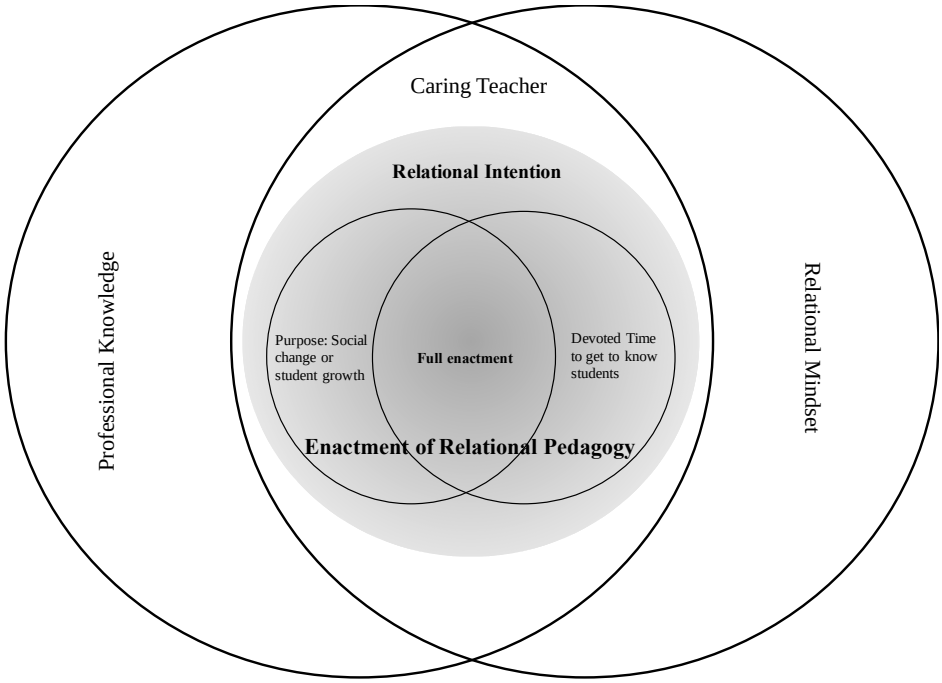



*Figure 1*. A theory on the enactment of relational pedagogy.

Figure 1 is a visual representation of this grounded theory on the enactment of relational pedagogy. The two outer circles of the figure represent two aspects of caring teachers: professional knowledge and relational mindset. Within the central circle is relational intention, and this is where relational pedagogy begins. The innermost circles represent two components of relation intention: teaching purpose and devoted class time. Caring teachers with purposes for teaching that were focused on student growth or societal change utilized their professional knowledge and relational mindset to create a relational intention, which allowed them to enact relational pedagogy with time devoted to building relationships.

## The Caring Teacher

All of the teachers in this study were caring teachers which was necessary, but not sufficient, for the enactment of relational pedagogy. Caring teachers as defined in

this study demonstrated will, skill, social support, and they provided a safe learning environment by their professional knowledge and relational mindset.

**Professional Knowledge**

Professional knowledge, in this study, was defined by the actions of teachers and students that resulted in the communication of course relevant information and the formation of learning communities. The results of this study expanded Tamir's (1991) definition of professional knowledge, which was the body of knowledge and skills from professional and life experiences that is needed to be successful in a profession, to include the communication of course relevant information that explained how teachers built a learning community based on their personal practical knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge, which is similar to the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1996) on personal practical knowledge and work done by Paulick, Groβschedl, Harms and Möller (2016) and Shulman (1986/2013) on general pedagogical knowledge.

The teachers in this study appeared to have learned content and general content knowledge during their graduate coursework, but what they did not learn was how to relate to students or how to engage students in learning. The teachers in this study primarily developed their personal practical knowledge from trial and error. All of the teachers had experience participating in various professional development workshops that were required by the college, but they either did not feel comfortable doing what was espoused in the training or they felt like they needed to modify the techniques from the trainings to work in their context. These results are consistent with what Åkerlind (2003, 2007) and Austin (2002) found in their studies on professional

knowledge attainment of faculty, which was a lack of opportunities for faculty members to learn about the art of teaching, and, moreover, that faculty were often left to figure it out on their own.

**Learning communities.** Learning communities were important to the teachers in this study, and each teacher felt that students were more likely to engage in coursework if the classroom environment was safe. Learning communities, in this study, were developed by the classroom environment created by the teacher, the structure and methods utilized by the teacher that was tied to their beliefs, and the way the teacher engaged students.

Each teacher created learning communities in unique ways, but what they all had in common was the communication of expectations and a dedication to responding to the needs of their students promptly. This study adds observational data to the social learning theory of communities of practice by expanding descriptions of joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire to include the classroom environment dimensions described by Trickett and Quinlan (1979). Joint enterprise was evident by the inclusive language used by teachers of this study. The teachers in this study used "we" instead of "I" or "you" during each class meeting, which is consistent with the research in relational pedagogy and the relational dimension of a caring class environment described in elementary classrooms by Cabello and Terrell (1994) that emphasized listening, even if the teacher maintained social distance, and interjecting personal anecdotes and humor as ways to demonstrate care.

Mutual engagement was observed by the way the teachers designed their courses. The teachers who utilized collaborative methods designed common tasks for

students that were rigorous and that required assistance from the teacher at some point during the class, which allowed the teacher to mutually engage with small groups of students. The teachers who used lecture methods engaged students using techniques that asked all students to participate such as call & response, thumbs up, and short videos with discussion prompts. Mutual engagement related to the personal dimension because of the emphasis on task orientation and the role of the teacher to create learning opportunities that required participatory action by both teacher and students. The current study provided specific engagement techniques, which has not been documented in the current literature, on how teachers promote mutual engagement in higher education.

Shared repertoire was not evident at the first class meeting but was something that developed as the term progressed. The consistent communication of objectives and course goals promoted a shared repertoire that became evident as teachers and students shared inside jokes and experiences from which they drew upon to connect content and to continue building relationships. A common language and camaraderie developed in each class between teacher and students and between students across the term. The shared repertoire developed because the students knew what to expect from the teacher who was consistent in language, tone, organization, and providing multiple opportunities to participate.

In addition to classroom environment, the teachers in this study delivered content using a consistent teaching method that was authentic to their individual comfort levels. A cohesive learning community boundary was formed by consistent structure and methods put in place by individual teachers that allowed for equitable

participation. It was within the border of the learning community where teachers and students engaged and interacted.

**Communication.** The last idea associated with professional knowledge is interactions that occur within the learning community. Interactions in this study were defined by two-way communications between teacher and student(s) or between student(s). These communications provided students with opportunities to change their trajectories from the periphery toward the center of the learning community where learning occurs. Juan provided a good example of this when he said,

> I try to get them to give me the thumbs up thing that you probably saw me do. I try to get them to say the word that's on the screen as much as possible. I don't let five minutes go by without having everyone in the room do roughly the same thing. That also gives the class a sort of good group dynamic. People get to know each other better. They actually feel cohesive. Feels like, I wouldn't say a team necessarily because that's a little hokey, but they're definitely all on the same boat (Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/14/2017).

In addition to whole class interactions demonstrated by Juan in the above quote that promoted the creation of a learning community, interactions also helped the teachers build relationships with individual students. The teachers in this study used congruent communication during interactions with students as described by Brown (2005) to build trust with their students. The teachers expressed empathy when students indicated anxiety or frustration, and the teachers utilized active listening techniques. The current study expanded the results on congruent communication that Brown (2005) found with students in middle schools to include students in higher education.

The current study agreed with Umbach (2005) in that there were more interactions between students and teachers in collaborative classes. However, in this study, quality of interactions appeared more important than quantity of interactions in building relationships with students. It appears that interactions of both quantity and quality are needed to build and sustain relationships with quantity needed at the onset of a relationship and quality needed to sustain the relationship.

Most of the caring teachers in the current study had regular informal interactions with students, which disagreed with studies by Cotton and Wilson (2006) and Stephen, O'Connell, and Hall (2008) who said that informal interactions in the higher education setting were limited due to space, time, and students not wanting to intrude on teachers' research time. A reason for this disagreement could be that the campus, in this study, was small with offices relatively close to the classrooms. In addition, the teachers in this study were not actively involved with research in their respective fields.

**Relational Mindset**

Relational mindset explained how teachers viewed building relationships as an important aspect of their teaching. The teachers in this study communicated care through a relational mindset that encouraged interactions with and between students for the purpose of building trust, humanizing students, and gaining both academic and non-academic knowledge, which is consistent with Noddings (2005) who emphasized caring teachers behave in such a way to break down unequal power relations by listening to students and taking time to develop trusting relationships. Vulnerability was also part of the teachers in this study having a relational mindset. The way the

caring teachers accepted the risk of vulnerability was different, and some of the teachers limited their personal vulnerability by remaining distant in class but were more open with students during informal meetings. The range of vulnerability observed throughout this study appeared to agree with a study conducted by Jeffrey et al. (2013) who concluded that the level of care by the teacher was related to the teacher's attachment history with regard to how close or distant they were with students.

Nurturing care, interpersonal care, and academic care were three themes that emerged from the literature review on care (e,g., Banks & Furman, 2009; Garner, 2007; Tosolt, 2008). Observed in this study was interpersonal and academic care, while nurturing care was not observed. The reason why nurturing care was not observed was more than likely due to the age of students. However, nurturing care was discussed with the teachers in this study who realized there were times when their adult students needed nurturing care, such as students who were dealing with emotional trauma or students who were in need of drug counseling. Banks and Furman (2009) found that nurturing care was needed with younger students whereas pedagogic care (interpersonal and academic) was needed with older students. The current study expands their results on nurturing care to include teachers in the tertiary setting. The observations of interpersonal care and academic care, in this study, were consistent with the literature (e.g., Denzine & Pulos, 2000; Devlin & O'Shea, 2012; Garner, 2007; Komarraju et al., 2010; Micari & Pazos, 2012; Tosolt, 2008) that came from survey data, participant reflections, and interviews with teachers and students.

## Enactment of Relational Pedagogy

A caring teacher with professional knowledge and a relational mindset was not sufficient to enact relational pedagogy. The central circle of Figure 1 is relational intention. Relational intention is unique to this study, and there were two main facets of relational intention: the teacher's purpose for teaching, and the teacher devoting time to build relationships with students. The results of this study indicated that the enactment of relational pedagogy was not black and white; rather the enactment of relational pedagogy appeared along a continuum.

The teachers were proactive in building these relationships by setting up meetings with individual students, emailing them, and talking with them before and after class. The innermost circle represents caring teachers who had relational intention and dedicated class time to get to know students, which increased those teachers' familiarity with their students. These were the teachers who knew the most about their students academically and non-academically. The teachers who did not enact relational pedagogy were reactive, and they never intentionally sought to build relationships inside or outside of class, although they were caring teachers.

### Relational Intention

Caring teachers have professional knowledge and relational mindsets, but this does not mean that the teachers have relational intention, which is necessary to enact relational pedagogy. This study adds relational intention as a new concept to the literature on relational pedagogy. Relational intention, in this study, was defined as the way caring teachers utilize their professional knowledge and relational mindset to purposefully build relationships with students in higher education. Relational intention

emerged in two different ways in this study: the teacher's purpose for teaching and the devotion of time to build relationships with students. The teachers who enacted relational pedagogy intentionally incorporated the act of building and sustaining relationships with students as part of their pedagogical approach. They had a purpose for teaching that was either aligned with student growth or societal change, and they all devoted time to get to know their students on a personal level in both informal and formal settings.

The varying degrees of relational intention observed in this study indicated that the enactment of relational pedagogy is on a continuum. Figure 2 illustrates that continuum with teachers who did not have relational intention outside of the arrow and teachers who fully enacted relational pedagogy towards the tip of the arrow. All of the teachers who enacted relational pedagogy often invited students to visit during office hours or made special arrangements with students to meet outside of class time. Teachers who fully enacted relational pedagogy had a purpose aligned with societal change, and they devoted formal class time to get to know their students both academically and non-academically during every class session. Teaching methods did not appear to influence relational intention because the individual teachers in this study who fully enacted relational pedagogy had different teaching methods. The teachers who did not have relational intention taught for reasons of personal fulfillment, and they did not devote class time to building relationships with students. The teachers were reactive when it came to interacting with students instead of being proactive and seeking to get to know students. While being caring teachers they did not enact relational pedagogy. Teachers who partially enacted relational pedagogy had a purpose

aligned to student growth, and they purposefully set aside time to get to know their students as people primarily during informal class meetings. Partial enactment also included teachers who also provided formal class time for collaboration, but their rationale for doing so was purely academic. The academic collaboration did provide the teachers with occasional opportunities to gain non-academic knowledge of their students.

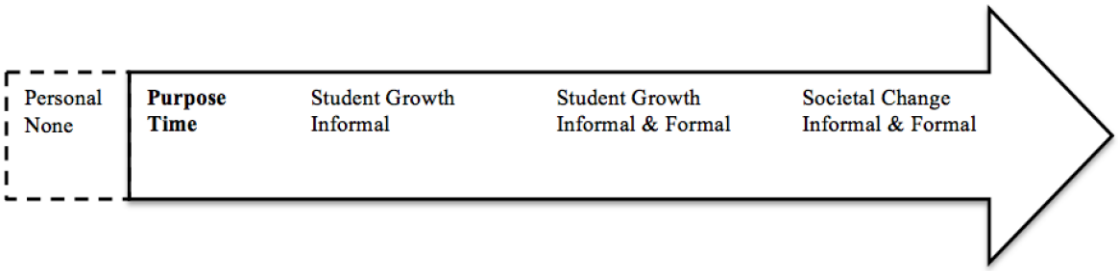



*Figure 2.* Continuum of relational intention toward fully enacted relational pedagogy

## Teacher Profiles

No two classes are ever the same. The teacher profiles in this section are based on two composite teachers, Kim and Lindsay. They are both caring teachers, yet their classes are unique. The intention of telling their stories is to provide a clearer picture of enacted relational pedagogy. Kim, a composite picture of caring teachers in this study represents two caring teachers in this study that did not enact relational pedagogy. Lindsay represents those caring teachers in this study who fully enacted relational pedagogy.

### A Caring Teacher's Classroom

Kim arrives right on time with a smile and a brief hello to students. The greeting is immediately followed by a brief discussion of what was covered the previous class, assignment due dates, an outline for the day's class, and a reminder of

office hours. Kim invites students to ask questions prior to getting started and then proceeds to promptly and precisely address all questions asked by students. The students are quiet, and most of them are ready to take notes. There are generally one or two empty seats between students with more students sitting in the back of the room than at the front. Kim starts to lecture on the psychological effects of nutrition. Kim writes on the board, illustrates concepts in what appears to be an easy to understand manner, and walks around the room making eye contact with students during lecture. Throughout the lecture, Kim pauses about every ten to fifteen minutes and asks if there are any questions. Kim responds competently to students' questions, often interjecting personal anecdotes or sharing a story from previous work experiences. The atmosphere of the classroom is relaxed with both teacher and students feeling safe and respected. There is no apparent tension between teacher and students, but there is an emotional distance between teacher and students. There are occasional intervals of laughter when either the teacher or students utilizes humor, which appears to be appreciated by everyone in the room. The class ends with the teacher communicating expectations and deadlines for the next class or for upcoming assignments. Students exit the room quietly, and on occasion a student or two hangs around after class to talk to Kim, who is eager to chat with students after class on the way to the office. The feeling I have while sitting in this class is analogous to when I am on an airplane and there is a nice, smiling flight attendant who cares for my needs and provides me with relevant information whenever I ask. The flight attendant helps bring the passengers together as a community even if just for a short while.

**Relational Pedagogy Fully Enacted**

Lindsay arrives to class early and engages in a lively and personal conversation about an incident that happened while the student was at work last week. Lindsay then turns around and asks another student if she watched the latest "Dr. Who" episode, and they proceed to talk about the show for a few minutes with other students joining in on the conversation. As students arrive to class, Lindsay calls out the students' names and says hello. Lindsay makes an effort to interact with as many students as possible before class begins. Lindsay asks students to share one good thing that happened to them since their last class meeting. Students share out loud about the good things they have experienced since last class. Lindsay also shares something good; a certain kind of butterfly was observed in the garden, and that meant that the garden was thriving.

After about five to ten minutes of personal sharing, Lindsay introduces the lecture topic for the day by showing a picture of a bonsai tree with the question: *Does trimming the tree make offspring smaller?* Students immediately start talking to each other and the room is very loud. After a few minutes, Lindsay calls on students by name to share out with the whole class and always recognizes the students' answers in a positive way, even when students respond incorrectly, which communicates to students that their contributions are valued. Lindsay likes to joke around with students as they respond; it feels kind of like a sibling who is giving you a hard time about something trivial. As the discussion dies down, Lindsay emphasizes that by the end of lecture they should all be able to answer that question in a scientific way using appropriate academic vocabulary. Lindsay launches into lecture, but this is unlike most lectures. With each slide Lindsay explains the content, often in a different accent, and

adds supplemental drawings and definitions on the white board. For every academic vocabulary term, Lindsay has the students repeat the word out loud after it is said. On average, each new term is said out loud at least three times. Students are highly participatory in class and they are definitely not afraid to ask Lindsay content or even more personal questions. Lindsay usually shows one short video during class and then asks the students to discuss a series of questions in small groups after the video. Lindsay listens to student responses and gets involved in their conversations. Lindsay speaks to every student, and when the class is brought together Lindsay uses students' responses that were overheard during small groups to lead a whole class discussion. Lindsay and the students are engaged together throughout the duration of class, and there is an energetic, fun atmosphere in the class. Lindsay uses many engagement techniques with thumbs up and call & response being popular techniques outside of humor, which is used generously by both the teacher and the students in a way that is supportive as opposed to belittling or threatening.

The class ends with Lindsay wishing everyone a good day along with friendly reminders about assignments. Neither the students nor Lindsay immediately leave the classroom. Instead, students are engaged in various conversations with many students setting up times for study groups. Some students engage Lindsay in conversations with questions about class or to receive individual feedback. It is also at this time that you can hear Lindsay setting up appointments with students for informal meetings.

The full enactment of relational pedagogy is like returning home after being away. Home is a place where family members interact with one another and demonstrate care for one another. I am uninhibited around my family because I know

there is an unconditional love and a never ending supply of support. My family loves me for everything I am and everything I hope to become – I am valued, not judged, and always accepted. There is a comfort in a class where relational pedagogy is enacted that is similar in feeling to being at home with family.

## Implications for Practice in Higher Education

This research supports a paradigm shift from the current educative economic model that relies on traditional transmission of information to students from teachers to a communication educative model that relies on a relational way of being with teachers and students working in harmony through which mutual learning takes place. If institutions wish to address the issues of persistence, retention, remediation, and changing demographics, they need to support caring teachers and the enactment of relational pedagogy. Research with higher education students indicated that students leave institutions and do not complete programs of study because they feel alienated and unsupported by faculty (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Roberts, 2011; Zell, 2010). The enactment of relational pedagogy brings students together in a learning community alongside the caring teacher, which may reduce student feelings of alienation. This study also has implications for teacher training by placing a relational emphasis within pedagogical development for future teachers in the elementary and secondary settings.

Institutions can provide support to their faculty by emphasizing the characteristics of care and the importance of developing personal and academic relationships with students. Faculty may not be aware of how care and relational intentions influence student learning, engagement, and effort. There are a few

suggestions that came from the teachers in this study that institutions could share with faculty to help them relationally charge their practice: make an effort to get to know as much about the personal lives of your students, do not be afraid to share your personal experience with your students, listen to your students, provide them with empathy and compassion when appropriate, and devote formal class time to interact with students whether that is during the first five minutes of class or when students are working collaboratively in small groups.

Teaching is not simply conveying information, especially if we want students to become global citizens; it is an art. Institutions may wish to rethink faculty workloads in order for faculty to be granted access to professional teachers within the university and to provide time to study the art of teaching as a community. Allowing faculty to be a part of a learning community with a professional teacher who enacts relational pedagogy could have a lasting impact on how faculty enact relational pedagogy in their own contexts.

This study was conducted during a summer session, which was eight weeks in duration. A shortened semester means that the days and times teachers meet with students was altered. The majority of the classes in this study met the same number of days during the week, but class time was doubled. There was one class that met two additional days, but the amount of time in class was the same. The teacher that met with students more frequently indicated that he enjoyed this format because he felt like he was able to get to know students and build relationships with them faster than a normal sixteen-week semester. The implication here is that maybe institutions should rethink the Carnegie unit. There are some courses that would benefit from meeting

more frequently with students and some courses that could benefit from meeting more at the beginning of the semester and less frequently later in the semester, especially in courses where students are expected to complete fieldwork. Faculty could schedule how and when they meet with students, which could possibly encourage faculty to think about how they can build relationships with students based on their context.

In addition, institutions could emphasize and reward excellent teaching as part of their evaluation process. The enactment of relational pedagogy appears to be what is needed in the 21st century higher education classroom, and institutions need to support the intention of putting relationships at the center because, as stated by several teachers in this study and other scholars, students will put forth more effort and be motivated to learn if they feel you care about them as a person (Ann, Follow-Up Interview 1, 6/8/2017; Juan, Formal Interview, 6/14/2017; PB, Follow-Up Interview 4, 7/28/2017; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Foster, 2008; Goralnik et al., 2012; Murphy & Brown, 2012; Nodding, 2005; Roberts, 2011).

Teacher education programs have an important role in the development of future teachers who will enter elementary and secondary classrooms. Relationships are important regardless of the age of students, and education programs could think about incorporating an ethics of care in foundations coursework and relational pedagogy in methods coursework. Pre-service teachers need to be exposed to both the technical and affective sides of teaching in order for them to maximize student engagement, effort, persistence, and achievement and reduce alienation. Teacher education faculty should model relational pedagogy in their courses so that pre-service teachers have experience as a student in a relationally charged classroom. Teacher education faculty could help

pre-service teachers unpack relational pedagogy through focused observations. Pre-service teachers during field experiences could look for indicators of enacted relational pedagogy such as humor, active listening, personal conversations, use of students' names or nicknames during class time, interactions with students before and after class, and talking with mentor teachers about their purposes for teaching. Focused observations of relationally charged classrooms and conversations with teachers who enact relational pedagogy during field experiences could provide pre-service teachers with an affective perspective to the art of teaching that will help them envision themselves not only as a caring teacher but as a caring teacher who has relational intention.

## Limitations and Future Research

The current study on the enactment of relational pedagogy moves relational pedagogy from theoretical discussions to practical applications and starts the conversation of how caring teachers place relationships at the center of their practice to influence the lives of their students. In this section, I discuss how the logistics of the study, which includes the site, timing, and participants associated with data collection, and the introduction of relational intention are simultaneously limitations and opportunities for future research.

The caring teachers in this study were selected from a two-year community college with an enrollment primarily composed of non-traditional students during the summer semester. Future research following the methodology outlined in this study during a regular sixteen-week semester could provide additional insights on how frequency and length of class sessions influence the enactment of relational pedagogy.

A study conducted during a normal sixteen-week session would also broaden the scope to include caring teachers who were not available during the summer session. The site was a teaching institution, so teachers were not actively pursuing their own research agendas, which may have influenced the time the teachers in this study spent on the development of their practice. Future research with caring teachers who have to balance teaching duties with research duties could provide additional insights on relational intention and how caring teachers balance these two responsibilities. Addressing the limitation of non-traditional students, a worthy study would be to investigate the enactment of relational pedagogy with caring teachers who have classes primarily composed of traditional students. There was some literature on how important relationships are for non-traditional students to persist in degree completion (Murphy & Brown, 2012; Roberts, 2011), but traditional students appeared left out.

The scope of this research was also limited to observations and interviews with caring teachers; the voice of the higher education student was omitted. Students' perspectives on the actions of the caring teachers could provide additional insight as to how the pedagogical practices of caring teachers help students develop relationships with teachers and whether or not certain practices are more likely to encourage or dissuade students to interact and build relationships. Documented conversations with students could provide information about how students want relationships with faculty to develop, specifically the direction of those relationships (teacher initiated or student initiated).

Relational intention was found to be a necessary facet to the enactment of relational pedagogy in this study and is an area that warrants future research. A case

study with teachers who are at the beginning of their careers could provide a view of how teachers develop the practice of putting relationships at the center of their practice, thus moving from a caring teacher to a caring teacher who has relational intention and who fully enacts relational pedagogy.

## Conclusion

As this journey into how teachers enact relational pedagogy draws to a close, there were insightful results that came from observing caring teachers in the field and listening to their voices. This study contributed to existing literature by answering requests from several scholars to include research grounded in observational data of higher education classrooms, extending relational pedagogy from theoretical discourse to practical application, and introducing relational intention as a necessary concept to enact relational pedagogy. Caring teachers who had a self-less purpose for teaching used their professional knowledge in conjunction with a relational mindset and relational intention through authentic teaching methods and engagement techniques to enact relational pedagogy. They were intentional with regard to fostering relationships with students and built time into their classes to get to know one another. The enactment of relational pedagogy is ripe for study and ready to emerge from the theoretical realm into the practical realm of teaching and learning.

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# APPENDICES

Appendix A

## Nomination Letter - Recruitment

Date
Dear Dr. _____,

My name is Kristina Adams and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Oklahoma in Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum. I am conducting a study on caring teachers in higher education. I would appreciate your help in identifying a few teachers in your department who you think exemplify a caring teacher.

Relational pedagogy refers to the actions and interactions in classrooms between caring teachers and their students. A caring teacher in higher education regularly demonstrates will, skill, social support and maintains a classroom environment where students feel valued and safe. I have attached, for your convenience, a table that further describes what I mean with will, skill, social support, and classroom environment.

The purpose of this study is to understand how teachers enact relational pedagogy in the classroom. This research addresses the following initial broad question and smaller questions within the scope of the larger question: How do caring teachers foster relationships with students in higher education?

- What do caring teachers do in the classroom to achieve positive relationships with students?
- How do caring teachers engage students?
- What are the interactions in a classroom that indicate teacher-student relationships?

This study is unique in that it is based on classroom observations of caring teachers who have been identified by professionals in their departments. I will gladly share the results of this study with you.

Please see the attached document if you need additional information to help you identify caring teachers in your department. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 405-924-3762.

Thank you for your recommendations and your time.

Cheers,
Kristina L. Adams
kristiadams@ou.edu

Email Attachment:

The characteristics of a caring teacher in this unique sample, and as defined in this study, are described within the concepts of will, skill, social support, and classroom environments. Will describes the teachers' passion for teaching and learning, their abilities to ignite student curiosity by their abilities to ask intriguing questions. Skill describes the teachers' enthusiasm and seriousness about their content. They use personal anecdotes and embed other disciplines into their teaching. Social support describes the teachers' genuine concern for students; they provide timely feedback to students and interact with students in positive ways. The classroom environment of a caring teacher is described as engaging, safe, and collaborative. The interactions in the classroom are lively, respectful, and the teacher maintains high expectations of students.

| **Characteristic** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| Will | Passion for teaching & learning, ignite student curiosity, asks intriguing questions, work alongside students |
| Skill | Enthusiastic about content, serious about their fields, committed to the content and processes relevant to their fields, offer expert perspectives, use personal anecdotes, embed other disciplines into their own |
| Social support | Gets to know their students on a personal level, positive interactions with students, provide constructive & timely feedback, listen to students, provide students support through informal interactions, encourages student persistence |
| Classroom environment | Engaging, collaborative, lively conversations, safe/non-threatening, open dialogue, positive, high expectations, |

Appendix B

Recruitment email to nominated teachers

Date:

Dear _____,

My name is Kristina Adams and recently your division dean nominated you as a caring teacher at my request. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Oklahoma in Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum. I am conducting a qualitative grounded theory study on how caring teachers in higher education foster positive relationships with undergraduate students. The purpose of this study is to understand how teachers enact relational pedagogy in the classroom. This research addresses the following initial broad question and smaller questions within the scope of the larger question: How do caring teachers foster relationships with students in higher education?

- What do caring teachers do in the classroom to achieve positive relationships with students?
- How do caring teachers engage students?
- What are the interactions in a classroom that indicate teacher-student relationships?

I write you today because I would like to meet with you or call you to discuss the possibility of your participation, and the details of the project. Your participation will enhance the theoretical development of relational pedagogy by providing an essential perspective as to how teachers build and sustain relationships in the classroom, which currently does not appear in the literature. Please let me know some possible dates and times that we could meet or when a convenient time would be for me to call you. I appreciate your consideration, thank you. ***The University of Oklahoma is an Equal Opportunity Institution.***

Sincerely,

Kristina L. Adams
kristiadams@ou.edu
405-924-3762

Appendix C

Formal Interview Script

[researcher reads verbatim]

Hello, _____, thank you for agreeing to participate in this study regarding relational pedagogy in higher education. ***The University of Oklahoma is an Equal Opportunity Institution***. All interviews will be audio recorded only with your permission. Do you provide permission for me to audio record this formal interview?

[if yes, may I begin recording now? If no, is it ok if I take notes?]

[researcher turns on recorder or uses a notebook to record responses]

[researcher states verbatim]

As previously discussed, the purpose of this study is to better understand how teachers enact relational pedagogy in the classroom. This research addresses the following initial broad question and smaller questions within the scope of the larger question:

How do caring teachers foster relationships with students in higher education?

- What do caring teachers do in the classroom to achieve positive relationships with students?
- How do caring teachers engage students?
- What are the interactions in a classroom that indicate teacher-student relationships?

Do you have any questions before we begin? Address any questions or concerns

[interview questions asked verbatim as written below]

1. Please describe your teaching background: number of years, types of courses taught, professional development

1.5 Added question: How has your teaching evolved?

2. Why do you think you were nominated as a caring teacher?
3. Tell me how you select to do what you do in class? When you are planning for a typical class what activities do you choose? Why do you select these activities?
4. Think about one of your classes, what do you do at the beginning, at the end
5. During class, how do you sustain student interest?
6. Describe the relationships you have with your students.
    a. So what do you do to facilitate building those relationships?
7. Describe a time, in class, when you felt connected to a student.
8. How do you let students know you care about them?
9. How often do you meet informally with students? And in what context?
10. How do you support students, or facilitate student success?

10. 5 Added question: What are three words you would use to describe your teaching?

11. Is there anything you would like to add with regards to being a caring teacher or teacher-student relationships?

Thank you for your time. You will be receiving an email within a week that contains the transcript of this interview. At that time, I ask that you approve or amend the transcript. If you think of anything else you would like to add, please do not hesitate to contact me. The next thing I would like to discuss is possible times for classroom observations and follow-up discussion meetings. I will stop recording now so that we may look at our schedules and plan for the rest of the study.

Appendix D

Research questions and Formal Interview Questions

| Question | 1 | 1.5 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 10.5 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overarching research question:** How do caring teachers foster relationships with students in higher education? | | | X | | X | | X | X | | X | X | | X | |
| **Sub-question 1:** What do caring teachers do in the classroom to achieve positive relationships with students? | | | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | | | | |
| **Sub-question 2:** How do caring teachers engage students? | | | | | X | | | | | | X | | | |
| **Sub-question 3:** What are the interactions in a classroom that indicate teacher-student relationships? | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Questions 1, 1.5 and 10.5 are intended to provide professional background information for each participant. Question 12 probes for additional information, similar to closing question.

Appendix E

Length of Observations for each Teacher

| **Teacher** | **Observation 1** length (min.) | **Observation 2** length (min.) | **Observation 3** length (min.) | **Observation 4** length (min.) | **Average length of observation** (min.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Alvin** | 75 | 90 | 105 | 90 | 90 |
| **Ann** | 80 | 80 | 165 | 90 | 104 |
| **Bernard** | 115 | 65 | 85 | 72 | 84 |
| **Bob** | 80 | 80 | 80 | 80 | 80 |
| **Juan** | 140 | 70 | 72 | 70 | 88 |
| **Lenny** | 155 | 90 | 86 | 62 | 98 |
| **PB** | 110 | 110 | 110 | 110 | 110 |
| **Winston** | 75 | 75 | 95 | 80 | 81 |

Appendix F

Formal Interview Codes

| Do | Categories of codes | Definition | Codes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do | Humanization of Students | Humanization of students was the process of treating students as subjects not objects. | • Learn students' names<br>• Interact with students to get to know students<br>• Do not judge students on grades or attendance<br>• Be flexible and accommodating for students who are going through difficult situations<br>• Curious about lives of students<br>• Ask questions about students' lives that allow them to share their lives. |
| | Learning Community | A learning community was a mutually respective environment where teachers and students learned together. | • Safe classroom environment<br>• Environment open to questions<br>• We are in this together<br>• If all of the students have do it then this brings them together<br>• Value student responses<br>• Allow students to voice opinions<br>• Allow students to work together on problems |
| | Trust | Trust was defined as the teachers' abilities and personalities to effectively communicate with students. | • Be available to students during office hours<br>• Be available to students before and after class<br>• Email students<br>• Respond to emails from students<br>• Listen to students' concerns<br>• Make an effort to be liked<br>• Teach authentic to who you are<br>• Provide students with positive feedback<br>• Provide students with prompt feedback<br>• Refer students to experts when necessary |

| Engage | Categories of codes | Definition | Codes |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Animated Lectures | Animated lectures were defined by the actions of the teachers during class time. | • Singing<br>• Acting<br>• Analogies<br>• Jokes<br>• Stories, personal and professional<br>• Move around<br>• Make eye contact<br>• Modify publisher's PowerPoint lectures<br>• Use exciting examples<br>• Use shocking pictures or examples<br>• Use visual aids<br>• Fluctuate voice<br>• Be excited about content |
| | Group Work | Group work was defined as two or more students engaged in dialogue about content. | • Activity<br>• Problem solving<br>• Simulations<br>• Role playing<br>• Time to answer questions with a classmate posed by the teacher about content, readings, videos, and case studies |
| | Connections | Connections were defined as the teachers' abilities to relate content to the lives of their students. | • Other coursework<br>• Prior knowledge<br>• Current events<br>• Current research |
| | Questioning | Questioning was defined by the teachers' abilities to ask questions of individual students and the whole class with the purpose of engaging | • Whole class questions<br>• Guiding questions<br>• Probing questions<br>• Extending questions<br>• Call on students by name to answer questions<br>• Allow students to make mistakes or to be wrong when answering a question |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | students with content. | |

Appendix G

Follow-Up Interview Codes

| Do | Category of Codes | Definition | Codes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do | Authority | Authority was defined by the teachers' abilities to "get students on the bus." | • Build trust with students<br>• Show empathy<br>• Value students – comments, questions<br>• Demonstrate expertise in field<br>• Try to reduce student anxiety<br>• Be accessible to students<br>• Be vulnerable with students – share personal struggles<br>• Make mistakes<br>• Be human<br>• Be part of their journey |
| | Available | Available was defined as being both physically and emotionally present for students. | • During class<br>• Before and after class<br>• During break<br>• During office hours<br>• By phone<br>• By email<br>• Special appointments<br>• Allow students to cry in office<br>• Allow students to voice concerns with their progress<br>• empathy |
| | Class Structure | Class structure was defined as the teacher created space where students engage in learning. | • Safe<br>• Open<br>• Focus on learning not on possibly being ridiculed<br>• Create a culture where it is ok to be that nerd<br>• Opportunities for discussion when appropriate<br>• Teach in a way that is comfortable to you<br>• Find out what works for you |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Personal Knowledge | Personal knowledge was defined as non-academic information about students. | • Learn their names<br>• Be flexible when you can be with individuals students who have challenges<br>• Find out all you can about each student<br>• Try to know something personal about each student |

| **Engage** | **Category of Codes** | **Definition** | **Codes** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Engage | Collaborative Activities | Collaborative activities were defined as activities that required small groups of students to work together while the teacher monitored progress. | • Group work<br>• Small group discussions<br>• Learning checks<br>• Role playing<br>• Simulations<br>• Active monitoring of group work by teacher<br>• Providing feedback to students during group work<br>• Ask probing questions<br>• Extend content for students who finish quickly |
| | Multimodal Methods During Lecture | Multimodal methods referred to teachers who used traditional lecture methods with a variety of styles. | • Modified publisher's PowerPoint with fresher examples, better pictures<br>• Write on board<br>• Draw on board<br>• Show videos<br>• Talk about case studies<br>• Ask questions of whole class<br>• Use a homework spinner to determine which homework question to turn in<br>• Use visual aids<br>• Show videos – youtube and personal<br>• Use shocking pictures from internet or picture taken by teacher |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Guided practice<br>• Relate content to current events<br>• Respond to student questions<br>• Allow for occasional tangents – off topic conversations (gas card and ATM discussion)<br>• Model assignment expectations |
| | Attention | Attention was defined as teachers' behaviors that were directed to intentionally engage students. | • Humor<br>• Jokes<br>• Stories – personal and professional<br>• Nutty slides<br>• Shocking slides<br>• Call & response<br>• Thumbs up<br>• Acting<br>• Singing<br>• Voice fluctuations<br>• Playing dumb<br>• Making a mistake<br>• Laughing<br>• Being goofy<br>• Answering student questions<br>• Listening to student responses/comments<br>• To become a participant<br>• To own their own actions/thoughts<br>• Mistakes<br>• To form study groups – work together outside of class |
| | Physical | Physical defined any action taken by students or teachers that involved physical movement of bodies or objects in the classroom. | • Proximity<br>• Eye contact<br>• Movement<br>• Smile<br>• Show emotions<br>• Show excitement<br>• Use students' names |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Arm gestures<br>• Using classroom materials as props<br>• Using students to demonstrate concepts<br>• Paying attention to student body language |

| **Interactions** | **Categories of Codes** | **Definition** | **Codes** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interactions | Non-academic knowledge | Non-academic knowledge was defined as teachers' conversations with students that allowed the teachers to get to know students on a more personal level. | • Student had to leave program and the teacher helped student retain tuition<br>• Student who is couch surfing for the summer<br>• Student who has parents in ill health<br>• Student taking care of special needs sibling<br>• Student appreciates teacher's methods<br>• Knowledge of students' financial issues<br>• Knowledge of students' family situations<br>• Student appreciates teaching method<br>• Students share personal stories during class<br>• Student comment about "living in a food desert"<br>• Teacher admits to having a bad teaching day and talks about this with students during next class<br>• Teacher provides time during class to have personal interactions with students |
| | Academic knowledge of individual students | Academic knowledge was defined as any discussion that resulted in the | • Role playing was difficult for students to remain in roles<br>• Class was quick to tell the teacher when they did not |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | teacher learning more about how students understand or learn content. | understand<br>• Group monitoring was a way of interacting with individuals and increasing students' self confidence with regard to content<br>• Teacher asked students about their career goals<br>• Oral exam feedback during class – students asked questions and teacher responded<br>• Teacher asked questions and students responded in order for teacher to gauge prior knowledge of content<br>• Student apologized about low exam score and teacher took the opportunity to talk about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation<br>• Teacher discussed with students during office hours about how they were studying and then helped them formulate a new way to study<br>• A student and the teacher talked during office hours about student performance and student started participating more in class<br>• Teachers emailed students who were struggling in their classes and set up a time to meet with students to discuss their grades and their approach to studying for the class |
| | Student-student knowledge | Student to student was defined as students interacting with one another | • Students have formed study groups<br>• Teacher observed two students during lab |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | during formal or informal meetings. | helping each other understand lab content<br>• Teacher observed students working together in the math lab<br>• Teacher monitored small group work and discussions<br>• Students clapped for each other at the end of student presentations<br>• Students supported each other with words of encouragement after a student shared something personal |

Appendix H

Field Notes Codes

| | **Category of Codes** | **Definition** | **Codes** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do | Communication | Communication was defined as any action by the teacher with the purpose of increasing student success. | • Course grading policies<br>• Course objectives<br>• Course expectations<br>• Model assignment expectations during class<br>• Go over the syllabus<br>• Shows the textbook<br>• Read institutional policies as required by the institutions<br>• Encouraged students to attend office hours<br>• Encouraged students to form study groups<br>• Teachers discussed previous class material before starting new material<br>• Teachers reminded students of upcoming deadlines<br>• Used email to send students reminders and adjustments to schedule<br>• Positive written feedback<br>• Positive verbal feedback<br>• Exam feedback – how students performed as a class and feedback on specific questions<br>• Paused for student questions and monitored pace of lecture using facial cues and students' comments<br>• Returned exams in a timely fashion |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Provided written feedback on online assignment<br>• Updated grades in learning management system regularly |
| | Demonstrate competency | Demonstrate competency referred to any actions by the teacher that would indicate their depth and breadth of knowledge in their content area. | • "At this point, students know that I know my content"<br>• Multiple ways of explaining content<br>• Shared experiences from the field<br>• Teachers demonstrated that they were current in the field by sharing new research/ideas with students |
| | Personal Knowledge | Personal knowledge was defined by the teachers' efforts to get to know students in a personal way. | • Teachers knew students' names<br>• During class time is set aside to find out personal information about student wither at the beginning of class or during group work<br>• Listened to students talk to each other<br>• Listened to students who commented or asked questions during class<br>• Teachers showed genuine curiosity about the lives of their students by asking questions about clothing, music, and weekend activities. |
| | Accepting | Accepting was defined as any action by the teacher that was pleasant in attitude and demonstrated | • Do not judge students based on attendance<br>• Do not judge students by their performance "you don't know what |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | acceptance of students as people with diverse opinions and lives outside of the classroom. | they are dealing with"<br>• Do not judge students on whether or not they respond correctly to a question – "mistakes are important"<br>• Allowed students to respond openly in class<br>• Allowed students to share opinions and thoughts during class<br>• Greeted students<br>• Welcomed late students<br>• Teachers regularly said thank you to students after students asked a question or provided a comment<br>• Teachers said something positive when students would speak in class<br>• Laughed<br>• Smiled<br>• Maintained pleasant demeanor<br>• Complimented students<br>• Praised students for pursuing educational goals |
| | Methods | Methods were defined as the general way the teacher delivered content across all observations. | • Collaborative – class was primarily activity based with limited lecture, opportunities for students to collaborate<br>• Mixed – both non-traditional and traditional methods<br>• Lecture – class was primarily lecture, students were rarely given an opportunity to collaborate |
| Engage | Jokes & Humor | Teachers used jokes | • Explicit joke (planned) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | & humor explicitly and implicitly. | • Implicit joke (not planned)<br>• Humor with students<br>• Humor about content<br>• Jokes related to content |
| | Stories & Analogies | Teachers used personal and professional experiences along with analogies to make content relatable. | • Personal stories<br>• Stories from the field<br>• Research stories<br>• Analogies related to content |
| | Voice Fluctuations | Teachers fluctuated their voices when emphasizing content. | • Vocabulary emphasis<br>• Funny voice during lecture<br>• Scottish accent<br>• Emphasized southern accent |
| | Attention Getters | Attention getters were defined as techniques used by teachers to capture students' attention. | • Call & response of vocabulary words<br>• Repeat after me<br>• Thumbs up if you understand<br>• Acting out theories<br>• Singing |
| Interactions | Types | Types of interactions identified the people involved in and the direction of the interaction. | • Student-student<br>• Student-teacher/whole class<br>• Teacher-student<br>• Teacher to whole class |
| | Context | The context of the interactions was defined by the content of the interaction. | • Teacher and student in non-academic conversation<br>• Teacher and student discussing content<br>• Students discussing content<br>• Students complaining about teacher<br>• Students complaining about class<br>• Students joking around with each other<br>• Teacher joking around with students |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | • Teacher answering questions about content<br>• Teacher asking questions about content<br>• Students asking question about content |

Appendix I

Data Convergence of Categories of Codes

| **Research Category** | **Cluster** | **Definition** | **Categories of Codes** | **Definition** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Do** | Affective<br><br>Memo: Purpose in teaching: societal change, student growth, personal reasons Affective Emphasis | Affective emphasis was defined as the actions of teachers that were directed at emotionally supporting students. | Trust | Trust was defined as the teachers' abilities and personalities to effectively communicate with students. |
| | | | Authority | Authority was defined by the teachers' abilities to "get students on the bus." |
| | | | Available | Available was defined as being both physically and emotionally present for students. |
| | | | Humanization of Students | Humanization of students was the process of treating students as subjects not objects. |
| | | | Accepting | Accepting was defined as any action by the teacher that was pleasant in attitude and demonstrated |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | acceptance of students as people with diverse opinions and lives outside of the classroom. |
| | | | Personal Knowledge | Personal knowledge was defined as non-academic information about students. |
| | | | Communication | Communication was defined by any action of the teacher with the purpose of increasing student success. |
| | Content | Content was defined as the actions of the teacher that facilitated students' learning. | Demonstrate competency | Demonstrate competency referred to any actions by the teacher that would indicate their depth and breadth of knowledge in their content area. |
| | | | Communication | Communication was defined by any action of the teacher with the purpose of increasing student success. |
| | | | Learning Community | A learning community was a mutually respective environment where teachers and students learned |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | together. |
| | | | Class Structure | Class structure was defined as the teacher created space where students engage in learning. |
| | | | Methods | Methods were defined as the general way the teacher delivered content across all observations. |
| Engage | Engagement Techniques | Engagement techniques were defined as the teachers' unique approaches to get students interested in content. | Animated Lectures | Animated lectures were defined by the actions of the teachers during class time. |
| | | | Attention | Attention was defined as teachers' behaviors that were directed to intentionally engage students. |
| | | | Physical | Physical defined any action taken by students or teachers that involved physical movement of bodies or objects in the classroom. |
| | | | Jokes & Humor | Teachers used jokes & humor explicitly and implicitly. |
| | | | Stories & | Teachers used |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Analogies | personal and professional experiences along with analogies to make content relatable. |
| | | | Voice Fluctuations | Teachers fluctuated their voices when emphasizing content. |
| | | | Attention Getters | Attention getters were defined as techniques used by teachers to capture students' attention. |
| | | | Questioning | Questioning was defined by the teachers' abilities to ask questions of individual students and the whole class with the purpose of engaging students with content. |
| | Content Delivery | Content delivery was defined as the methods used by teachers to communicate course specific content. | Group Work | Group work was defined as two or more students engaged in dialogue about content. |
| | | | Collaborative Activities | Collaborative activities were defined as activities that required small groups of |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | students to work together while the teacher monitored progress. |
| | | | Multimodal Methods During Lecture | Multimodal methods referred to teachers who used traditional lecture methods with a variety of styles. |
| | | | Connections | Connections were defined as the teachers' abilities to relate content to the lives of their students. |
| Interactions | Interactions | Interactions were defined as two-way communications that resulted in students and teachers getting to know each and content better. | Non-academic knowledge | Non-academic knowledge was defined as teachers' conversations with students that allowed the teachers to get to know students on a more personal level. |
| | | | Academic knowledge of individual students | Academic knowledge was defined as any discussion that resulted in the teacher learning more about how students understand or learn content. |
| | | | Student-student knowledge | Student to student was defined as |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | students interacting with one another during formal or informal meetings. |
| | | | Types | Types of interactions identified the people involved in and the direction of the interaction. |
| | | | Context | The context of the interactions was defined by the content of the interaction. |

Appendix J

Data Convergence of Research Clusters

| **Theme** | **Definition** | **Cluster** | **Definition** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Professional Knowledge | Professional knowledge was defined by the actions of teachers and students that resulted in the communication of course relevant information. | Content Emphasis | Content emphasis defined as the actions of the teacher that facilitated students' attainment of course content and the building of a learning community where the teacher was able to demonstrate competency. |
| | | Engagement Techniques | Engagement techniques were defined as the teachers' unique approaches to get students interested in content. |
| | | Content Delivery (Method) | Content delivery was defined as the methods used by teachers to communicate course specific content. |
| | | Interactions | Interactions were defined as two-way communications that resulted in students and teachers getting to know content better. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Relational Mindset<br><br>*Purpose* | Relational mindset was defined by the actions of the teacher to get to know their students personally in order to meet the needs of the whole person. | Affective Emphasis | Affective emphasis was defined as the process of students and teachers building trust, accepting diversity, and sharing the learning environment to better understand one another and the teacher's actions were directed at emotionally supporting students. |
| | | Interactions | Interactions were defined as two-way communications that resulted in students and teachers getting to know each other better. |

Appendix K

Frequency of engagement techniques across all observations and by teaching method

| Method and Teacher | Jokes & Humor | Stories & Analogies | Attention Getters | Voice Fluctuations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Collaborative** | **58** | **28** | **26** | **4** |
| Lenny | 7 | 15 | 0 | 0 |
| PB | 51 | 13 | 26 | 4 |
| **Lecture** | **112** | **77** | **140** | **34** |
| Alvin | 44 | 41 | 44 | 13 |
| Bernard | 17 | 19 | 5 | 3 |
| Juan | 51 | 17 | 91 | 18 |
| **Mixed** | **37** | **33** | **8** | **8** |
| Ann | 9 | 21 | 0 | 0 |
| Bob | 22 | 4 | 0 | 2 |
| Winston | 6 | 8 | 8 | 6 |
| **Totals** | **207** | **138** | **174** | **46** |

Appendix L

Frequency of interactions across all observations and by teaching method

| **Method and Teacher** | **Teacher to student** | **Student to teacher/whole class** | **Teacher to whole class** | **Student to student** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Collaborative** | **697** | **204** | **359** | **2335** |
| Lenny | 199 | 77 | 31 | 1456* |
| PB | 498 | 127 | 328 | 879* |
| **Lecture** | **29** | **261** | **150** | **51** |
| Alvin | 3 | 85 | 43 | 11 |
| Bernard | 4 | 89 | 27 | 28 |
| Juan | 22 | 87 | 80 | 12 |
| **Mixed** | **71** | **402** | **177** | **314** |
| Ann | 26 | 237 | 78 | 206 |
| Bob | 30 | 103 | 54 | 36 |
| Winston | 15 | 62 | 45 | 72 |

** A mathematical formula was used to estimate the minimum number of student-student interactions that occurred during group work, 2[(n-1)!]. This would be multiplied by the number of groups in the class and then multiplied by the number of tasks that required group work during the class. For example, if there were 3 students in a group, 5 groups, and 3 tasks, then the calculation was 3*5*[[2(3-1)!] = 60*