

CONFIRMING AND DISCONFIRMING COMMUNICATION PRACTICES OF
TEACHERS IN URBAN CLASSROOMS

A Dissertation
Submitted to
The Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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July 2015

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal communication practices of teachers have been recognized as having a significant impact on the relational dynamics between teachers and students; however, the specific interpersonal communication practices utilized by teachers of urban students are not well understood. Although teacher-student interactions have been studied for many years, the research has not focused on how confirmation and disconfirmation are perceived in urban classroom environments. Furthermore, minimal research exists regarding how perceived confirmation and disconfirmation impacts urban teacher-student relationships. Using a qualitative approach, this study examines the confirming and disconfirming communication practices of teachers from 4 urban charter high schools. In addition, this study examines how the 22 teacher participants and 26 student participants perceive the communication practices as impacting teacher-student relationships. A finding from the data was *respect*. Both teachers and students identified respect as being the single most critical factor to building teacher-student relationships. Confirming behaviors like honesty/openness, praise/positive feedback, checking for understanding, and calmly correcting behaviors were identified as having a positive impact on the relationship-building process. Disconfirming behaviors such as disrespect, putting students on the spot, sarcasm, and aggressive tone were identified as hindering the relationship-building process. Descriptions of each theme are provided as well as implications for teacher practice and future research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my professors, teachers, and mentors who have spent time keeping me encouraged throughout my personal and professional pursuits. I am forever grateful for the tough conversations, unconditional love, continued support, and ongoing prayers.

I would like to first acknowledge my mother who has been my number one advocate, teacher, role model, and friend. I thank her for working tirelessly to make sure that I had everything I needed to be resilient in life. She taught me that success, greatness, and excellence have more to do with character and less to do with accomplishments. Words cannot express the true impact you have had on my existence.

I would also like to acknowledge my seventh-grade teachers, Mr. Vaughn, Mrs. Porter, and Doc who devoted extra time, energy, guidance, and resources to me during a time when I struggled to find my identity and self-worth. Thank you for also teaching me the importance of using my gifts and talents to help others. I want to thank Mr. Jimmie Jones, my mentor, and very first business advisor. The Adult and Organizational Development faculty, Joseph Folger, Larry Krafft, Tricia Jones, Cynthia Belliveau, Janice Laurence and the late Mel Silberman have all played an integral role in my academic trajectory. The Urban Education faculty, Erin Horvat, Novella Keith, and William Cutler, and especially my Committee Chair Will Jordan, all had a profound impact on my experience as a doctoral student at Temple. Other professors who have been great supporters of me are, James Earl Davis, Nathaniel Norment, Sonia Peterson-

Lewis, Ayesha Imani, Portia Hunt, Lynnette Mawhinney, Jayminn Sanford-Deshields and Wanda Brooks.

Special thanks goes out to so many others who have given me guidance and support throughout the years, Sabriya Jubilee, Carl Moore, Stuart Rhoden, Keunah Lee, Laura Porterfield, Angela Campbell, Lorraine Savage, Danielle Wallace, Yaba Blay, Marc Lamont Hill, Camika Royal and Quaiser Abdullah.

Lastly, I am sure that this achievement could not have happened without the love, support, and patience of my husband, Shahid Rana, my daughter Zuri Rana, and my son Kingston Rana. I love you and I acknowledge the sacrifices that have been made on my behalf to pursue this project.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the source from whom all blessings flow.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an essential component of any relationship or interaction (Walther, 2011). In any communication, two or more individuals interact with each other in either verbal or nonverbal forms (Whitaker, 2011). Both verbal and nonverbal communication skills are central and significant to the development of healthy relationships between individuals, especially those within the same organization (Knapp, Hall, & Horgan, 2011; Whitaker, 2011). Interpersonal confirmation and disconfirmation takes place in every communication interaction (Cissna & Sieburg, 1981). Evelyn Sieburg and Carl Larson put forward a definition of confirmation and disconfirmation that has been consistently used for over thirty years. Confirmation is “any behavior that causes another person to value himself more,” and disconfirmation is “any behavior that causes another person to value himself less” (Cissna & Keating, 1979, p. 49). According to these definitions, in almost every communication interaction, a person’s identity is being either confirmed or disconfirmed by the other person with whom they are communicating.

For almost sixty years, studies from various disciplines demonstrate evidence that confirmation and disconfirmation has an effect on a person’s self experience (Buber, 1957; Cissna & Keating, 1979; Cissna & Sieburg, 1981; Dance & Larson, 1976; Ellis, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Laing, 1969; Sieburg, 1973; Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967). The positive outcomes of confirmation consist of healthy family relationships, marital satisfaction, and increased classroom participation in students (Cissna & Keating, 1979;

Goodboy & Myers, 2008; Laing, 1969). The negative outcomes of disconfirmation consist of dysfunctional family relationships, identity confusion, and substandard cognitive and emotional development in the classroom (Dance & Larson, 1976; Ellis, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Laing, 1969; Sieburg, 1973; Watzlawick et al., 1967). Confirmation and disconfirmation have been studied in a variety of fields, such as education, communication, healthcare, and psychology, with results showing a wide array of effects on interpersonal relationships.

In the field of education, studies have been conducted examining the role of confirmation and disconfirmation between teachers and their students (Goldman & Goodboy, 2014). Studies have also shown that confirmation has a positive relationship with student learning outcomes (e.g. affective learning, student motivation, student grades) (Bordia, Wales, Pittam, & Gallois, 2011; Campbell, Eichhorn, Basch, & Wolf, 2009; Goldman, Bolkan, & Goodboy, 2014; Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). In a more specific study, Goldman and Goodboy (2014) examined college students' emotional outcomes in the classroom (e.g. emotional interest, emotional support, emotion work, emotional valence) as a function of teacher confirmation (e.g. responding to questions, demonstrating interest, teaching style). Their study revealed that confirmation has positive influences on the emotional outcome of students.

The theoretical foundations of confirmation and disconfirmation have been applied to the education field and studies have been conducted primarily in main-stream educational environments. Most existing studies focus on the important role of confirmation in the performance and output measures of students. Research has not

focused on how confirmation and disconfirmation are perceived in urban classroom environments.

Statement of the Problem

Currently there are over 100,000 public schools in the United States, including approximately 5,300 charter schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, there are over 100 charter schools serving high poverty, high-need students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Classroom sizes range from 20-40 students on average, and research shows that teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to teach curriculum while managing the mounting cognitive and affective needs of students. As a result, students receive less one-on-one interaction with teachers, thus having an adverse effect on the quality of the teacher-student relationship.

Students in high-poverty urban schools benefit from positive teacher-student relationships because of the risks associated with poverty. Risk effects linked to poverty include high drop-out rates, increased behavior issues, low self-esteem, lower academic achievement, and decreased classroom engagement (Pianta, 1999; Murray & Malmgren, 2005). Urban students with positive teacher-student relationships have higher academic achievement, and increased socio-emotional development than their peers who do not (Cauce, Stewart, Rodriguez, Cochran & Ginzler, 2003). In addition, evidence shows that teachers have a significant impact on the academic, socio-emotional, and developmental outcomes of students.

There is wide-ranging literature on teacher effectiveness, most of which does not focus on urban student populations. Traditionally, research in this area has focused on a teacher's pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge with an emphasis on examining either a teacher's ability to design and implement instructional methods to enhance learning, or their possession of a substantial amount of content knowledge (Bulger, Mohr, & Walls, 2002). Related research on teacher effectiveness has focused on teacher instruction that is student-centered (Minor et al., 2002), acknowledging the necessity for teachers to understand child development and take into account their various academic, social, and cognitive needs (Franklin, 1992; Wentzel, 2002). Another area of literature on teacher effectiveness focuses on teacher communication (McKay, 1997; Sachs, 2004; Thibodeau et al., 2003) and specific micro-level behaviors of students. According to this body of research, effective teachers use communication to communicate high expectations, motivate students, and demonstrate respect (Bohn et al., 2004; McKay, 1997; Minor et al., 2002). What is missing, however, is information about how urban students perceive teacher communication practices, and which of these practices have the greatest impact on the teacher-student relationship-building process.

Teacher confirmation has been attributed to stronger relational bonds between teachers and students, thus positively impacting a variety of associated outcomes (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Noddings, 2003; Price, 2008). By researching how students in urban classrooms perceive their teachers' confirmation and disconfirmation behaviors, this study will contribute to the body of

literature regarding confirmation and disconfirmation. Furthermore, this study will also contribute to the existing research on urban teacher-student relationships.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how 26 urban teachers and 22 urban charter high school students perceived teacher confirmation and disconfirmation and its impact on teacher-student relationships. Through an examination of teacher communication practices, this study seeks to articulate how confirming and disconfirming behaviors are enacted in urban classrooms, and how teachers' and students' perceptions of these behaviors influence the relationship-building process.

Research has traditionally focused on the confirming and disconfirming practices of teachers and their impact on elementary school students. Because a study examining confirmation and disconfirmation as it relates to teacher-student relationships in urban classrooms has not yet been done, urban teachers have not been aware of how students perceive their behaviors. Furthermore, they have not been aware of the impact that students' perceptions of these behaviors is having on their ability to build positive relational bonds.

With urban students facing long-term academic, economic, and social challenges, encountering repeated disconfirmation from teachers may have far-reaching effects on their academic and developmental trajectory. Disconfirmation can threaten a student's self-concept leaving them feeling demeaned, inferior, and misunderstood (Sieburg, 1973). Conversely, confirmation can positively impact a student's self-concept, thus, leading to far-reaching positive academic and social outcomes.

It is important to indicate that although this topic can be studied by examining the interaction from student-to-teacher, this study specifically deals with the teacher-to-student relationship, where the students are viewed as the receivers and the teachers as the senders of communication messages.

Research Questions

Relationships develop, sustain, and terminate as a result of a series of interpersonal communication exchanges (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Teachers and students rely on communication to engage in both the relationship-building process and the learning process. Because confirmation and disconfirmation occur in almost every communication interaction (Laing, 1969), it is important that teachers are aware of how their communication (verbal and nonverbal) can affect their ability to build and sustain relationships with their students. The research questions guiding this study are:

RQ1. What are the confirming and disconfirming communication practices that teachers use in urban classrooms?

RQ2. How do teachers and students perceive that confirming practices are helping them in the development of positive teacher-student relationships within the urban classroom setting?

RQ3. How do teachers and students perceive that disconfirming practices are hindering them in the development of positive teacher-student relationships within the urban classroom setting?

In light of the continued debate surrounding how teachers can effectively teach and positively impact urban high school students, it is important to contribute to the body

of knowledge regarding teacher confirmation and disconfirmation in educational settings. This is imperative not only in the greater urban school reform debate, but it is also vital for urban educators working day-in and day-out to help their students succeed.

This study identified several confirming communication practices which were identified by participants as having a positive impact on teacher-student relationships. The practices identified were: honesty/openness, respect, praise/positive feedback, checking for understanding, and calmly correcting behaviors. In addition, several disconfirming communication practices were identified by participants as having a negative impact on teacher-student relationship. The practices identified were: disrespect, putting students on the spot, sarcasm, and aggressive tone.

These findings help advance the understanding of how vital teacher confirmation is to the relationship-building process specifically with urban students facing a multitude of socio-emotional, psychological, academic, and economic challenges. These findings demonstrated that while there was no one way to develop positive teacher-student relationships, there were specific factors which helped to increase the likelihood that teachers can build stronger bonds with their students.

Definition of Terms

Culture- Culture can be defined as “the values, beliefs, and attitudes that are relatively unique to a given group of individuals and expressed in communal ways” (Ortiz & Flanagan, 2002, p. 339)

Positive/Quality Relationships- Defined by “strong, frequent, and diverse interdependence that lasts over a considerable period of time” (Kelley et al., 1983)

Teacher-student relationships- Defined as caring and authentic relationships between teachers and the students.

Confirmation- Messages sent to another that communicate they are valued by the sender.

Disconfirmation- Messages sent to another that communicate they are not valued by the sender.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

For over twenty years researchers have dedicated considerable attention to understanding teacher-student relationships and the impact of these relationships on students' academic and socio-emotional development. Early research in this area by Pianta (1992) and Howes (1992) was influential in providing a theoretical basis for the significance of teacher-student relationships. This research originally conceptualized teacher-student relationships within a broader framework of adult-child relationships (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). They argued that open communication, instructional support, quality involvement (i.e. behavioral dimensions of involvement), and care and trust (i.e. emotional dimension), assists children in creating schemas, or cognitive representations with teachers that are similar to secure caregiver-child attachments. Furthermore, they argued that the quality of these cognitive representations may affect students' behavioral, academic, and social well-being. Efforts to understand and improve teacher-student relationships must attend to various component processes and how these processes interact with each other.

Relationships between teachers and students operate as part of a complex system, which depends on a variety of factors, including the context of the relationship, teacher and student attributes, attachment history of both the teacher and the student, internalized relational patterns that the teacher and student have developed, and the student's cognitive development and home environment (Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003; Sameroff, 1995; Ford & Lerner, 1992). Additional factors, such as life experiences,

student's behavior, and student's ability level at school entry may all affect how students interact with teachers. Research suggests that students' early environments affect their relational behavior in school, which subsequently affects the quality of the relationships they develop with their teachers (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999).

Other factors that may influence teacher-student relationship trajectories are socio-economic status and race. Students from lower socio-economic status households are more likely to be placed in classrooms that are more teacher-directed and less quality than their peers with greater socio-economic resources (Pianta et al., 2002). As a result, students may experience a less quality relationship with their teachers. Consistent with this notion, students identified as having higher levels of socio-economic risk display greater relational risk both in mother-child and teacher-student relationships (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004a).

The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of teachers and students regarding their interpersonal experiences of building relationships with each other. Teacher-student behavior was the central focus of this study as it was the primary unit of analysis. The literature in this chapter is organized into four sections: (a) a comprehensive review of the confirmation and disconfirmation frameworks, (b) cultural factors related to teacher-student relationship development, (c) communication factors related to teacher-student relationship development, and (d) confirming and disconfirming communication in the classroom. The literature presented in the following sections integrate concepts related to urban teacher effectiveness, culturally relevant pedagogy, teacher-student relationship development, and interpersonal and relational communication strategies.

Tensions, gaps, similarities, and differences are identified to provide a clear understanding of the way in which the current study extended the extant literature on urban teacher communication.

Conceptual Framework

There are numerous lenses through which to examine urban teacher-student relationships. This research is focused on the relational practices of teachers that foster and hinder the development of teacher-student relationships. For the purposes of this study, relational practices that foster the development of teacher-student relationships were defined as verbal and nonverbal actions of teachers that demonstrated that students were valued. Relational practices that hinder the development of teacher-student relationships were defined as verbal and nonverbal actions of teachers that demonstrated that students were not valued. Each of these definitions is consistent with the underlying assumptions of confirmation and disconfirmation, two concepts within the body of work on relational communication.

Foundation of Confirmation and Disconfirmation Research

In the 1950's, Martin Buber began writing about the validation of another's existence, what we now know as confirmation (Cissna & Sieburg, 1981). He focused on what he called "man's personal dealings with one another" (Stewart, 2006, p. 681). According to Buber (1965) humans cannot exist without relational communication. That is, a person's existence is established based on their interaction or communication with another person. He called this the "interhuman" and argued that both people in a communication interaction must view each other as "beings" instead of "objects" (Buber,

1965). When this happens, people engage in dialogue that affirms their existence as being valued and understood. This perspective has influenced what is now known as interpersonal communication.

Confirmation is believed to be essential during communication exchanges because it is an important aspect of the “interhuman” (Buber, 1957; Campbell et al., 2009). Buber’s (1957) perspective consistently underscored the importance of confirmation, claiming that the level of “humanness” in a society is based upon the extent to which its constituents confirm one another. Ultimately, confirmation is needed in order to achieve the “interhuman.”

Martin Buber’s (1957) theorizing about confirmation has influenced scholars who began applying his ideas to fields outside of religion and philosophy. R.D. Laing (1961) applied confirmation to the field of psychiatry and extended Buber’s foundational ideas by establishing different types of confirmation. Through ongoing research of Buber’s concept of confirmation, Laing found that the actions taken by one individual can have an affect on the feelings of acknowledgement, recognition, and endorsement of another. Moreover, Laing (1961) defined confirmation as “a process through which individuals are ‘endorsed’ by others, typically through recognition and acknowledgment” (Sieburg, 1973, p.2). He also postulated that both confirmation and disconfirmation could be experienced through tactile, visual, and auditory modes (p. 3)

Although Buber focused primarily on confirmation, Laing studied disconfirmation and its effect on interpersonal interactions. He defined disconfirmation as “attempts to constrain the other’s freedom, to force him to act in the way we desire,

but with ultimate lack of concern, with indifference to the other's own existence or destiny" (as cited in Sieburg, 1973, p.3). As a result of Laing's ideas surrounding disconfirmation, it was determined that disconfirmation could have detrimental effects on individuals if experienced consistently over time (Cissna & Sieburg, 1981). Laing describes how disconfirmation can be enacted in parent-child interactions:

one whose existence or authenticity has been subjected to subtle, but persistent, mutilation, often quite unwittingly... regardless of how he feels or acts, his feelings are denuded of validity, his acts are stripped of their motives, intentions and consequences, the situation is robbed of its meaning for him, so that he is totally mystified and alienated (as cited in Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967, p. 87).

Watzlawick, Bavelas, and Jackson (1967) built upon Laing's work in their seminal piece, *Pragmatics of Human Communication*. In this work, they applied confirmation and disconfirmation to the field of psychology. Watzlawick et al. (1967) introduced the idea that human communication occurs on two levels: content and relational. The content level represents the words being said during a communication interaction. The relational level represents the meaning behind the message (the meta-message), that is, the underlying meaning behind the content level and what it says about the relationship the two people in the communication interaction have. It is at this relational level that confirmation and disconfirmation have the greatest impact.

The guiding principles of confirmation and disconfirmation were established by the scholars named above: Buber (1957), Laing (1969), and Watzlawick et al. 1967). As a result of their work, two theories of confirmation have been developed, along with several tools for measuring confirmation and disconfirmation in various settings. The next section will discuss two theories of confirmation developed by Evelyn Sieburg and

Carl Larson. Sieburg's theory was initially created for use in the speech communication field (Cissna, 1976; Sieburg, 1973). Larson created the second theory which incorporated both confirmation and disconfirmation (Cissna, 1976). The following section presents information regarding studies that have examined the development of confirmation and disconfirmation.

Elements of Confirmation and Disconfirmation

Confirmation and disconfirmation have been applied to psychology, philosophy, and theology prior to the 1970's (Buber, 1957, Laing, 1969; Watzlawick et al., 1967). Evelyn Sieburg applied confirmation and disconfirmation to the speech communication field (Cissna, 1976; Sieburg, 1973). Sieburg compiled a list of forty possible responses in human communication. She refined the list from forty responses to twenty-four by eliminating duplicate responses. The final product was a survey that she distributed to establish which types of responses were favored (confirmation) and which were not favored (disconfirmation). Survey results showed that the following were considered confirming responses: direct response, agreement, clarification, supportive response, and expression of positive feelings. "Agreement" was eliminated from the list because Buber (1957) and Laing (1969) believed agreement and disagreement were not necessarily indicators of confirmation or disconfirmation. The following were considered disconfirming responses, "imperviousness, interruption, irrelevant response, tangential response, and unclear response" (Sieburg, 1973, p. 7).

Sieburg further developed the work of Watzlawick et al. (1967) by deciding to get rid of rejection, keep confirmation (but call it dialog), and divide disconfirmation into

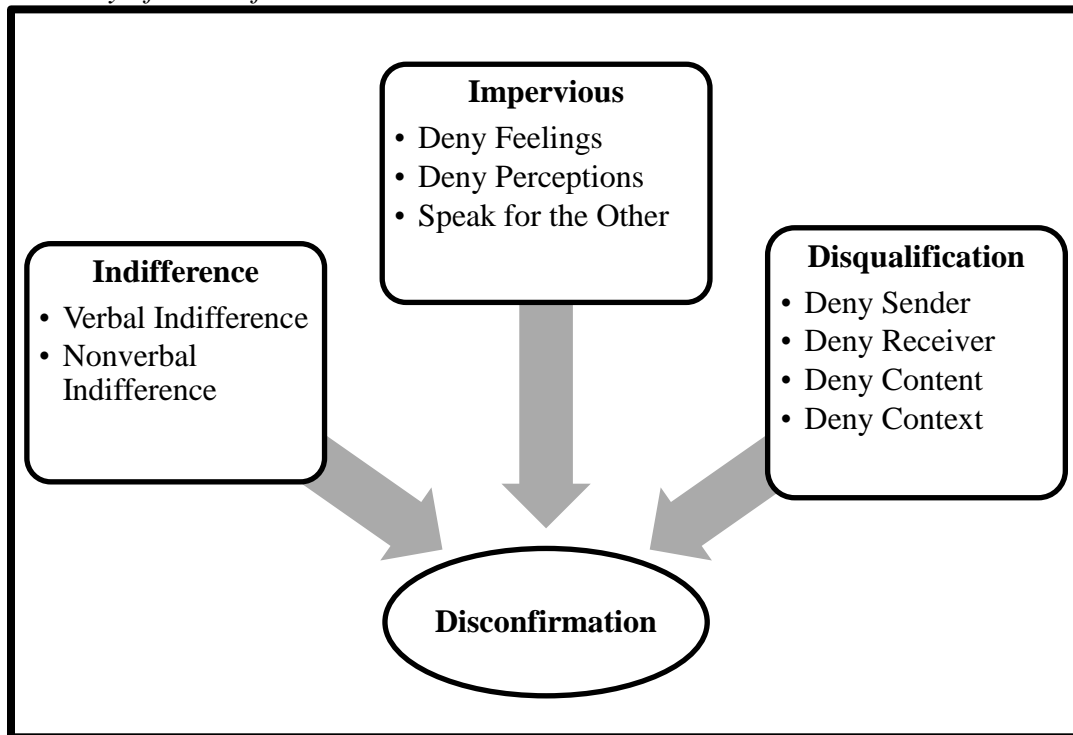
three categories: indifference, disqualification, and imperviousness (Sieburg, 1973).

Sieburg's final four response categories and their communication definitions are below:

1. Dialog (confirmation) – recognizes or endorses the other, acknowledges communication, accepts other's self-experience, seeks involvement, speaks when reply is expected, listens without interruption, responds relevantly and directly, uses personal language, shares self-experience, congruent verbal and nonverbal behavior.
2. Indifference (disconfirmation)– denies existence of the other, rejection of communication through silence when a reply is expected, monologue, absent or inappropriate nonverbal responses, disruptive interjections, interruptions, avoidance of self-expression or eye contact, physical distancing.
3. Impervious (disconfirmation) – denies the self-experience of the other through a lack of awareness of another's perceptions, distortion of another's self-image or emotional expression, interpretation, and evaluation.
4. Disqualification (disconfirmation) – inhibits communication through irrelevant response, tangential responses, unclear communication, ambiguity, and contradictions. (Cissna & Sieburg, 1981, pp. 432-437).

Figure 2.1

Summary of Disconfirmation



After further refinement of her theory, Sieburg (1973) revised the dialog category into three sub-categories: recognition, acknowledgment, and endorsement. She then paid attention to the four meta-messages that were found within confirming and disconfirming responses. The following is a description of Sieburg's identified relational messages:

1. First confirming meta-message - "You exist"
Corresponding disconfirming meta-message - "You do not exist"
2. Second confirming meta-message - "You are worthwhile"
Corresponding disconfirming meta-message - "You do not matter"
3. Third confirming meta-message - "I accept your way of perceiving"

Corresponding disconfirming meta-message – “I deny your way of perceiving”

4. Fourth confirming meta-message – “We are relating”

Corresponding disconfirming meta-message – “We are not relating”

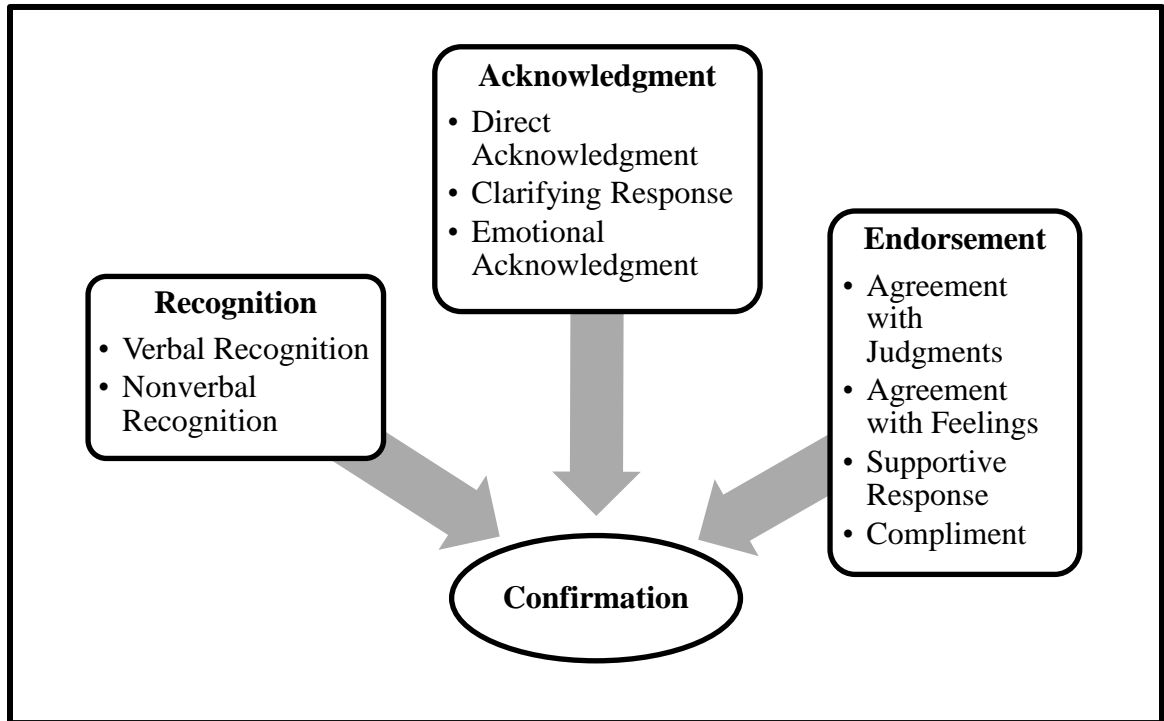
(Cissna, 1976, p. 6).

Sieburg’s theory was useful in explicating what confirmation and disconfirmation was, but she was interested in also learning why certain behaviors were perceived as being either confirming or disconfirming by people. She utilized the symbolic interactionism theory, which postulates that people assign their own meaning and feelings to another’s actions. Through her research, Sieburg concluded that people interpret and perceive certain behaviors in the same way. Sieburg’s focus on meta-messages and the relational aspects of communication helped the application of confirmation and disconfirmation to an interpersonal level. Her developed theory and research on confirmation and disconfirmation is considered an invaluable contribution to the field of speech communication.

Along with Sieburg (1973), Carl Larson and Frank Dance worked together to determine the “aspects of the ‘linking function’ in human communication at the interpersonal level” (Cissna, 1976, p. 8). The linking function is the way “humans ‘link’ themselves to others through establishing a relationship between one’s self and others” (p. 8). They were interested in studying the way in which “individuals perceive themselves and others’ communication at different levels of acceptance and rejection in their interpersonal relationships” (Stumpe, 1992, p.). The term “rejection” as Larson used

Figure 2.2

Summary of Confirmation



it is different from the term “rejection” utilized by Watzlawick et al. (1967), rather, it is more consistent with Sieburg’s (1973) definition of “disconfirmation.” Because Larson and Dance’s (1976) research was aligned with Sieburg’s research on human communication, it became viewed as a secondary theory of confirmation (Cissna, 1976, p. 8).

Larson and Dance’s (1976) theory is based on the premise that risk is involved with communication acts because of the varying degrees of disclosure involved in communication exchanges (Cissna, 1976). However, Larson and Dance (1976) did not

believe that every communication exchange involves acceptance (confirmation) or rejection (disconfirmation), he put forth the idea that acceptance or rejection of one's self-image only occurs when responses cause "an orientation shift away from the content of a message and toward an evaluation of either one's own or the other's self" (Cissna, 1976, p. 12). In that regard, Larson and Dance's (1976) theory is in alignment with Sieburg's theory in that they both take into account the meta-messages of a communication exchange.

With regard to meta-messages, Larson and Dance (1976) focused on the perspective of the receiver of the message – the person whose self-image may be either accepted or rejected. Larson and Dance's list of the four possible responses are: (a) Explicit Acceptance – positive evaluation of a person or communicative content; (b) Implicit Acceptance – clarifying responses, expressions of positive feelings, or direct response; (c) Explicit Rejection – negative evaluation of a person or overt dismissal of communication content; and (d) Implicit Rejection – interruptions, imperviousness, irrelevant responses, or tangential responses (Cissna, 1976).

The next component of Larson and Dance's (1976) theory deals with the impact that acceptance and rejection has on the receiver. If the receiver perceives rejection, there are three possible reactions that the receiver could enact: evaluate the sender, amplify the aspect of his self-image that is being rejected, or salvage any remaining aspects of his or her self-image. The reaction of the receiver is dependent upon "the certainty of one's self-image, the importance of the other person, and the consistency of the other's responses" (Cissna, 1976, p. 13).

Sieburg (1973) and Dance and Larson (1976) both developed theories that are useful in understanding interpersonal communication exchanges. Sieburg (1973) focused on the aspects, levels, and meta-messages of confirmation and disconfirmation by assigning them to groups, whereas Larson and Dance focused on the responses that cause shifts within the conversation that invoke feelings of either acceptance or rejection. Larson also created a description of the three ways in which a receiver's self-image can be impacted by accepting or rejecting language.

The primary difference between Sieburg (1973), and Larson and Dance (1976) was that the former believed confirmation and disconfirmation could occur in varying levels, while the latter believed there were no degrees of confirmation or disconfirmation (Cissna, 1976). Larson also disagreed that every communication message could be considered either confirming or disconfirming. Connected to this idea, Laing and Cissna align more with Sieburg's position. According to Laing, every interpersonal action "is either predominately validating, confirming, encouraging, supportive, enhancing, or it is invalidating, denying, discouraging, undermining and constricting" (p. 34). Both Sieburg's and Larson and Dance's theories are applied to interpersonal communication exchanges today. They provide the theoretical foundation necessary to navigate the groundwork established by scholars such as Buber, Laing, and Watzlawick et al. It was appropriate for this study to utilize confirmation and disconfirmation as a framework to examine the intricate back-and-forth interactions of teachers and students in the classroom. Each element of confirmation and disconfirmation aided in the initial categorization of teachers' relational practices during the data collection phase.

Culture and Teacher-Student Relationship Development

There are a myriad of factors that influence teacher-student relationship development, which leaves a huge task for teachers; especially teachers of high-risk students who experience multiple external barriers to success. The next section seeks to provide deeper insight into how teachers of culturally diverse, high-risk students employ relational strategies that have a positive impact on their academic, socio-emotional, and psychological health.

The notion of culture brings forth a variety of connotations and definitions. It is essential to have a general understanding of culture, and to understand that culture is a word frequently used in education (Erickson, 2001). Beyond the anthropological definitions of culture, social science researchers have explained culture in terms of education as the set of ideas, beliefs, and acquired knowledge that are passed on through teaching and learning--- both consciously and unconsciously (Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht & Lindsley, 2006, Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). With regard to this study, it is important to consistently re-examine how culture impacts the classroom environment. Literature on culturally relevant pedagogy offers us a closer look at the practices of culturally sensitive teachers of African American students. Although not explicitly stated in the theory, culturally relevant practices have clear connections to quality teacher-student relationships and can be used to inform our understanding of these relationships in diverse school settings.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In her study of eight successful teachers of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1994) attributed their effectiveness to what she called culturally relevant pedagogy. She conceptualized the term as a “pedagogy that empowered students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 17-18). In 1995, she published two articles that laid the groundwork for CRP. She determined that the theory relied on three specific criteria: academic success, cultural competence, and critical or sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Additionally, she emphasized those criteria by defining CRP as a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that school perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 469). Because of the varied ways in which teachers utilized academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness differently, Ladson-Billings later presented three theoretical underpinnings that broadly defined the teaching behaviors that would satisfy the criteria of a culturally relevant pedagogue.

Subsequent research using CRP as a theoretical framework utilized varying definitions of the term. For example, CRP has been defined as a way to use students’ cultures and strengths to bridge school achievement (Boutte & Hill, 2006), and to recognize students’ home cultures, promote collaboration among peers, hold high standards, and connect home life with school experiences (Neuman, 1999). There is general agreement among culturally relevant pedagogues as how the theory is utilized in

structuring classroom management, facilitating learning, and providing multiple opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, and helping students maintain their own culture while navigating in the mainstream culture (Siwatu, 2007). However, the aforementioned list does not account for one of the major components of SRP, which is to challenge issues of power and openly confront racial and social injustices (Gay, 2000).

Howard (2001) elicited his own theoretical framework for CRP proposing three criteria that comprised a conceptual framework for teaching African American students. This framework included communication styles, culture and learning, and perceptions of knowledge. According to Howard, culturally relevant pedagogues were sensitive to the students' use of expressive individualism, emphasized collaboration and the collective good, and possessed a critical view of knowledge. Others adapted their understanding of CRP in even more ways. Although the definitions of CRP differ, the overall framework is useful in identifying various teacher behaviors that foster quality teacher-student relationships with African American students.

Urban Teacher Effectiveness

Literature on urban teacher effectiveness extends the work of CRP scholars by providing a more nuanced look at the effective behaviors of teachers of urban students. Where CRP scholars focus on the ethnic identity of students, urban teacher effectiveness research is concerned with the context of students' learning environments.

Scholars in urban education have identified several attributes of teachers as indicators of their potential success in urban settings. These characteristics include beliefs and perceptions about self and others, and the personal values and morals that

guide teachers' thinking and behavior. Education researchers have consistently identified the following four attributes of effective urban teachers: (a) sociocultural awareness, (b) contextual interpersonal skills, and (c) perceived efficacy.

Sociocultural Awareness

Sociocultural awareness is an essential quality for teacher success in urban school settings. Gay (1995) defines sociocultural awareness as the identification, acceptance, and affirmation of one's own and other's cultural identity (Gay, 1995). This awareness creates a genuine trust in the inherent quality of human nature that manifests itself as a teacher's respect and faith in all students (Haberman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995, Zeichner, 1996). Teachers who display sociocultural awareness view students' experiences as valuable and meaningful and take steps to integrate the realities of their students' life, experience, and culture into the classroom and curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Zeichner, 1996).

Contextual Interpersonal Skills

Effective urban teachers show evidence of strong interpersonal skills, which enables them to perceive and respond to the complexities of the urban environment through supportive communication, attitudes, and beliefs. Contextual interpersonal skills are influenced by the teacher's previous experiences with individuals from diverse social, ethnic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds (Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992). These personal experiences serve as the lens through which all future interactions are viewed and developed. Effective urban teachers possess attitudes that are accepting of divergent opinions and experiences. Furthermore, effective urban teachers work together with other

education professionals and the community to develop support systems for student needs as well as their own professional growth (Guyton & Hidalgo, 1995). Ultimately, these interpersonal skills aid teachers in developing a sense of connectedness with their students and their students' community (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Perceived Efficacy

Finally, perceived efficacy is another predictor of urban teacher success. Efficacy is defined as the teacher's perceptions of personal influence and power over factors that contribute to student learning (Guskey & Passaro, 1994). Perceived efficacy influences a teacher's decision to attempt a task and the teacher's perception of whether he or she can complete the task successfully. A few characteristics of teachers who possess high perceived efficacy include integrity, high standards for self and students, taking responsibility for student motivation and learning, persistence, and assumptions of success (Gay, 1995; Haberman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Now that research has been presented regarding cultural factors that impact their behaviors, attitudes, and actions toward students, it is important to identify some of the broad cultural communication norms that may impact the manner in which a teacher communicates with his or her students. To accomplish this, I will utilize the concepts of low context and high context cultures developed by Edward T. Hall (1976).

High-Context and Low-Context Cultures

Hall (1976) introduced a dominant cultural dimension called 'context' to examine the relationship between communication and culture. He was interested in building upon the need to understand the factors that foster or hinder effective communication between

individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Hall and Hall (1990) integrated three primary concepts: context, information, and meaning. Each concept utilized context as a system of meaning for information exchanges between groups of people or within a group of people. They further argued that context is entrenched in information for the purpose of creating meaning within a message. That is, without relevant information regarding the context, a message is considered to have no meaning. Hall's context dimension provides a framework that facilitates the understanding of non-verbal communication, which is situational and important to high-context cultures, and verbal communication, which is important to low context cultures.

Ishii, Reyes, and Kitayama (2003) found that Americans attend more to verbal messages than nonverbal messages. On the contrary, Japanese attend more to nonverbal messages than verbal messages. This suggests that Americans prefer direct and explicit communication, while Japanese prefer indirect and implicit communication. People in high-context cultures are better at interpreting messages from others without full descriptions, due to the implicit shared information. In high-context cultures, people are attuned to information about the context because they are expected to use information for communication, whereas low-context cultures rely on the meaning of words to attach context to the interaction. Figure 2.1 shows a breakdown of common low-context and high-context cultures and attributes.

What can high-context and low-context communication teach us about teacher-student relationships? When examining teacher-student interactions, critical information about how teachers and students may be (mis)interpreting communication based on their

primary designation as high-context or low-context can provide a deeper understanding of the interaction context. For example, low-context White teachers who more concerned with task completion and rule-oriented decision-making may unintentionally disrespect Latino students who are more concerned with relationship-building and relational decision-making. Hall's framework can assist in providing deeper insights into interactions.

Figure 2.3

Low-Context and High-Context Cultures

	Low-Context	High-Context
Example Countries	US, UK, Canada, Germany, Denmark, Norway	Japan, China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France, Italy, Spain
Business Outlook	Competitive	Cooperative
Work Ethic	Task-oriented	Relationship-oriented
Work Style	Individualistic	Team-oriented
Employee Desires	Individual achievement	Team achievement
Relationships	Many, looser, short-term	Fewer, tighter, long-term
Decision Process	Logical, linear, rule-oriented	Intuitive, relational
Communication	Verbal over Non-verbal	Non-verbal over Verbal
Planning Horizons	More explicit, written, formal	More implicit, oral, informal
Sense of Time	Present/Future-oriented	Deep respect for the past
View of Change	Change over tradition	Tradition over change
Knowledge	Explicit, conscious	Implicit, not fully conscious
Learning	Knowledge is transferable (above the waterline)	Knowledge is situational (below the waterline)

Hall, Edward T. "High Context and Low Context Societies." Beyond Culture. Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1981.

Culture and communication are linked in many ways. The previous literature sought to illuminate what we know about how culture connects with teacher-student relationships. The following section focuses on aspects of communication that are relevant to understanding the interactional context of relationships. The goal of this section is to examine additional relational communication behaviors of teachers that impact their relationships with students.

Communication and Teacher-Student Relationship Development

Control, Trust, and Intimacy

The communication that occurs between teachers and students is often described as interpersonal in nature (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Interpersonal communication occurs when predictions are based on a psychological level of analysis, rather than cultural or sociological levels of analysis (Miller & Steinberg, 1975). That is, people communicate with each other as individuals rather than with regard to their roles (sociological level) or the cultural groups they belong to (cultural level). In the classroom, teachers and student often communicate on the sociological level—as a result of their roles. Thus, the psychological level of communication would be most likely to occur outside of the classroom. Millar and Rogers (1976) described interpersonal relationships in terms of three relational dimensions: (a) control, (b) level of intimacy, and (c) amount of trust.

Control

The control dimension of relationships, as described by Millar and Rogers (1976) represents a significant portion of the communication that occurs between a teacher and

student. This dimension is “concerned with who has the right to direct, delimit, and define the actions of the interpersonal system in the presently experienced spatial-temporal situation” (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p. 91). Traditionally, teachers hold the majority of power and control in the classroom and typically have greater status than students. According to Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen (1988) argued that through resisting teachers, students too have power in the classroom. Moreover, students have power when they are empowering students (Frymier, Shulman, & Houser, 1996). Teacher can share control with students by providing them with choices and allowing them to have input into the content covered or other aspects of the class. Frymier et al. (1996) found that students who were empowered by teachers also reported feeling more motivated to study to study and reported performing more learning indicators. Control is an important dimension of teacher-student relationships.

Intimacy

Millar and Rogers (1976) identified intimacy as another interpersonal dimension of relationships. Intimacy has been traditionally linked to romantic relationships and hasn't been seen as relevant in understanding teacher-student relationships. Intimacy refers to, “...the degree to which each person uses the other as a source of self-confirmation and the affective evaluation of the self-confirmation” (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p. 93). Many would agree that an appropriate amount of distance between teachers and students is necessary; however, intimacy as defined by Wood (2002) as feelings of connectedness and closeness between individuals is an appropriate way of

conceptualizing intimacy in terms of teacher-student relationships. Another important element in the teacher-student relationship is trust.

Trust

Trust is often seen via the use of a variety of communication behaviors. Millar and Rogers (1976) argued that trust exists in a relationship if both participants have manifested specific behaviors that indicate reliance and/or dependence on one another, faith in one another, and certain levels of expectation in each other. Trust has been viewed as an important element in the instructional context, as a dimension of credibility (Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Nadler & Nadler, 2001) or as an outcome of effective teacher communication (Wooten & McCroskey, 1996). The relational dimensions of control, intimacy, and trust are defining characteristics of relationships (Millar & Rogers, 1976).

Care

Noddings proposed the idea that teachers must “care for” students rather than “care about” them. Noddings argued that academic achievement was not the sole indicator of educational outcomes and reframed outcomes as aims- what one wishes to accomplish and to whose benefit—and “happiness”:

Education, by its very nature, should help people to develop their best selves—to become people with pleasing talents, useful and satisfying occupations, self-understanding, sound character, a host of appreciations, and a commitment to continuous learning. A large part of our obligation as educators is to help students understand the wonders and complexities of happiness, to raise questions about it, and to explore promising possibilities responsibly. (Noddings, 2003, p.23)

In addition, she argues that in the teacher-student relationship, the teacher's role as the carer is to be attentive to the students' "assumed" and "expressed" needs (Noddings, 2012). Teachers who address students' assumed needs focus primarily on meeting their academic needs, while teachers who address students' expressed needs focus on their non-academic needs. The teacher-student relationship can have a positive impact when students address both their academic and non-academic needs (Noddings, 2012).

Noddings (2002) identified four aspects of care-based education, each representing a way of "caring for" students; encouraging their "goodness" as people; nurturing their social, emotional, and academic growth; and helping them understand happiness. These components are modeling, dialog and attention, practice, and confirmation. Most relevant to this study are modeling, dialog and attention.

Modeling

Noddings argues that teachers often claim to value and practice modeling but may do so in the detached manner of an exemplar: in effect, modeling "caring about" teaching rather than "caring for" others. Noddings was insistent that "we have to show in our modeling what it means to car" (p. 16) by monitoring the effect one's behavior has on others and asking, "Is our response adequate? Could we have put what we have said better? Has our act helped or hindered?" (p. 16).

Effective teachers were competent at incorporating elements of students' cultural identities into content and pedagogy. They possess a command of the social structures, cultural metaphors, and rituals that are a part of their students' lives. Having this level of competence allows teachers to link various cultural elements seamlessly into classroom

discussions, and informal interactions with students (Bonner, 2009; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2007; Ulicci, 2009). Furthermore, effective teachers have interpersonal and pedagogical competencies to help students' success in the classroom. They communicate direct, concrete instructions and show students how to carry them out (Brown, 2004; LeMoy, 2010; Ross, Bondy, Galligan, & Hambacher, 2008). In addition, they monitor student behavior (Evertson, 1989) and helped students understand expectations without embarrassing them (Garza, 2009). When students make mistakes, effective teachers expressed concern but focused energy on whatever it took to help students succeed academically and socially (Garza, 2009). In essence, these teachers modeled "caring for" by showing respect and appreciation for cultural diversity (Brown, 2004; Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2006; Price, 2006) and through their own deep understanding (Bogotch, Miron, & Murry, 1998; Dunn, 2010; Milner & Tenore, 2010).

Dialog and Attention

Noddings also paid attention to dialog and attention as a means to build relationships, describing this process in terms of teachers participating in an ongoing self-reflection and monitoring of the effects of their actions (Noddings, 2002, p. 19). When teachers engage in authentic dialog and attention, relationship building intersects with opportunities for teachers to model "caring for" skills and for students to practice them. Effective teachers are able to respond to their students' wants and needs through developing deep connections with them that incorporates self-reflection. Research identifies numerous strategies teachers can use to develop these connections.

Informal conversation is a basic strategy that involves teachers sharing personal stories and interests (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Dunn, 2010). During these conversations, teachers learn about students' background and interests (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2006) by encouraging them to talk about their own interests, hobbies, and families (Gay, 2002). Another strategy was to learn students' cultural expressions and conversational styles for later use in personal discussions and classroom instruction (Bondy et al., 2007; Bonner, 2009; Sharan, 2010). In addition, teachers would introduce students to various cultural words and expressions (Ullucci, 2009). Care-based theory and pedagogical practice intersect when teachers view dialog and attention as essential parts of the teaching and learning relationship and work conscientiously to nurture them. It is important to note that true dialog and attention cannot be replaced by informal pleasantries without making conscious efforts to learn anything about the other's interests or culture.

Conflict and Communication

John Gottman (1994) a psychologist and marriage communication researcher developed four types of behaviors that are destructive to marital relationships. His contribution to the field of communication is applicable to the study of teacher-student relationships because of the relational nature of his work. In the next section I provide a brief summary of Gottman's concepts utilizing original examples of how his concepts could be enacted by teachers.

The first destructive behavior is criticism. This involves the attack of the other's personality or character. This is the most common destructive behavior that can be

characterized by expressing dissatisfaction through complaints in a way that assaults the other's identity. For example, rather than a teacher saying, "I don't like when you forget your assignments." Criticism would be, "You never have it together! Where are your assignments? Emphasis is on what is being said and how the message is being sent.

The second destructive behavior is contempt. This involves a higher level of criticism that includes insults and psychologically abusive messages. Contemptuous behaviors include nonverbal signals like eye-rolling and sneering, and verbal messages like name calling and mocking.

The third destructive behavior is defensiveness. This involves the receiver of the contemptuous message becoming defensive. The defensiveness escalates the conflict and can result in a cycle of contemptuous behavior followed by more defensiveness. Common defensive behaviors include making excuses, disagreeing with the other, and denying responsibility.

Individuals in personal and professional relationships encounter conflict at some point during the trajectory of their relational journey. Teachers who enact any of the four behaviors above may have a negative impact on the relationship-building process with their students. Furthermore, they may find themselves stuck in a cycle of conflict that creates permanent damage to the interpersonal, which impacts the student's academic performance. The following section presents literature on another form of negative communication that can be applied to our understanding of how communication impacts interpersonal relationships.

Microaggressions

In the multicultural counseling literature, Sue (2007) describes negative relational messages that are similar to disconfirmations, but differ in that they are not always intentional. Although primarily used in the counseling context, microaggressions can be applied to our understanding of teacher-student relationships and communication.

Microaggressions are "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages" to a target group (Sue et al., 2007). They are often subtle, and can be manifested in the verbal, nonverbal, visual, or behavioral realm. In addition, they are often enacted automatically and unconsciously (Sue et al., 2007). They are "brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have a harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group" (Sue et al., 2007).

Oftentimes people inherit negative feelings and beliefs about members of marginalized groups (i.e. people of color, women, homosexuals) as a result of the socialization process in the United States (Sue, 2004), where biased attitudes and stereotypes reinforce group hierarchy (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2006). Microaggressions can also be delivered environmentally through the physical setting of target groups where they are made to feel unwelcome, isolated, unsafe, and alienated. Research suggests that the socialization process culturally conditions racist, sexist, and heterosexist attitudes and behaviors in well intentioned individuals, and these biases are often automatically enacted without conscious awareness, particularly for those who endorse egalitarian values (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2002).

The following can be said about microaggressions:

- They tend to be subtle, unintentional, and indirect.
- They often occur in situations where there are alternative explanations.
- They represent unconscious and ingrained biased beliefs and attitudes.
- They are more likely to occur when people pretend not to notice differences, thereby denying that race, gender, or sexual orientation had anything to do with their actions. (Sue et al., 2007)

There are three types of microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults are blatant verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attacks intended to convey discriminatory and biased sentiments. Microassaults are related to covert racism, sexism, and heterosexism. Microinsults are unintentional behaviors or verbal comments that convey rudeness or insensitivity or demean a person's racial heritage, gender, or sexual orientation. These subtle comments are characterized by an insulting hidden message. Microinvalidations are verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or dismiss the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of the target group. Like microinsults, they are unintentional and usually outside of the communicator's awareness.

Since all people inherit bias about various identity groups through cultural conditioning in the United States, no one, including helping professionals, is free from these biases (Ridley, 2005). Rather than helping, some professionals may be contributing to the oppressive experiences of culturally diverse clients or students.

Effects of Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are harmful to people of color regardless of the intention of the other person. The dehumanizing impact of racial microaggressions can lead to anger, depression, discontent, and an overall dissatisfaction with life. In an early study of microaggressions in high schools, researchers attempted to correlate the microaggressions of White teachers against students of color with the behavior and academic performance of the students (Cook, 1975). Causation was not proven, however, data showed that microaggressions of teachers caused students to feel “frustrated, inadequate, shamed, and resentful” (Cook, 1975, p. 21). In a recent study, Sue et al. (2009) conducted focus groups on college campuses to examine how teachers managed microaggressions in the classroom and the impact it had on classroom dialogue. Findings suggested that when White teachers had difficulty managing microaggressions, a racial climate was created, thus, minimizing students’ abilities to have honest and open dialogue.

It is evident from the relevant research that microaggressions are detrimental to the relationship building process between teachers and students. The final section of the chapter returns to confirmation and disconfirmation, the framework guiding this study. In this section a more thorough summary is provided regarding the types of positive and negative messages that influence interpersonal interactions.

Confirmation and Disconfirmation in the Classroom

Based on the framework developed by the scholars mentioned above, tools were created to measure confirmation and disconfirmation in various contexts and disciplines.

There are two primary ways confirmation and disconfirmations are measured: (a) observational coding of communication encounters, and (b) identifying the degree to which one perceives confirmation and disconfirmation (Cissna, 1976). With observation, the researcher watches and codes the statements made during communication exchanges to determine the extent to which each party confirms or disconfirms the other. The coders must have extensive training on the types of confirmation and disconfirmation to produce accurate results. Two measurement tools used in the observational method are the Interpersonal Responsiveness Category System, created by Sieburg, and the Confirmation and Disconfirmation Rating Instrument (CDRI) created by Garving and Kennedy (1986).

The second method for measuring confirmation and disconfirmation is to determine whether or not a person perceives confirmation and disconfirmation in a number of relational contexts. Sieburg (1973) developed the Perceived Confirmation Scale, which is widely used to measure confirmation and disconfirmation in this way. This instrument is a six-item Likert scale in which respondents answer questions regarding specific communication exchanges with others. The questions range from, “he/she is aware of me,” to, “he or she isn’t at all interested in what I have to say” (Cissna, 1976; Sieburg, 1973). This tool has been used and applied to research on supervisor/subordinate, teacher/student, husband/wife, and even doctor/nurse relationships.

The healthcare field has applied the concepts of confirmation and disconfirmation to further examine the relationship between nurses and doctors (Garvin & Kennedy,

1986). In their research, Garvin and Kennedy (1986) used a simulated environment where a nurse and a doctor (who did not normally work together) met to discuss a medical issue not related to their jobs. Their study found that 87% of the communication between a nurse and a doctor contained confirming statements. Unfortunately, because their study was conducted in a simulated environment, they concluded that their results were atypical of real-life nurse-doctor interactions (Garvin & Kennedy, 1986).

Ellis (2000) studied confirmation and disconfirmation in the classroom, with a focus on the different implications of teacher confirmation on the students. In her study, Ellis (2000) measured the relationships between perceived teacher confirmation, affective learning, and cognitive learning. She had students rate their teacher's behaviors and later developed the Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS) for continued use in educational settings. As a result of her study, Ellis (2000) has concluded that teacher confirmation directly influences affective learning, and affective learning directly influences cognitive learning. Moreover, in her more recent study, Ellis (2004) focused on exploring (a) students' feelings of confirmation or disconfirmation as a function of perceived teacher behaviors, and (b) whether teacher confirmation behaviors occur in hierarchically arranged clusters. A learning model comprised of teacher confirmation, receiver apprehension, motivation, affective learning, and cognitive learning was tested. Also using the TCS, results showed that 61% percent of the variance in students' feelings of confirmation were attributable to perceived teacher confirmation behavior. Moreover, 50% of the variance in students' receiver apprehension was attributable to teacher confirmation. Ellis (2000; 2004) claimed that teacher confirmation directly influenced

student emotions and behavior. The influence of teacher confirmation on motivation, affective learning, and cognitive learning was indirect, mediated through receiver apprehension (Ellis, 2004). However, the implication of the statistical results of Ellis (2000, 2004) were not based on the explanation and perspective of students, which can provide a more appropriate comprehension and rationale of the study findings.

In more recent studies, the role of confirmation and disconfirmation have also been studied in the field of education (Cambell et al., 2009; Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). In the study of Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010), it was claimed that teachers must foster a supportive and connected learning environment in order for students to succeed academically. Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010), examined teacher confirmation behaviors and student-to-student connectedness as predictors of students' willingness to talk in class and preparedness for class (e.g. reading assigned chapters). However, with the instrument used in the Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010) study, the explanation for the numerical correspondence and statistical relationships were not obtained based on the perspectives of the respondents themselves; thus, limiting the authors to gathering the implications of the results of the study from existing literature; hence, it is better to gather in-depth qualitative data through interviews to better explain the existence of the relationships that the existing studies have provided.

In another study that is similar to Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010), Campbell et al. (2009) explored the relationships between teacher confirmation and student effort within the collegiate level. Campbell et al. (2009) have defined teacher confirmation as any form of communication from teachers to students with an objective

of indicating if students are endorsed, recognized, and valued in relation to college students' efforts to perform well academically. Teacher confirmation and students' efforts were both measured using Likert-type self-report questionnaires. Using Pearson correlation, the relationship between teacher confirmation and student effort was .37 ($p < .01$). It was also found that there were no significant differences between the extent of teacher confirmation reported by male and female students or in students' ratings of male and female professors, and there were no significant interaction effects by gender in the relationship between teacher confirmation and college students' efforts (Campbell et al., 2009). Collectively, student gender, student age, class size, student's general effort, and interest in the class, accounted for approximately 28% of the variance in student effort. Campbell et al. (2009) has demonstrated that teacher confirmation has a cross-sectional association with student effort. Furthermore, Campbell et al. found that future teachers may need training in teacher confirmation skills. However, based on the statistical results of the study, the authors were also unable to explain the results based on the perspectives of the respondents.

Research on how confirmation and disconfirmation have been applied to educational settings will be presented in this section of the literature review. To date, minimal studies have been conducted in face-to-face classroom settings concerning confirmation and disconfirmation. Sundell (1972) and Leth (1977) conducted the early studies on confirmation and disconfirmation in the classroom. They each studied different aspects of communication exchanges and contributed meaningful insight into teacher-student interactions. Sundell's (1972) research presented the idea that

confirmation is “contagious,” and those teachers who were more confirming tended to have students who displayed more confirming behaviors as well (Cissna, 1976). Leth’s (1977) research focused on perceived confirmation and found that perceived confirmation contributed to positive teacher-student relationships (Ellis, 2000).

Researchers, Ellis (2000, 2004) and Goodboy and Myers (2008) studied the effects that confirmation has on student’s learning, engagement, and feelings of confirmation. Ellis developed a tool called the Teacher Confirmation Scale (TCS) that measures perceived confirmation of teacher behavior. Her tool has been statistically valid and has been utilized in subsequent research studies. The TCS is a helpful instrument because it transforms subjective traits such as acceptance, trust, and respect into specific teacher behaviors that can be measured by students. Confirmation has been linked to increased levels of student learning. Ellis also provided statistical evidence showing that cognitive learning is linked to affective learning, which is linked to confirmation, therefore demonstrating that confirmation is indirectly linked to cognitive learning.

Ellis’ (2004) research showed that confirming teacher behaviors are linked to increased feelings of confirmation within students. To find this out, Ellis surveyed 295 college students and asked them to rate their interactions with one of their professors. Students received Sieburg’s (1973) Perceived Confirmation Scale, and Ellis’ Teacher Confirmation Scale. Results showed that 60% of the students showed their feelings of confirmation were related to the confirmation behaviors exhibited by their professors (Ellis, 2004).

Perceived confirming teacher behaviors have been linked to decreased levels of receiver apprehension in students and increased levels of classroom participation and quality of relating to an instructor (Ellis, 2004; Goodboy & Myers, 2008). Goodboy and Myers (2008) saw the similarities in studies of teacher caring and teacher confirmation and identified the benefits that stem from confirmation are almost identical to those stemming from teacher care.

In another related study, Goldman et al. (2014) focused on the relationship between teacher confirmation behaviors (e.g. responding to questions, demonstrating interest, interactive teaching style) and student learning outcomes (e.g. affective learning, student motivation). The contribution of Goldman et al. (2014) to existing literature was that they studied confirmation and compared its role and influence to students and teachers between three relevant cultures: (a) Turkey, (b) China, and (c) the United States. From the study of Goldman et al. (2014), findings have revealed that the confirmation-learning outcome relationship was significantly stronger in the United States and China than it was in Turkey. Based on the findings, it can be implied that teacher confirmation behavior is an effective teaching behavior that is relevant across different cultures; however, the level and significance of its importance on student learning seems to be more important for American culture as reflect in the results from studies of American students. The Goldman et al.'s (2014) study is relevant to the current study as it provides support for the claim that there is a relationship between teacher confirmation and students' academic performance, especially among American students. However,

Goldman et al. (2014) did not consider the perspectives of teachers and students in an in-depth manner of data gathering in order to further substantiate the results of their study.

The research on confirmation and disconfirmation in the classroom is minimal as reflected in the limited recent studies gathered and included in this review. What has been researched, however, has provided valuable insights into how confirmation and disconfirmation affect student engagement, cognitive learning, and teacher-student relationships. Additional research on confirmation and disconfirmation in the classroom is needed to expand upon what is currently known in this area because it has been proven to be effective in improving the development of teacher-student relationships. One specific area that this study will address is how teacher behaviors are perceived by teachers and students as confirming or disconfirming in urban high school classrooms.

Conclusion

This review highlights what is known regarding the intersection of culture, communication, and relationships. Bodies of literature were selected to identify the relational behaviors of teachers and non-teachers that impact the relationship-building process. Research was presented on culturally relevant teaching, urban teacher effectiveness, cross-cultural communication, relational dimensions of relationships, care, conflict and communication, microaggressions, and confirmation and disconfirmation. There is a central pitfall to the literature presented in this chapter. While available research has done an exceptional job of identifying behaviors that positively and negatively impact various relationships, minimal research is present regarding urban teacher-student relationships. Thus, questions still exist regarding how teachers of urban

students can develop and sustain positive relationships with their students. As this time a study has not examined teacher-student relationships through the lens of confirmation and disconfirmation. The current study utilized a qualitative design to identify relational communication practices that foster and hinder the development of teacher-student relationships in urban classrooms.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers and students perceived teacher confirmation and disconfirmation in urban classroom settings. This study was conducted with a more specific focus on 9th-grade urban classrooms. Research suggests that the quality of relationships that students develop with their teachers has important implications for their emotional and behavioral well-being (Hughes, Cavell, & Jackson, 1999); Pianta & Steinberg, 1992). Furthermore, research shows that the quality of teacher-student relationships often deteriorates after the transition from elementary to middle school, and even more in high school (National Research Council, 2004; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989). This decline can have a direct effect on adolescents' social and emotional health. Students who reported increasing levels of teacher support during adolescence had decreases in depression and increases in self-esteem (Reddy et al., 2003).

The primary assumption of this qualitative study is that reality itself is social, emerging in the language used to refer to individuals' subjective experience in and perception of that world (Mead, 1913). Individual perception of reality is subjective, and research is an investigation of the process by which reality is interpreted by individual. Creswell (1994) explained, "Qualitative research is interpretive research" (p.147).

Research Questions

In this section I articulate the rationale for the study's research questions. Each question was designed based on gaps in extant literature regarding the impact of teacher communication practices on the development of teacher-student relationships in urban classrooms. The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1. What are the confirming and disconfirming communication practices that teachers use in urban classrooms?

RQ2. How do teachers and students perceive that confirming practices are helping them in the development of positive teacher-student relationships within the urban classroom setting?

RQ3. How do teachers and students perceive that disconfirming practices are hindering them in the development of positive teacher-student relationships within the urban classroom setting?

Research Question 1- What are the confirming and disconfirming communication practices that teachers use in urban classrooms?

The first research question sought to address three distinct gaps: a) the virtually non-existent research on urban teacher confirmation, b) the lack of research focused on teacher disconfirmation, and c) studies that utilize researcher observations as a significant data source for studying teacher confirmation and disconfirmation. Extant literature on teacher confirmation has yet to focus on urban school context. This study seeks to identify significant discrepancies in how teacher confirmation is perceived by urban students. In addition, there are virtually no studies that focus equally on confirmation and disconfirmation or solely on disconfirmation. Instead, what is known about

disconfirmation has been presented as a cursory afterthought. The methods in this study sought to provide a more in-depth opportunity for observations of teacher disconfirmation. Finally, relevant research on confirmation has focused on student and teacher reports via questionnaires as a basis for measuring teacher confirmation behaviors. It was the goal of this study to utilize observations as an additional data source. In order to answer the first research question, classroom observations were used to identify and classify teachers' confirming and disconfirming communication practices.

Research Question 2- How do teachers and students perceive that confirming practices are helping them in the development of positive teacher-student relationships within the urban classroom setting?

This research question sought to elicit information about how both teachers and students perceive teacher confirmation. Furthermore, this question sought to identify specific communication practices that teachers and students perceived as helping the development of their teacher-student relationships. Special attention was given to elucidating differences in the teacher and student perceptions. In order to answer this question, focus groups were conducted with teacher and student participants.

Research Question 3- How do teachers and students perceive that disconfirming practices are hindering them in the development of positive teacher-student relationships within the urban classroom setting?

This research question sought to elicit information about how both teachers and students perceive teacher disconfirmation. Specifically, this question sought to identify the specific communication practices that teachers and students perceived as hindering the development of their teacher-student relationships. Special attention was given to

elucidating differences in the teacher and student perceptions. In order to answer this question, focus groups were conducted with teacher and student participants.

Rationale for Methodology

A qualitative methodology is appropriate for this study because qualitative methodology helps in shaping a worldview, individuals perceive culture, history, personal experiences, socioeconomic status, and community or organizational dynamics differently (Leedy & Ormond, 2010; Polit & Beck, 2010). In essence, this shapes a person's perception, or worldview of any given phenomena. For this study, the phenomenon of interest is the confirmation and disconfirmation based on the perceptions of teachers and students in an urban high school. Qualitative research offers its readers the advantage of gathering and presenting rich data, especially when data gathering is performed through interviews (Moretti et al., 2011).

The data for this study was collected through the use of three methods: classroom observations, teacher and student focus groups, and teacher questionnaires. Classroom observations were key in providing information about how the teachers and students interacted in their natural environment. I observed teachers interacting with different groups of students during different times of the day, month, and school year. I was able to get a sense for each teacher's style. I also used classroom observation data to identify specific confirming and disconfirming communication patterns of urban teachers. In addition, I wanted to see the teachers in action prior to hearing their perspectives regarding their own behavior. The goal was to identify potential contradictions based on inconsistent teacher reports of their perceptions.

Teacher and student focus groups were utilized to gather information about how teachers and students perceived teacher communication practices. The focus group format was important because teachers and students were able to respond to the questions presented as well as each other. Each focus group interaction was dynamic and provided unique insights into the varying levels that each teacher and student agreed or disagreed with each other. I also observed the emotional reaction of each teacher and student who as responses to the focus group questions were given.

At one site, the teachers were unable to meet for a focus group. A questionnaire was emailed to each teacher individually with the focus group questions that were used for live teacher focus group sessions. Each teacher typed their answers into the form provided and emailed them back for data analysis.

The Role of the Researcher

An important concern is the role of the researcher in relation to the participants. In order for the researcher to be effective, they must be aware of his or her own biases and must take steps to mitigate them. The challenge for me was to avoid bias due to my experience attending an urban high school, and my experience working with urban youth in urban school settings over the years. Corbin and Strauss (2008) addressed the situation in which the researcher and participants “share a common culture” and asked, because “it is impossible to completely void our minds” of the common experience, “why not put that experience to good use?” (p. 80). They suggested that the researcher’s experience be used to “bring up other possibilities of meaning” (p. 80). In this project I used my reading

and experience to inform the classroom observations. I do believe that my experiences and knowledge-base enhanced the possibility of creative thinking and theory-generating.

LaRossa (2005) noted that the literature itself can be seen as part of the data to be considered. I decided, however, that the various aspects of the research design helped the data collection and analysis process without an overreliance on the literature or the forcing of categories. In particular, my awareness of the sources of my beliefs regarding teacher-student relationships in urban classrooms, the relative lack of literature regarding teacher-student relationships in urban school settings, my plan to consider both the literature and the data of the research as material to subject to constant comparative analysis for the purpose of generating categories, concepts, hypotheses, and theory, and my creation of focus group questions to elicit exploratory answers rather than yes-no responses based on categories from the literature.

The data analysis and collection were guided by ethical principles. Every attempt was made to hold fast to the use of the appropriate methods and procedure that guide qualitative studies. Participants were guaranteed that their privacy would be protected throughout each phase of this study.

Research Sites

The following section provides detail regarding how I gained access to each of my research sites. Immediately following, I provide a description of each of the school sites.

Selection of Research Sites

The initial aim was to conduct the current study in public high schools across the city. Several weeks were spent calling and emailing schools, however, no progress was made with gaining access for the study. As a result, a decision was made to try to gain access to charter high schools, where leadership was more accessible. There was a local charter school near my home that I always drove by. I decided to find the contact information for their principal online so I could request access to the school for the study. I received a response from the principal of MCHS within two weeks of my initial email. She was interested in a phone call to discuss details of the study. We set an appointment for a phone call a few weeks later. After speaking with her for a few minutes she agreed to allow my access to the school. I emailed her back and forth to coordinate the dates and times I was planning on researching at her school site.

Sandiford Charter High School was another site for the study. One of my former professors founded the school, so I made contact with her to ask about conducting research at the school. She approved my request after reviewing the scope of the study. I was referred to a senior administrator to coordinate the data collection schedule.

Young Charter High School was two blocks away from my university during the time of the study. Several professors and administrators from my university sat on their board and were active participants in their educational programs. Although, I did not know anyone personally from YCHS, I decided to reach out regarding the study since I know they were familiar with my academic department and program. I made contact

with the school director who immediately referred me to another administrator who assisted me with the coordination of data collection efforts at that site.

Capital Charter High School was suggested as a potential research site by a colleague. Her son worked at the school, which was in its first year of operation. She provided me with her son's information, who provided me with access to their principal. The principal requested a phone call to discuss the scope of the study. After speaking with him, I received approval to conduct research at CCHS.

Each principal provided written approval of the study to be conducted at their site. These letters were submitted to the Temple University Institutional Review Board along with the research proposal that was approved in February of 2012.

Metropolitan Charter High School

Metropolitan Chart High School (MCHS) was founded in 2000 by a coalition of community members. It is located in a predominantly Latino neighborhood and has over 90% Latino students in grades 6-12. At the time of this study over 1,100 students attended the school, with approximately 64 teachers on staff. MCHS follows a college-prep curriculum and offers honors classes for students in various subjects. Class size was approximately 22 students.

Sandiford Charter High School

Sandiford Charter High School (SCHS) opened its doors in 2009 and was founded by members of the African American community and infuses an African-centered pedagogical approach to learning. It is a k-12 school site with 15 teachers and approximately 500 low-income African American students. SCHS is also a college-prep

program that provides internship and academic support services to aid students in transitioning to college. Their African-centered approach is infused in their curriculum, practices and rituals, and school values. The class size at SCHS was approximately 18 students.

Capital Charter High School

Capital Charter High School (CCHS) was founded in 2012 and is one of 25 schools in a national Catholic school network. At the time of this study CCHS was in their first year of operation and had 125 9th grade students. Low-income African American and Latino students made up over 97% of their student population. CCHS is a workforce development program that provides students with employment opportunities through corporate partnerships. Each student works off-site during one school-day. Class size at CCHS was approximately 15 students.

Young Charter High School

Young Charter High School (YCHS) was founded in 1997 by members of the local business community. YCHS is a part of a national network of schools that serve former high school dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24. Approximately 200 low-income students attend YCHS to gain high school diplomas. Over 95% of students are African American or Latino. This particular research site was unique because of its population. Many of the students have jobs, children, and other adult obligations. For this reason, students have are given more flexibility with completing their academic work. There are also case managers and social workers on site to connect students to community resources. Classes are small (6-12 students) and teachers utilize a

combination of structured and self-directed activities to account for the varying levels of progress for each student. YCHS was the only site in this study that did not specifically focus on the 9th-grade population.

Participants

There were 48 participants in this study from four different charter schools in the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The age, race, gender, and grade level were collected through student demographic sheets. The race, gender, subject taught, and number of years taught were collected through teacher demographic sheets. This information was collected for the purpose of examining how certain biographical information may impact the interpretation of perceived confirmation and disconfirmation behaviors.

Purposive sampling was used because the objective of this study was to gain insight into the confirmation/disconfirmation phenomenon as perceived by individuals in urban classrooms (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Through this purposive sampling, there were two criteria required of the teachers: (1) must teach high school, and (2) must teach a major subject. No additional criteria regarding number of years taught gender, age, sex, or subject taught was applied to the teacher sample.

The teacher participants consisted of 22 9th-grade teachers: 17 white , and 5 African American; 16 female, and 6 male; 6 English, 7 Math, 4 Social Studies, 2 Science, and 3 special topic teachers; 10 teachers with 5 years or less teaching experience, and 12 with more than 5 years of teaching experience.

There were two criteria required of the students: (1) studies in schools in the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and (2) must be a 9th grader. No additional criteria

regarding number of gender, age, or sex was applied to the student sample. Student participants consisted of 26 9th-graders: 11 males, 15 females; 14 African American, and 12 Latinos ranging from age 13-16.

Data Collection Procedures

This study was conducted in four phases. The first phase included classroom observations and teacher and student focus groups at Metropolitan Charter High School. The second phase included teacher and student focus groups at Sandiford Charter High School. The third phase included classroom observations and teacher questionnaires at Capital Charter High School. The fourth phase included classroom observations and a teacher focus group at Young Charter High School. Because this study is one of the first on confirmation and disconfirmation in the urban context, phases were utilized to allow time for the researcher to examine and analyze data prior to the beginning of the next phase. After each phase, decisions were made as to what additional research methods were needed to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic. Furthermore, each phase introduced another school site to the study. Each school site had similar student populations; however each school model was distinctly different, which added varying insights into how communication behaviors were interpreted. The next section is not organized by phases, rather, it is organized by data collection method to provide a more streamlined view of the experience of teachers and students who participated in the study.

Classroom Observations

A total of 180 hours of classroom observations were conducted at all four research sites. Access to each site was gained with the assistance of various administrators (principals, program directors, program coordinators). Teachers were informed of the study and asked if they were willing to have the study conducted in their classrooms. During classroom observations, I sat in the back of the room in an attempt to remain out of direct site of the students. A digital audio recorder was used to capture verbal exchanges between teachers and students.

At MCHS a total of seven weeks and 42 hours were spent conducting classroom observations. During the first two weeks, a total of 12 hours of preliminary observations were conducted to become familiar with the school site. These observations provided additional contextual information about the urban charter high school culture in Philadelphia at the time. The remaining 30 hours of classroom observations at MCHS were divided equally among six 9th-grade teachers and happened over a period of 5 weeks. At CCHS a total of five 9th-grade teachers were observed for two hours a week over a period of three weeks. A total of 30 classroom observation hours were conducted at this site. At YCHS eight teachers were observed for two hours each week over a three week period. A total of 48 classroom observation hours were conducted. Because YCHS was a nontraditional high school, teachers could not be categorized as specializing in a particular grade level. Each teacher taught students at various academic levels.

Each teacher was observed unobtrusively during mornings and afternoons. This strategy was used to account for external factors like ‘time of day’ or ‘group of students’

that may have consistently affected a teacher's ability to utilize a variety of relational communication practices. Audio recording was used to capture all 180 hours of observations. Recordings were transcribed for analysis.

During classroom observations, an observation rubric was used to capture teacher-student interactions as they occurred in the moment. In an effort to organize observations, teachers' verbal and nonverbal behaviors were categorized in two ways, (1) teacher confirmation behaviors, and (2) teacher disconfirmation behaviors. In addition, students' reactions to the teachers' confirmation and disconfirmation behaviors were recorded. Collecting data on students' responses to teachers' communication was important in the interpretation of each communication interaction. For example, a teacher may communicate in a particular way with a student that is misinterpreted by me as disconfirming, while the student perceives it in an entirely different way.

It was important to audio record during classroom observations. Relational communication theory posits that there are two levels to each message, the content level and the relational level. The content level is the raw data or transcript of what one person is saying to another. The relational level is the meaning behind each message sent that provided information about the context of the relationship. To capture the content level of teacher-student interactions, transcripts of the audio from all classroom observations were analyzed. The observation rubric was utilized to gather information about the relational level of each interaction. Both forms of information were helpful in identifying discrepancies in my own interpretation of each communication practice. The following

section provides more detail into the classroom observations conducted at each school site.

Metropolitan Charter High School (MCHS)

On my first day of classroom observations, I walked into the school and immediately saw the large security desk situated in front of the front office. To my left and right there were sets of huge metal double doors. I could hear the voices of teachers and students beyond those walls, but I couldn't see them. I was greeted by the security guard who asked me to sign in and gave me a name tag. I was directed to go to the front office to receive my observation schedule. The secretary at the front desk greeted me with a huge smile, "Hi, we've been expecting you! Wow, you look young like one of these students. You go to Temple?" she asked with a slight Spanish accent. After a few minutes of talking about my study and my experiences at Temple, we were interrupted by an older man carrying a clip board and a walkie-talkie, "Ms. Baldwin, nice to meet you, I'm Mr. Gary, I'll take you to your first class." He walked me through the large double-doors down on the right, which I later learned was the 9th grade wing. We stopped at room 207 and he motioned for me to walk in. I peeked in the room and was waved in by the teacher Mrs. Bower, "Hi, you must be Brandi! Have a seat and make yourself at home. Class, this is the woman I told you about that is a student at Temple getting her PhD. Do you know what that is?" One student yelled, "a doctrine!" "Almost," the teacher said, "a doctorate... She's here because she's studying to be a doctor. Act normal and don't mind her, she is just doing observations." I was immediately aware of all of the brown faces in the room. Classes at MCHS were filled with predominantly Latino

students, some African American, and virtually no White Americans. Mrs. Bower was a white middle-aged woman with wavy blond hair who had over 13 years of experience in education. She had previously worked at the school and left for 7 years to work as a principal only to return back to MCHS as an English teacher. In a later conversation she shared that a job in administration wasn't for her.

Over the next several weeks, I observed Mrs. Bower's morning and afternoon classes. She was very structured and followed her daily routine to a "tee." She'd start each class with updates, and then return assignments. I remember one day in particular, when she decided to show the students the movie West Side story.

Mrs. Bower: Today we're watching the first part of West Side Story; does anyone know what that movie is about?

Student: It's pretty much the White gang against the Puerto Rican gang right?

Different Student: Yo, where's the Dominican gang?

Laughter erupted among the entire class. "5-4-3-2-1!" says Mrs. Bower, "Why am I yelling over your voices?" I soon learned that at MCHYS the "countdown" was used by most teachers as a signal for the students to calm down. Rather than using the countdown to give students an opportunity to quiet down, most teachers yelled the numbers out with a threatening tone. I never observed what happened after "1" if the students didn't calm down. The teachers who used that technique would move on to other threats or do the countdown again, which didn't seem effective. Although generally friendly, at times Mrs. Bower communicated with students in a stern manner. Based on their reactions to come of her language I identified the following communication interactions as disconfirming. On one day, a student had her head on the desk; it wasn't clear if she was sick or sleepy.

Mrs. Bower: Esther, are you okay?

Esther: Yes.

Mrs. Bower: Then why are you sleeping?

Esther: I'm not sleeping.

Mrs. Bower: Then pick your head up off the desk, thank you.

Esther was visibly embarrassed as evidenced by the look on her face. Other students in the classroom giggled and chattered about the fact that Esther got in trouble in front of everyone. That wasn't the only time Mrs. Bower reprimanded a student in front of their classmates. On another occasion Mrs. Bower is experiencing difficulty settling the students down. After a few rounds of the countdown she yells at a student in front of the entire class:

Mrs. Bower: First of all, put it down! Second of all you need to be paying attention!

Student: I am paying attention!

Mrs. Bower: No you're not, because you're looking at Jose!"

As with the last example, some students were giggling and making fun of the student. The entire climate of the classroom was impacted when Mrs. Bower reprimanded students in front of their peers. Not only did it take her twice as long to settle students back down, once settled many students weren't willing to participate in the activities. Mrs. Bower was very strict when it came to students being on task. The strategies she used to keep students on task were not effective and only brought the morale of the class down. Whenever a student spoke while she was speaking, she's interrupt, "How are you listening to me and talking at the same time?" "Eyes up here... 5-4-3-2-1." For the next several weeks I observed Mrs. Bower's colleagues engaging with students. One teacher in particular spent a significant amount of time reprimanding her students in some of the same ways that Mrs. Bower did.

I remember the first day I heard Ms. Cornell's voice. I was about five classrooms away from her class, and all I could hear was, "5-4-3-2-1! Students quiet down! Chatty Charlies... ssshhh!" She was an English teacher at MCHS that ran her classroom like a drill-sergeant.

Ms. Cornell: Let's go, it's time to recite vocabulary! Repeat after me! Alleviate!
Students: Alleviate!
Ms. Cornell: Again!
Students: Alleviate!
Ms. Cornell: Again!
Students: Alleviate!
Ms. Cornell: One more time!
Students: Alleviate!

Ms. Cornell continued reciting 10 vocabulary words in this way for the next several minutes. The yelling was overwhelming to hear, but it seemed to energize the students, in a nonproductive way. After the recitation was over, students were antsy and talking with each other. Ms. Cornell yells, "I need your attention! Let me see the whites of your eyeballs!" Most of the students don't listen; they continued talking to each other. For several weeks I observed Ms. Cornell's communication style. Below are examples from transcripts of things she said to her students on a regular basis.

Situation: Ms. Cornell asks students to turn their assignment in.
Ms. Cornell: This is my worst class in terms of turning in assignments and doing homework! 5-4-3-2-1, calm down!

Situation: Ms. Cornell tells the students instructions for their next assignment.
Ms. Cornell: Let's not lollygag, get started as soon as you can! Quickly, let's practice speed writing! Hurry up Chris! We have to get this done today!

Situation: Ms. Cornell prepares students for an interactive activity.
Ms. Cornell: Go! Stand up behind your desks.
Student Reaction: Students moan and groan because they don't want to get up.
Ms. Cornell: If you have a problem with standing up, I'll solve it with a demerit!"

Situation: Ms. Cornell has just finished giving instructions to students about their next assignment.

Ms. Cornell: Did you know that in order to take notes you have to write?
(sarcastic)

Ms. Cornell yelled during the entire class period. Her voice was always at an elevated level presumably because her students never fully quieted down. She seemed frazzled on most days and was constantly rushing from one activity to the next as if there was too much to do and not enough time. Another teacher at MCHS was similar to Ms. Cornell.

Mrs. Scottsdale was a middle-aged White woman with over 15 years of experience as a teacher. She taught Social Studies and worked at the school for four years. Before each class, Mrs. Scottsdale stood outside of her classroom sometimes blocking the door so students couldn't get in. It wasn't clear why she did this. For some students she moved right away, but for others, most of the males, she did not. As soon as class started Mrs. Scottsdale closed the door and walked over to her desk. On most days she'd sit down and appear to be doing paperwork, preparing for assignments, or typing on her computer. Students were giving no direction within the first 5-7 minutes that class started while Mrs. Scottsdale finalized her lessons. During that time, students became restless, antsy, and unfocused. When Mrs. Scottsdale was ready for class to begin, she'd bark an order at the students, "Chris, get up there and write an ingredient on the board!" Some students appeared intimidated by Mrs. Scottsdale, other seemed unbothered, and a few seemed annoyed and frustrated. Mrs. Scottsdale rarely told her students why they were doing an assignment. She communicated orders military style and expected them to comply. After several weeks observing Mrs. Scottsdale I noticed a pattern in her

behavior. She came across as angry most of the time. Many things that students did angered her and she seemed to be in a constant power struggle with those students who weren't appreciative of her communication style. Like Ms. Cornell, she spent much of her time asking students to quiet down. She'd retort, "Can we stop talking?" On other occasions she'd be sarcastic, "If we cannot control the volume, we will not watch any videos! I already told my other class that they don't have the magical gift of silent listening. Hold it together, now!" I observed Mrs. Scottsdale dismissive of many students who asked questions. One time a student asked her a question about one of their assignments. Mrs. Scottsdale's response was, "I'm not worried about that right now, let it go." On the same day another student asked for help with his in-class assignment and Mrs. Scottsdale's response was, "I understand that you need help, but I can't just make it my imperative as soon as I walk through the door." The student walked back to his desk, tore his assignment up and put it in the trash. During this interaction Mrs. Scottsdale was typing at her computer. She spent most of her time near her computer, yelling at students, and giving instructions to students while sitting down at her desk. When students got too loud she'd "ssshhh" them. When she noticed that students were off-task she'd snap her fingers at them as well. Students did not respond kindly to Mrs. Scottsdale's approach. Most students were disengaged and seem lost during her class period. They weren't receiving clear guidance and direction and seemed to get off task quickly without her standing at the front of the room. She didn't like noise and wanted students to be quiet while in class. On one occasion I observed her explicitly saying to

students, “Today, I don’t want to hear from you!” Even when students asked to go to the bathroom, she acted annoyed that students were talking.

Student: Can I go to the bathroom?

Mrs. Scottsdale: Is the pass there?

Student: Yes.

Mrs. Scottsdale: Then fill it out. (sarcasm)

I never got a chance to speak with Mrs. Scottsdale one-on-one. She seemed to avoid me at all costs. She said very little during the focus group, which will be discussed later on during this chapter.

Mrs. Jones

Mrs. Jones taught remedial math and had eight years of teaching experience at MCHS. Like most of her colleagues, Mrs. Jones was White and in her mid-thirties. In contrast to Ms. Bower and, Ms. Cornell, and Mrs. Scottsdale, Mrs. Jones was bubbly, cheerful, optimistic, and easy-going, almost to the point of being a push-over. At times she could have used communication that commanded a bit more authority. During the weeks that I observed her, most of the students were half-asleep. Their heads were frequently on their desks and Mrs. Jones didn’t ask them to sit up. When Mrs. Jones asked questions of the class, the same three students always responded. She rarely encouraged the more quiet students to participate. Because she didn’t actively direct students many side conversations developed during class. Rather than asking students to be quiet, Mrs. Jones would continue talking. There were times when 15 out of the 22 students were actively having side conversations. I had difficulty focusing on Mrs. Jones and I understood why so many students opted to go asleep rather than stay up and try to focus on the lesson with their peers making so much noise. Many of the students didn’t

even realize that she was trying to get their attention. After a few seconds, students would quiet down and Mrs. Jones would go back to teaching, only to find that after a minute or two the chatter started again.

I remember one occasion when Mrs. Jones attempted to motivate the students to participate more. During the entire class she made an effort to call on students who normally stayed quiet. The students would say, “I don’t know the answer” and she would ask one of her frequent participators to answer the question. During this class she also said things like, “Give your shoulder partner a high-five!” Only about 4 students actually gave a high-five to their partner. Mrs. Jones responded, “That’s it! Good guys!” She didn’t seem aware of the fact that the students weren’t interested in her lessons. It wasn’t clear to me whether she was ignoring the students’ disinterest or if she just wasn’t aware. For weeks I observed her going through lesson after lesson with the students who never fully engaged with the lesson. She was friendly and encouraging, but didn’t seem to have a connection with the students. Her focus remained on completing each lesson for the day. She didn’t add any creative touches to help spark additional interest in students like two of her other colleagues that I observed.

Mr. Bonner and Mr. O’Brien

Mr. Bonner and Mr. O’Brien were both Math teachers. They were the only 9th-grade teachers on staff who were Educate for American corps members. During the time of the study both of them were in their second and final year in Educate for America, which required them to teach in an urban school. Mr. Bonner was African American and Mr. O’Brien was White, both were in their mid-twenties and had less than three years of

teaching experience. Their classrooms were extremely different from their other colleagues. When I observed each of their classrooms the first thing I heard was music. Mr. Bonner would play Afro-cuban jazz music. Mr. O'Brien would play classical music. When students walked in each would address the students by Mr. or Misses and their last names. Mr. Bonner would even shake the hands of each of his students as they walked in the classroom. Mr. O'Brien would address students coming in late by saying, "Welcome, have a seat and get started. You haven't missed much." I could tell right away that both Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien valued natural consequences for the students. They spent far less time reprimanding students than some of their colleagues, partly due to their method for keeping students engaged and interested in the lesson.

Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien allowed students to work freely with each other. they encourage group thinking, teamwork, and partner assignments. If students had questions during the lesson they could either ask the teacher or ask their partner. Side conversations didn't receive a demerit in Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien's classes. They "policed" the students a lot less than some of the other teachers observed at MCHS. Both teachers set clear expectations and reinforced those expectations throughout the class. Mr. O'Brien would say, "I'll know you're finished when I see you white boards up." Mr. Bonner would say things like, "My expectation is that it remains silent until you are finished working." This was in stark contrast to the , "5-4-3-2-1!" that other teachers used to threaten students to silence. There were times when students were off-task and disruptive. Mr. Bonner would walk over to each student, kneel down, and whisper to them privately as not to interrupt the work of other students. After a quick check-in to

make sure that the students was clear about expectations, Mr. Bonner would walk away. The student would be back on task.

The students in Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien's classes had freedom; freedom to ask questions, take breaks, work with peers, and prioritize their work. Some students worked on make-up homework while others moved ahead with work for the next day. There was a sense of calm among the students as well. They were more focused than I'd ever seen in any other class, jazz music in the background and all. Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien talked pop culture with the students, cracked jokes, and chimed in on their student-to-student conversations.

Positive communication was a large part of Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien's communication interactions with students. Each also used "we" language more often than not, which seemed to assist in the development of an inclusive learning environment. Here are several examples of ways that Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien praised and encouraged the students.

One activity that he did frequently was a timed problem solving task. Students would have one minute to complete a math problem. He would tell them the instructions, "Find the slope intercept for this problem. You can use a calculator or use the graph to answer manually." After the minute was up, he'd yell, "Answers up!" Students would hold up dry-erase white boards with their answer. "Very good folks, excellent folks. You guys are all-stars!" After observing how Mr. Bonner effortlessly incorporated numerous verbal affirmations with students, I decided to count the number affirmations he used during a thirty-minute period. On average, Mr. Bonner communicated 22 affirmations

every half hour. I noticed that students seemed energized, and his usage of affirmations helped to keep them engaged and focused during difficult lessons. The following is a list of confirming messages that Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien used regularly with students.

- Let's be good like we were yesterday.
- Ask questions if you need to.
- I like how you're coming up with those answers!
- If your calculator doesn't look like mine, that's okay. Call me over and I will help you out.
- Very good folks, excellent folks!
- Good job, be proud of yourselves!
- Good job to Juan who got 100% on his exit ticket.
- For those who weren't here, do your best today, you'll be fine.
- Good job guys!
- Try your best, you can do it.

Everything didn't go perfectly in Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien's classes. Students acted out in the same ways they did in other classes. What was distinctively different was how their behaviors were addressed. On one occasion two students weren't participating in a classroom activity. Mr. O'Brien noticed and said to the entire class, "You cannot choose to participate. It's okay if you get it wrong, but you cannot choose not to participate." The students he was referring to quickly got back on task and were attentive for the rest of the period. During another day of observation, Mr. Bonner's students were talking more than usual. Mr. Bonner responded, "I need everyone tracking me. All eyes on me. Because I'm not sure how well we're focusing I'm asking that we do this silently."

Capital Charter High School

CCHS was the only site that had all 9th-graders. It was also in its first year of operation at the time of the study. Students went to work for one day a week off-site at a

local business to learn career skills. They also participated in an advisory period weekly to talk about their personal and academic progress. As a common practice, teachers ate with students during a catered family-style lunch daily. I attended a lunch period on one occasion and saw that teachers and students were talking about a variety of topics most of which related to their personal lives. These unique elements of the CCHS program seemed to contribute to the overall culture of the school. Unlike, at the other sites, there wasn't a clear teacher-student divide present at CCHS. Everyone seemed to be a part of one big family.

I arrived at CCHS, a large stone gray building that looked like a Catholic church. I learned later that in-fact it had inhabited a Catholic school prior to CCHS opening. I walked to the front office and checked-in to receive a guest pass. The halls were quiet, the walls were bare, and the school was very calm. A slight echo reverberated as I walked upstairs to the main floor where the classes were. I was escorted by a nun, an older White woman about 65 years old named Sis. Mary. She volunteered at the school a few times a week. When we reached the main floor I started to hear chatter from behind the walls. I was already given instructions to attend Latin first with Ms. Bradshaw, so I went directly to her classroom.

There was a significant difference in teacher-student interactions at CCHS than at any other research site in this study. At CCHS, I observed that in the classroom, every teacher enacted a communication style that centered on instructing students about academic content. That is, teachers at CCHS seemed to never use disconfirming language, and only confirmed students primarily through verbal and nonverbal

recognition. For example, if a student raised their hand to answer or ask a question, the teachers would call on the student and acknowledge their relational bid. Beyond that, teachers at CCHS rarely used confirming language with students while in the classroom. This was the only research site where, in the classroom, teachers' communication focused almost solely on the academic instruction. In addition, students at CCHS were very quiet and also seemed focused on academic instruction while in class. Classes were generally quiet. Students rarely spoke to each other during class. Everyone's attention was focused on the teacher in every class.

Observing the culture of communication at CCHS demonstrated that teachers can build and sustain quality relationships with students through out-of-class communication that affirms students' self-worth and value. Although I observed minimal confirming communication practices from CCHS teachers within the classroom setting, that did not denote a lack of quality teacher-student relationships among teachers and students at the school. Furthermore, the culture of communication at CCHS demonstrated that a school's climate can be manipulated to foster the development of quality teacher-student relationships. Requiring that teachers eat with students at lunch, and allocating time for students to talk openly about their academic and personal progress during an advisory session are two ways that the school climate of CCHS was adapted to ensure additional opportunities for students to feel valued and appreciated.

Young Charter High School

YCHS was on the third floor of a large office building in the city. The same building housed other community-based programs. During my first visit I walked into

the lobby and stopped at a small security desk to sign-in. The guard was texting on his phone, not paying much attention to who was coming in and out. I could tell that either visitors rarely came in or rarely signed in judging by the last signature on the visitor log from over a month earlier. After signing in I walked toward the elevators and stood with a group of about seven young African American adults. They wore book bags and had head phones in. Some carried books in their hands. When the elevator finally arrived several minutes later I realized that it could only hold about five people comfortably. I rushed to claim my spot in the elevator and was soon pressed all the way in the back corner when each of the young students packed into the elevator. As the doors closed everyone remained quiet for the ride. I could hear the faint sound of hip hop music coming from one of the students' headphones. When the door opened the quiet from within the elevator was quickly replaced by sounds of students laughing, joking, and talking. The students from the elevator quickly dispersed, some going left, others going to the right. I walked out of the elevator and didn't see any signs that I was actually in a school. No lockers, no front office, no "attendant." In stark contrast to the other schools I'd visited thus far, these students looked like adults. I could tell that some of the students were older than I. The students I saw were either African American or Latino. I wandered around until I saw a door ajar with three White women sitting and chatting. I introduced myself and asked for Ms. Taylor, my contact for the study. They gave me directions to her office, and I was on my way. I found out later that the three women were case managers for the students. I made my way to Ms. Taylor's office, which was down the hall and around the corner. The building seemed like more of a labyrinth than a

school. I tried my best to blend in with the students. The hallways were bustling and I was overwhelmed by the noise level and the various activities going on. I finally made it to Ms. Taylor's office. When I knocked on the door she came out and welcomed me with open arms, "You must be Brandi. We are so excited to have you!" She gave me a hug and asked me to sit down in her office. We talked for a few minutes about the study and she gave me details about the students and the YCHS program. After we were done she took me to my first classroom. In the next section I will provide some insight into the teachers at YCHS. Students at YCHS were given opportunities to work independently at their own pace during class. For this reason, during the majority of observation hours, there was very little teacher-student interaction. I will highlight some significant teacher-student interactions from this site.

Mr. Gregory was one of the math teachers. He was White and in his mid-thirties. He had eight years of teaching experience and was at YCHS for a few years. He had positive interactions with his students. During the times that I observed his class students worked independently on various assignments. If they needed help, he was available to assist them. At times a student would ask a question and he'd ask the entire class to listen to him explain the answer. When it was quiet for several minutes, he'd ask, "Anyone need help?" An average of 6 students attended his class. For that reason he had minimal disruptions and didn't have to manage the class in the ways teachers did at other sites. I could tell that Mr. Gregory's students viewed him as a resource to help them through any difficulties. His role was that of a facilitator, rather than an instructor of content. Ms. Andersen, Mr. O'Neill, and Ms. Kudro were similar. Their students spent

time working on assignments. When they needed help the teachers stepped in to provide assistance. These group of teachers didn't "police" the students. The classroom environment was similar to that of a college classroom. I'd here teachers say, "Think about how this connects to real life." When students struggled with thinking critically about topics, Ms. Anderson would say, "Remember, you are the expert. Really think about it." The students were encouraged to push themselves to think deeper about the topics. When students provided a comment during discussions, Mr. O'Neill would say, "Thank you for sharing." There was a clear sign of mutual respect between teachers and students at YCHS. Most of the students in the classes were engaged and behaved as if they wanted to be there. There was one exception that stood out during my visits.

Ms. Gracen was the Language Arts teacher at YCHS; a White woman in her mid-twenties with four years of teaching experience. I was able to speak with her prior to her class starting and she was very outgoing. She complimented me on the work I was doing with the study and told me how important it was that teachers and students build positive relationships. To my surprise, once class started, her behavior toward students was far less confirming than I expected.

As soon as the bell rang to signal the start of class, a switch seemed to flip with Ms. Gracen. She seemed rushed. She gave the students instructions on their first activity without greeting them or addressing expectations or "house-keeping" updates. The students were still getting settled when she started giving instructions for the first activity. Two of the seven students looked visibly bothered. It wasn't clear if they were mad, angry, or sad. What was evident was that they were not in a good mood. Unfortunately

Ms. Gracen either didn't see it or didn't care, because she called on one of the girls to provide an answer from the worksheet assignment.

Ms. Gracen: What'd you get Anita?

Anita: I don't know.

Ms. Gracen: You always fall short and get it wrong and say you don't know. Have faith in yourself!

Anita: (silence)

I could tell that Anita had a pattern of saying she didn't know the answer. Ms. Gracen was clearly frustrated by this pattern and let Anita know it, in front of the entire class. She then proceeded to address the entire class. "I'm tired of this. When things get tough you give up. That's the reason why most of you can't get this." Some of the students started grumbling, "Yo, what she talkin' 'bout?" The students seemed resistant to the assignment because it was difficult. Ms. Gracen seemed tied to the process. She was determined to get through each of the Language Arts worksheets for the day. She walks over to her desk, let's out a sigh, and lashes out, "I'm more than willing to help if you are nice to me!" One student immediately asks, "Will you help me?" But before Ms. Gracen responds she overhears another student complaining about the work. "You need to shut your mouth! Don't crumple your paper either. This work must get done!" For the rest of the period Ms. Gracen was livid. "You are giving up on yourselves!" The students grew increasingly frustrated and Ms. Gracen's patience was dwindling. "It seems like we're losing focus class," Ms. Gracen says. "We're not, it's just hard" another student responds. Ms. Gracen seemed unaware that she was contributing to the increased tension among the students. Below is an example of an interaction that went on during this class.

Ms. Gracen: We need to move! Stop being so impatient with yourself. I'm not gonna come up with the words for you.

Student: I want to change my person for my essay.

Ms. Gracen. Not an option!

Student B: This is my mom calling, can I answer the phone?

Ms. Gracen: No!

Student B: It's my mom though

Ms. Gracen: I don't care who it is! Matter of fact, it's your essay, not mine. If you have time for phone calls, it's on you. Class, it's your grade not mine, but I do care. I'm skipping numbers 17 and 18.

Student C: Why?

Ms. Gracen: Because I only have five days left.

During the other two weeks that I observed Ms. Gracen she was less irritable, but I could still sense that she was rushed.

Teacher Focus Groups

At MCHS, focus groups were held during the one-hour lunch period when teachers were not assigned to lunch duty. Focus groups were held in an empty classroom. Two separate one-hour on-site focus groups were held on the same day with three teachers participating in each. Mrs. Bower (English), Mrs. Jones (Math), and Mr. O'Brien (Algebra) participated in one and Ms. Cornell (English), Mr. Bonner (Algebra), and Mrs. Scottsdale (Social Studies) participated in the other. This part of the process was not without its challenges. During this particular focus group there were many interruptions by students who came in and out of the classroom for supplies and their book bags. Student interruptions accounted for a loss of about ten minutes of actual teacher focus group discussion time.

At SCHS a focus group was scheduled with five teachers; however on the day of the focus groups only three teachers were available. The focus groups lasted one hour with Ms. Garfield (English), Mrs. Ali (Leadership), and Ms. Jenner (History). Similar to the experience at MCHS, students consistently interrupted the focus group with questions for the teachers about assignments and other work.

At YCHS, focus groups were conducted with eight teachers: Mr. Gregory (Math), Mrs. Haines (Math), Ms. Miles (Math), Ms. Kudro (Science), Ms. Andersen (Social Studies), Ms. Gracen (Language Arts), and Mr. O'Neill (Social Studies). The focus group was held after school once students were dismissed. The focus group lasted approximately one hour and had no interruptions.

Teachers were told that they would be asked a series of open-ended questions about their relationship-building experiences with students. They were also informed that their responses would be audio recorded. Consent to audio-tape forms were collected from each teacher prior to the start of the focus group. Teachers were asked the following semi-structured questions during the focus groups:

- How do you define quality teacher-student relationships?
- What practices have you successfully used to build quality relationships with your students?
- What practices have not worked to build quality relationships with your students?
- How does culture impact the relationship-building process? Do you think culture matters when it comes to building teacher-student relationships?

After each question was posed, teachers were given an opportunity to respond. Each teacher provided a response for each question. A natural conversation developed and teachers began to organically share their perspectives spending more time on certain

questions and less on others. Teachers were given time to elaborate on their thoughts and further explain their perspectives. Short-hand notes were taken throughout the interview to record select responses. After transcribing the full interviews, a more thorough analysis was conducted on the data.

Teacher Questionnaire

A teacher questionnaire was provided to the teachers of CCHS because, during the time of the study, they were not available to participate in a focus group. Each teacher was emailed a questionnaire with the same questions teachers were asked during the focus groups:

- How do you define quality teacher-student relationships?
- What practices have you successfully used to build quality relationships with your students?
- What practices have not worked to build quality relationships with your students?
- How does culture impact the relationship-building process? Do you think culture matters when it comes to building teacher-student relationships?

Teachers were instructed to complete the questionnaires and return them electronically for analysis. Questionnaires were received from all five teachers at CCHS; Mr. Jacobson (Theology), Ms. Evergreen (Science), Mrs. Johnson (English), Mr. Krinsky (Algebra), and Ms. Bradshaw (Latin).

Student Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with 12 9th-grade students from MCHS. Teachers were given sign-up sheets to collect the names of students who were interested in participating. Students who signed up received parental consent and assent forms. A total of four male and eight female students participated in the focus group.

At SCHS, focus groups were conducted immediately following the teacher focus group. Students originally volunteered based on announcements the 9th grade teachers made at my request. All students who participated received consent and assent forms that were turned in prior to the focus group. A total of 14 students participated. There were seven female and seven male students present between the ages of 13 and 16. Three students identified themselves as Latino, and 11 students identified themselves as African American.

The student focus groups at both SCHS and MCHS lasted for one hour. Pizza, chips, cookies, and juice were provided for the students. No teachers or administrators were present during the focus groups. Once students were settled, I introduced myself and gave them an overview of the study. Many students were very interested in my background, schooling, and what it meant to be a doctoral student. Approximately five minutes were spent during each focus group, answering questions from the students. Before asking focus group questions, ground rules for participation were discussed. No student could interrupt another student, make a remark about another student's comment, or make fun of another student for what he or she said. Students agreed that the ground rules were fair and the focus groups began. Students were also asked to complete demographic sheets identifying their name, race, age, and gender.

In an effort to get as many perspectives as possible in the limited time that was allotted, students were asked to provide responses to each question in a round-robin format. Students could "pass" if they had no comment or did not want to answer a particular question. After initial responses were shared by each student, an opportunity

was given for them to elaborate further on their previous comments. Student responses were recorded on a flip chart. The student focus groups were very lively and students were eager to share their perspectives. Oftentimes while students were sharing their perspectives I'd hear another student chime in by saying, "yep" "mmm hmmm" or "that's right" indicating an agreement with what another student was saying. Students were asked the following questions during the focus groups:

- How do you define quality teacher-student relationships?
- Think about teachers who you have a close relationship with. What did they do to build that relationship with you?
- Think about teachers who you do not have a close relationship with. What did they do that hindered your ability to have a close relationship with them?
- How does culture impact the relationship-building process? Do you think culture matters when it comes to building teacher-student relationships?

During focus groups, students were excited to talk about the teachers who connected with them beyond the classroom. They shared stories that they knew about certain teachers; how many kids they had, where they lived, where their home-town was. Students shared that they liked the teachers who were down-to-earth and who shared personal stories about themselves. They equated connecting beyond the classroom with care and felt that teachers who took the time to share their own personal stories showed that they cared for them on a deeper level than teachers who didn't.

Data Analysis

At each phase of the data collection process, field notes, observation rubrics, and audio transcripts were analyzed. No technology was used to analyze and interpret the data. Teacher communication was the primary unit of analysis. Therefore transcripts were content analyzed to pull out messages of teachers. Each message was first sorted

into one of four categories: nonverbal confirming practices, verbal confirming practices, nonverbal disconfirming practices, and verbal disconfirming practices. I made sure to keep key indicators to help me keep track of who said each statement. For example, each of the statements in one of the four categories above also had a label which identified the individuals in the communication interaction (i.e. Ms. Krinsky talking to Jose). Once all of the data was sorted into each of these categories, tags were given to each phrase to specifically identify each type of confirming and disconfirming message. Phrases like “great job!” were categorized under confirmation and tagged “compliment.” Interactions when a teacher ignored a student’s request were categorized as disconfirmation and tagged “nonverbal indifference.” Once all data was sorted, I field notes were used to add deeper meaning to each phrase. For example, at times, I sorted interactions as disconfirmation based on the content-level (words spoken) of the message, and after reviewing field notes which had key information about the students’ reaction and response to the teacher’s words (i.e. the relational level of the messages), I realized that the phrase was not actually disconfirming. The relational communication framework supports the idea that communication is receiver-oriented. That is the interpretation of the message lies in the hands of the receiver. If a student does not perceive a communication interaction as disconfirming their identity, it is not disconfirmation. A challenge and limitation of the study is that subsequent follow-up data was not collected from students to cross-check my field notes. I relied solely on student’s verbal and nonverbal reactions to teachers’ messages and did not collect information that provided information on students’ psychological assessment of teacher messages.

After data was categorized, labeled, tagged, and cross-checked with field notes the rigorous process of identifying themes within the data began. I examined the frequency that specific ideas were brought up in field notes, focus groups, and teacher questionnaires. Ideas that were consistent and persistent across all data sources were grouped together and given a theme. Respect, care, praise/verbal affirmations, showing students are valued, wipe the slate clean daily, disrespect, lack of time, and cultural awareness were themes that emerged.

I examined negative cases across all three data sources to disconfirm emergent findings. This process increased the rigor of data analysis. I also reviewed relevant literature during the time of data analysis to strengthen my validation procedures. Tensions, gaps, and discrepancies were noted throughout the process. The next chapter discusses the findings of the data collection and relevant themes that emerged.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Bridging the Relational Divide: Communication Practices that Foster and Hinder Teacher-Student Relationship Development

In this chapter findings from the study are shared. The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of teachers and students regarding their interpersonal experiences of building relationships with each other. A qualitative methodology was used in this effort to analyze classroom observation and focus group data from 22 teachers and 26 students in urban charter high schools. The study explored how teachers and students perceived relational practices of teachers, and emphasis was placed on confirming and disconfirming communication interactions.

In this chapter I will present data on the perceptions of teachers and students related to the verbal and nonverbal confirming and disconfirming practices of teachers and how they impact teacher-student relationship development.

As stated in the methods chapter, each participant was given a pseudonym. Following a format similar to Richie et al. (1997) results are explicated using specific terms to indicate the frequency of endorsement. Phrases such as, “the majority of,” “most” and “many” were used to discuss ideas shared by at least 11 of the teacher and students participants. Words such as “several,” and “some” show that 6-9 participants supported the concept. “A few” was used to indicate concepts expressed by 5 or fewer participants.

Teacher Confirming and Disconfirming Communication Practices

Based on the data collected from the focus group discussion (students and teachers), teacher questionnaire data, and observation of teacher-student communication practices, several confirming and disconfirming practices emerged from the data. For this study, confirming teacher practices were defined as verbal and nonverbal messages that sent an explicit or implicit message to students that they were valued, respected, and cared for. Conversely, disconfirming teacher practices were defined as verbal and nonverbal communication that sent an explicit or implicit message to students that they were not valued, respected or cared for. Based on these definitions, the confirming and disconfirming communication practices that emerged from the data will be presented.

Honesty/openness and respect appears to be the key definitions attributed by both teachers and students regarding positive teacher-student relationships. With regard to respect, once student, Tyema said, “They are not derogatory towards us”. In the focus group, Mr. Bonner from MCHS spoke about the importance of respect in teacher-student relationship, “Respect is number one. If you can get a teenager to respect you and follow to directions and listen to you, you know you have their respect.”

Other definitions of positive teacher-student relationship that students spoke included positive attitudes, fun, and teachers being able to instruct the class effectively. From the teachers’ perspectives, communication also emerged as a defining characteristic of positive teacher-student relationship.

Based on the analysis of the teacher questionnaires, the results showed that respect was the defining characteristic of a positive teacher-student relationship. One teacher said: “A positive teacher-student relationship can be defined most effectively in one word, “Respect”. Other definitions provided included being heard, communication, love, patience, and academic relationship.

Teachers were asked based on their definitions of positive teacher-student relationship, how this kind of relationship manifest. The participants had different responses, which included delivering expectations, developing relationships with students, honesty, and concern. Ms. Haines spoke about the importance of delivering expectations, “The key is to first deliver the expectations of how students are to display respect to other human beings and then maintain those standards without compromise”. Mr. O’Neill teacher spoke about honesty, “I try to be as honest and transparent as possible. Students deserve to be treated with the same dignity and fairness as adults”.

Based on the analysis of the observation data collected from several classrooms, focusing on the teacher-student communication practices observed during class, several confirming and disconfirming communication processes were recorded. The observation data are divided into four main thematic categories: confirming communication practices – verbal, confirming communication practices – nonverbal, disconfirming communication practices – verbal, and disconfirming communication practices – nonverbal. The results for each these thematic categories will be discussed.

Confirming Communication Practices – verbal

Checking if students understand, giving praise/positive feedback, calling students by their names, and calm reprimand/corrections of negative behaviors were observed as the most frequent confirming verbal communication practices used by teachers in classrooms. Other confirming verbal communication behaviors observed included conflict resolution, giving clear instructions, encouraging students to try and persevere, giving direct answers to questions, teaching students learning techniques, encouraging questions, asking for students' help/assistance, reminding of tests, honesty, and negotiating with students.

Confirming Communication Practices – nonverbal

Using background music to relax the students, fostering collaborative environment, clustering of students, low tone of voice for privacy, monitoring of students, gives students options, having authoritative tone, and being approachable were observed as the most frequent confirming nonverbal communication practices used by teachers in classrooms. Other confirming nonverbal communication practices used by teachers in classrooms included developing a fun environment, noticing when students are having difficulties, providing one-on-one support, direct discipline, and eye contact. The following section provides examples of both verbal and nonverbal confirmation observed by teachers.

When entering Mr. O'Brien's classroom the first thing you notice is a long 15-foot sign that reads, "All students draw upon their passion, motivation, and life experiences, to become independent, adaptive problem solvers, powerful thinkers, effective communicators, and meaningful contributors to the larger community." His

classroom was neat and clean, with desks symmetrically arranged in rows. Mr. O'Brien had a degree in Education and was completing his second year as a Teach for America corps member at MCHS. He was in his mid-twenties and looked only a few years older than the students. The only thing that differentiated him as a teacher was his suit, and staff ID lanyard he wore around his neck. At the beginning of each class he had classical music playing in the background and greeted every student by name as they walked through the door. Mr. O'Brien's habit of greeting each student as they walked in the door is demonstrates the basic level of confirmation, which is recognition. This subtle, yet powerful practice welcomes the students into his social space.

During each week of observations I became familiar with Mr. O'Brien's communication practices. He confirmed students primarily through acknowledgment and endorsement. For example he would frequently encourage students by saying, "good job, be proud of yourselves." He utilized a combination of both supportive responses and compliments to show students that they were doing well. When he did this, students seemed motivated to continue to participate in the classroom activities.

Mr. O'Brien used verbal recognition to greet students daily, and compliments and supportive responses to encourage their participation. His students responded by mirroring his behavior. They would compliment him and each other. They would also encourage their classmates by giving them supportive messages. Mr. O'Brien's communication style was integral in the creation of a positive classroom culture for his students. Some students who I observed in other classes, who were disinterested or disengaged, came alive while in Mr. O'Brien's class.

I observed the similar outcomes from another teacher from that same school. Mr. Bonner was a young African American male teacher and Teach for American corps member. At the time of the study he was completing his second year as a corps member. He too, had music playing in the background throughout the duration of most classes. Instead of classical music, like Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Bonner was playing afro-cuban jazz music. His students were predominantly Latino, and seemed to recognize most of the melodies of the songs. It was a regular occurrence for students to hum along to the music as they worked. Overall, the classroom climate seemed welcoming and relaxed. Mr. Bonner was enthusiastic and humorous in his interactions with students. He didn't "police" the students or quiet every side conversation. Instead, he gave students the freedom to converse during class and learn in a more relaxed atmosphere. Students seemed to live the freedom they were given by Mr. Bonner. Ironically, the more room they were given to relax, have fun, and self-direct their learning, the more mature they seemed. Mr. Bonner's students did not take advantage of his approach.

The teachers who utilized confirming communication practices were better at managing student to student conflicts. Mr. Bonner had a knack for mediating student conflicts as well. On one occasion two students, Amy and Gregory, started arguing loudly. Mr. Bonner instructed the class to continue their independent work, and walked over to Gregory. He knelt down and in a low calm voice asked, "What's going on?" Gregory responded, "she botherin' me, I'm tyrin'a do my work." Mr. Bonner replied, "I'm glad you're trying to do your work, but the next time someone is bothering you; let me know so I can handle it." Gregory nodded his head signaling that he understood Mr.

Bonner's request, then continued doing his work. Mr. Bonner's initial use of a clarifying response gave Gregory an opportunity to explain what was going on. Teachers observed at both YCHS and CCHS took the same approach when managing student conflicts. Students who were given an opportunity to explain their behavior prior to receiving a demerit were more likely to cooperate with the teachers. Students seemed appreciative that they were a part of a discussion about their behavior.

From classroom observations, the majority of teachers observed used a combination of confirming and disconfirming communication practices with their students. There were a few teachers who use more confirmation, and there were others who utilized a more disconfirming teaching style.

Disconfirming Communication Practices – verbal

Putting students on the spot, sarcasm, and not calling students by their names were observed as the most frequent disconfirming verbal communication behaviors used by teachers during class. Other disconfirming verbal communication behaviors observed included talking over each other, yelling, not explaining the rationale of tasks, failure to communicate instructions to students, name calling, singling out students, making negative comments/remarks, and giving demerits.

Disconfirming Communication Practices –nonverbal

Aggressive tone in reprimanding students and not monitor students were observed as the most frequent disconfirming nonverbal communication behaviors from teachers during class. Other disconfirming nonverbal communication behaviors observed

included ignoring students, no eye contact, bad mood, lack of awareness, and being unprepared in class.

During classroom observations, it was evident how disconfirming language from teachers effected students' engagement and interest in learning. Particularly in terms of discipline and how teachers communicated when they needed to direct students toward specific tasks. During classroom observations, Mrs. Scottsdale, a social studies teacher from MCHS was observed frequently making sarcastic remarks to students. On one occasion she was instructing students to direct their attention to the board to take notes on the Navaho Indian tribe. The majority of students complied with her request, but a few students were taking too long to get out their notebooks. Mrs. Scottsdale yelled, "Did you know that in order to take notes you have to write?" Most students ignored her comment, but one student remarked, "What do she think, we dumb or something?" Her sarcastic remark seemed to undermine the relationship-building process leaving students feeling embarrassed and disrespected. Throughout the lesson, Mrs. Scottsdale continued to rush students through the activity. Some students were visibly frustrated, while others gave up altogether. Mrs. Scottsdale didn't seem to be in-tune with the students' instructional or emotional needs; rather, her goal appeared to be getting through the lesson as fast as she could. It was apparent that her sarcastic comment was perceived by students as a sign of disrespect.

Some of the teacher' disconfirming behaviors emerged when they had to reprimand students. Teachers seemed to have a difficult time disciplining students without being disconfirming or disrespectful. Furthermore, teachers' disconfirming

behaviors often disrupted the learning environment. For example, during classroom observations at MCHS, I was taking notes in the back of the classroom. While students were working quietly on algebraic equations at their desks. The teacher, Mr. Bonner had jazz music playing softly in the background. The room wasn't silent, but it was calm and students were focused intently on their assignment. All of a sudden, loud footsteps were heard coming down the hallway along with a man's voice yelling, "Let's go!" About ten seconds later, Mr. Bonner's door swung open. "Reservation for one, non-smoking." A tall man signaled for a young girl to sit down by pointing his finger at the desk closest to the door. Mr. Bonner made eye contact with the man, but didn't say anything. In front of the entire class, the visitor says to Mr. Bonner, "she's a mess today," and leaves. I later learned that this man was a part of the educational support staff at the school. Apparently the student he escorted to Mr. Bonner's classroom misbehaved while in her other class. The student who was reprimanded looked visibly embarrassed. After the disruption, Mr. Bonner had to say, four occasions, "Stay focused people" to get the class back on track, when he normally redirected students 2-3 times during the entire class period. This example is poignant because it demonstrates that students who are not directly involved in a communication interaction can be affected by overhearing someone else receive a disconfirming message. Not only does disconfirming communication show students that they are not valued, it also is disruptive to the learning environment.

Many teachers seemed to use more disconfirmation language when they were stressed and trying to get as much work done as possible. In contrast, the teachers who were more relaxed about how much the students accomplished seemed to have better

relationships with students. Overall CCHS and YCHS teachers were the most relaxed. Their school days were block periods and provided students with twice as much to get things done. A few teachers at MCHS were visibly stressed by the amount of work their students had to get done during class.

During another observation classroom observation at MCHS, two students had their heads down because they were not feeling well. Ms. Cornell yelled from her desk, “Unfortunately, you better get your heads up Coco and Jordan! Open your eyes or you will get a demerit!” Immediately the other students in the class started to react to Ms. Cornell’s comment. “Ooohh, she told you!” one student said. “Yo, she’s comin’ at your neck Jordan,” said another student. “Keep it shut!” Ms. Cornell yelled. Jordan and Coco kept their heads on the desk and refused to participate for the rest of the class. Students chattered among themselves. Some were talking about how mean Ms. Cornell was, while others were making fun of Coco and Jordan, who just got in trouble. Ms. Cornell would frequently reprimand students in front of their classmates.

Ironically, when asked about disciplining students in front of their peers, teachers in the focus groups communicated unequivocally that “students deserve to be treated with the same dignity and fairness as adults and should not be disciplined in front of their peers.” Still, some teachers admitted they made mistakes and lost their temper.

Ms. Cornell is a prime example of a teacher who both disciplined students in front of the class and seemed stressed by the amount of work that needed to get done. On the first day I was scheduled to observe Ms. Cornell’s classroom, I remember walking down the hallway and hearing her voice from five classrooms away. She was yelling at the

students, “5-4-3-2-1!!! Settle down now!” When I got to the classroom, I poked my head in the door and made eye contact with Ms. Cornell, who signaled for me to sit in the back of the classroom. I immediately felt the tension in the classroom because Ms. Cornell seemed frazzled and was rushing the students from one activity to the next. She did most of the talking and was having a hard time balancing her teaching duties while managing the students. She frequently yelled at students, and spent the majority of class time correcting poor student behavior. The more Ms. Cornell's disconfirming behavior continued the less control she had over the classroom. Each week I observed Ms. Cornell exhibiting the same behavior. When she yelled at students they would be visibly upset, embarrassed and disengaged in the learning process. Students who were once motivated became indifferent to the learning process. Some students would put their heads down on desks; others would show signs of frustration and anger.

Another teacher from MCHS had a more severe approach than Ms. Cornell. Her class was the most out of control compared to other classes in the study. One word describes Mrs. Scottsdale's class, chaotic. The walls of her classroom were bare, desks were disheveled, and there were always pieces of trash on the floor. Mrs. Scottsdale's students were lively and energetic, but Mrs. Scottsdale was gruff, stern, short-tempered and impatient during each time I observed her.

During classroom activities, Mrs. Scottsdale was observed barking orders at the students, “Chris, get up there and write your answer on the board!” She would tell students what to do without giving them a rationale for why they were doing it, “Because I said so”. She also reprimanded students in front of the entire class. I remember a day

when she noticed a student was chewing gum in class. She stopped mid-sentence to point out the student, “Are you kidding me? Trash can, now!” Students reacted to Mrs. Scottsdale’s communication behavior by disengaging from the class. Some ignored Mrs. Scottsdale altogether by laying their heads down on the desk and choosing not to participate. Other students disengaged by talking to other students, doodling on paper, sleeping, and even walking out.

Consistent with the results of both the focus group and the teacher questionnaire, respect emerged as the core definition of positive teacher-student relationship. According to the teachers, positive teacher-student relationships manifest in various forms, such as delivering expectations, developing relationships with students, honesty, and concern. Based on the classroom observations, the responses of the teachers were consistent with the confirming verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors in class such as checking if students understand, giving praise/positive feedback, calling students by their names, calm reprimand/corrections of negative behaviors, using background music to relax the students, fostering collaborative environment, clustering of students, low tone of voice for privacy, monitoring of students, gives students options, having authoritative tone, and being approachable. However, disconfirming behaviors such as aggressive tone, putting students on the spot, sarcasm, and not calling students by their name were also observed.

Confirmation Practices Contributing to Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Based on the data collected from both the focus group (students and teachers) and teacher questionnaire data, they reported perceived factors that encourage positive teacher-student communication practices. From the teacher questionnaires, the

participants revealed the strategies that they used to build positive teacher-student communication practices. Both of these thematic categories will be presented in this section.

Based on the data collected from the focus group from both teachers and students, it appears that honesty and having emotional connection with students were perceived by both students and teachers as behaviors that will encourage positive teacher-student communication practices. One student, Raquel said: “They are open to talk about stuff other than work”. Ms. Garfield from the SCHS focus group spoke about sharing information about herself to connect with students,

You have to know where students come from. I told them I’m from a suburban background, they know that. That helps them understand me. Even though I’m Black and I look like them, I’m not from the same environment they are from. Either way you have to be culturally aware and sensitive. (Ms. Garfield, 06/11/2012)

The results of the data collected from the questionnaires showed that positive feedback was the most frequent strategy used by teachers to build positive teacher-student communication practices. One teacher, Mr. Krinsky spoke about the importance of being honest and praising students,

I think a lot of our students need praise. They may not get enough of it or may not be praised at all at home. I also found being really honest and upfront with them is key. They are very real and read situations and people well. So we (as a faculty) tell them that they are loved and they know they are. The administration is also very transparent with them about situations that arise in school. We treat them with respect and talk to them on our level and I believe they appreciate that. This all contributes to building positive relationships. (Mr. Krinsky, 02/08/2013)

Being honest/transparent and individual tracking/accountability were also used by teachers to build positive communication practices.

Support was another teacher behavior that aided the relationship-building process. Teachers and students who participated in the focus groups identified both academic and non-academic support as being an essential skill for teachers to have. Academic support included any behaviors that supported students' abilities to complete their class work, homework, and other projects. In addition, non-academic support included things like motivating, encouraging, and understanding behaviors.

Verbal affirmation was an important support behavior that was discussed during focus groups. Teachers believed that affirming language helped to motivate students to complete their work. Students agreed that when teachers affirm their effort in class they are more motivated to keep trying, particularly with difficult tasks and assignments.

Mr. Bonner consistently demonstrated the use of verbal affirmations. When the class was working cooperatively to answer difficult math questions he'd say, "Good job, be proud of yourselves!" When students were able to not only get an answer right, but explain the process they used to get the answer Mr. Bonner would say, "I like how you're coming up with these answers." One activity that he did frequently was a timed problem solving task. Students would have one minute to complete a math problem. He would tell them the instructions, "Find the slope intercept for this problem. You can use a calculator or use the graph to answer manually." After the minute was up, he'd yell, "Answers up!" Students would hold up dry-erase white boards with their answer. "Very good folks, excellent folks. You guys are all-stars!" After observing how Mr. Bonner effortlessly incorporated numerous verbal affirmations with students, I decided to count the number affirmations he used during a thirty-minute period. On average, Mr. Bonner

communicated 22 affirmations every half hour. I noticed that students seemed energized, and his usage of affirmations helped to keep them engaged and focused during difficult lessons.

Teachers also felt that praising students for both their academic effort and achievements was an essential relationship building practice. Ms. Ali from SCHS said it best, “Find something they do right and tell them. Provide them with public and private praise.” At another focus group, Ms. Gracen of YCHS shared,

Praise is number one. When I first came to teaching, I was thinking, why am I going to tell a kid that he’s doing a good job when he answers one out of ten questions right? That was the wrong mindset. If I told my students they didn’t do a good job, the next time they wouldn’t even try. (Ms. Gracen, 03/10/2013)

Teachers and students shared their perspectives on what it means to demonstrate patience and how it impacts the relationship building process. Students felt that teachers lacked patience and rarely took time to help them, understand them, or give them the time they needed to be successful in school. As a result, the relationships they had with certain teachers suffered.

During focus groups, students were excited to talk about the teachers who connected with them beyond the classroom. They shared stories that they knew about certain teachers; how many kids they had, where they lived, where their home-town was. Students shared that they liked the teachers who were down-to-earth and who shared personal stories about themselves. They equated connecting beyond the classroom with care and felt that teachers who took the time to share their own personal stories showed that they cared for them on a deeper level than teachers who didn’t.

Teachers, who were strictly focused on their role as an instructor, were perceived by students as not showing care and not being interested in their “whole selves.” Students didn’t just want teachers to care about their personal lives; they wanted to know about their teacher’s personal lives as well. During the focus groups, Mr. O’Brien described how he connects with students.

I believe that making connections with students outside of class is the key to developing strong relationships. Some of my students and I have attended plays together, and even gone on retreats. I also look forward to participating in Saturday service projects and other outside-of-class activities. Developing relationships outside of class leads to better interactions in class. (Mr. O’Brien, 10/17/2012)

It was evident which of the teachers in the study had a connection with students beyond the classroom. During class they would interact with students in a more casual way, sometimes using slang words or referencing music artists that students were familiar with.

Teachers shared more perspectives on the importance of connecting beyond the classroom. Ms. Evergreen shared during the CCHS focus group, “Individual conversations with students outside of the classroom work well. I want to know who they are and about their lives.” Ms. Ali added, “Being open to being vulnerable and showing that you’re human helps them and helps them see what a real adult is.” The teachers shared during their focus groups that connecting beyond the classroom gives students permission to do the same. Mrs. Bower from MCHS explained,

A lot of times, we don’t know what these kids are going through outside of school, and when we ask, they aren’t willing to share. But when I share something that’s going on in my life, or a personal challenge that I’ve had, they begin to open up on their own. (Mrs. Bower, 10/17/2012)

Based on the data from the focus group and teacher questionnaires, it appears that being honest, having emotional connection with students, and positive feedback/praise were perceived by both students and teachers as behaviors that will encourage positive teacher-student communication practices. These confirming communication practices are helping both teachers and students to develop positive teacher-student relationships within the urban classroom setting.

Disconfirming Practices Hindering Teacher-Student Relationships

The results of the analysis conducted using the data collected from the focus group discussion (students and teachers) showed the factor that contribute to negative teacher-student relationship and the perceived role of culture in teacher-student relationship. For the teacher questionnaire, the results of the analysis showed their perceptions about the challenges in teacher-student relationships and the role of culture in teacher-student relationship. All of these thematic categories will be discussed in this section.

The results of the focus group discussion showed that both teachers and students believed that being disrespectful is the main factor that contributes to negative teacher-student relationship. One teacher, spoke about how disrespect can affect the teacher-student relationship,

I get resistance, and I understand the rebellion and disrespect. It's hard to deal with it. I recognize that you may not like something you have that right and I don't like some things too. But when it turns into this battle and it's negative. They have to understand that what I'm asking you to do is going to help you. I'll never ask you to do anything that will harm you. Sometimes they act like you would do something to harm them. Do you ever think I was tell you something to harm you? Unfortunately I had a student that I asked that to and she said she didn't know. She had had negative relationships with adults who had told her bad things. For that moment I got it. She wasn't used to adults taking on that responsibility and doing what's right for them. That's been difficult. (Ms. Jenner, 06/11/2012)

From the perspective of students, they also spoke about teachers being disrespectful, "Some of them are disrespectful. They need to be more reasonable and don't understand our personal experiences".

Both teachers and students from the focus groups discussed the importance of teachers having reasonable expectations for urban students. Teachers acknowledged the fact that some of their students were facing difficult situations at home. They shared ways they would accommodate students going through difficult times. Some teachers said they extended deadlines on assignments. Other teachers talked about providing in-class time for students to catch up on work or even catch up on rest. One specific area that teachers and students agreed on was the idea of wiping the slate clean each day. Students felt that they had better relationships with teachers who gave them a new chance each day to succeed. Overall, students felt that they were labeled after having one day of bad behavior. According to students, teachers "held grudges" against them most of the time. Teachers agreed that they had difficulty wiping the slate clean each day and providing new opportunities for children to show better behavior.

During focus groups, students shared their experiences of being labeled by teachers as "bad." Students felt that once they were labeled "bad," teachers interacted with them like they were actually bad students. According to students, it was hard for them to remove the labels that teachers placed on them. One student, Kareem spoke to this point during focus groups at SCHS when he said, "I have one bad day and they treat me like I'm bad the whole year. I don't feel like I have a fresh start each day." Other students in the focus group agreed, "yea, yea, some teachers be holdin' a grudge on you even if you messed up just one time!"

During classroom observations, I noticed exactly what Kareem was talking about. One day, Mrs. Scottsdale asked students to turn in their homework as soon as they

entered the classroom. Students began feverishly searching through their book bags. One student, Jose, walked over to put his homework on the teacher's desk. "I got my homework Miss," Jose said. Mrs. Scottsdale replied in a harsh tone, "I'm not gonna have any problems out of you today, am I?" Jose replied emphatically, "Nah Miss, what you talkin' bout?" Mrs. Scottsdale replied, "You were being disruptive yesterday, and I can't deal with that today." Jose walked off, and was overheard telling the classmates at his desk, "She always on my case about something. I just walked in!"

Although teachers were able to articulate the necessity to wipe the slate clean each day with students, many were observed doing just the opposite when I was on-site during classroom observations.

During one focus group Ms. Jenner summed up her view on the necessity to wipe the slate clean each day by saying,

I've adopted a principle of a 'new day-fresh start.' Regardless of how much attitude you had in class, or how bad you did on the quiz yesterday, I still need to shake your hand as you come in every morning like everyone else. I still need to smile at you, I still need to say hello to you. You need to know as a mature adult I've moved on from yesterday and to get to where we need to get to achieve our goals, I have a fresh start today, in terms of how I view you, and you need to have a fresh start. I think students respond to that and that helps build that rapport and trust. (Ms. Jenner, 06/11/2012)

The expectations of urban teachers should be realistic and supportive of their students' academic and non-academic challenges. For both students and teachers the most reasonable expectation of teachers is to wipe the slate clean each day and allow students an opportunity to demonstrate better behavior and academic progress.

Focus group data suggested that teachers understood the necessity to demonstrate patience, but had difficulty actually being patient due to the amount of students they were

responsible for in each class. During one particular classroom observation, while sitting in Ms. Anderson's class a student, Nadira, approach her desk to ask a question about her homework. While Nadira was talking, Ms. Anderson never looked up from her computer. This demonstrated a clear sign of disconfirmation, specifically, nonverbal indifference. After the student finished asking for help, while still typing, Ms. Anderson said, "I understand, but I can't just make it my imperative as soon as you walk in the door to help you. Go sit down." The student looked disappointed and a bit embarrassed. A few minutes past and Ms. Anderson yelled, "Turn in your homework!" Nadira didn't turn hers in; she tucked it away in her notebook.

I was curious to learn more from teachers about why they rushed students and were impatient at times. During focus groups Ms. Bradshaw of CCHS shared, "I would say time. The amount of time and space I have to build relationships is limited." At MCHS, teachers felt the same way. Mrs. Jones shared, "I want more time to get to know them better, but I am pushed by what we have to do." Mrs. Bower added, "Patience is crucial. As teachers we have to understand that teaching is a process and not an event, but it's hard when there's so much to do." The vast majority of teachers shared similar sentiments about there not being enough time to build relationships and maintain learning the standards of the schools.

This particular incident is an example of what I observed in more than one classroom. Teachers who were consumed with grading papers, writing notes, and addressing issues did not demonstrate patience with students. Their lack of patience came through their communication behaviors. During another classroom observation, I

observed teachers rushing students through tasks and activities. For example, each week, Mrs. Jones rushed her students during vocabulary time. “Vocabulary sections now! Let’s not lollygag, get started as soon as you can!” Another week, she’d say, “Quickly, let’s practice speed writing. Hurry up Chris!” She was often overheard saying, “I’m not waiting on everybody!”

Based on the results of the analysis of the data from the teacher questionnaires, balancing roles and lack of support from administrators emerged as a challenge in building the teacher-student relationship.

The Role of Culture

In terms of the role of culture in teacher-student relationship, the students and teachers from the focus groups had different perceptions. Among the students, there were no prevailing opinions shared in the focus group discussion about the role of culture in teacher-student relationship, some spoke about racism and lack of diversity, but others believed that race had no impact in teacher-student relationship. Among the teachers in the focus group, they focused on the difficulty of mastering informal/slang terms to communicate effectively with students, the importance for socialization and media literacy.

When asked if culture had an impact on the relationship building process, teachers and students agreed that culture does not hinder the relationship building process, but that seeking and showing understanding of each person’s culture was essential to maintaining meaningful relational connections. Teachers felt it was important to seek and show understanding for student’s cultural experiences and communication practices.

Specifically, teachers felt it was important to be sensitive to the home environments of students and challenges that students face as a result of their living circumstances.

During focus groups at MCHS, Mr. Bonner shared his perspective on the importance of being open to seek and show understanding about students' culture.

Even if race and culture doesn't come up in class, I also think that I need to be available as a teacher to have that conversation. Literally just yesterday I had a parent of a student I don't even have in one of my classes come up to me in the hallway and say 'my son says he shakes your hand and says hello to you every day. He looks up to you as a quality African American role model. (Mr. Bonner, 10/17/2012)

Mr. Bonner acknowledged his responsibility to be open to conversations about culture. Acknowledging the culture context of students provides information to teachers about their rules for communication. When teachers and students are aware of the communication rules that are culturally determined for each other, there are increased opportunities for relationship building.

During focus groups at SCHS, an African-centered school, Ms. Garfield shared her perspectives on the complexities of culture and how it affects students' rules for communication.

I'm Black and I look like them, but I'm from the suburbs. I was raised in a different environment than them. That also helps them understand me. When asking about them you have to be sincere, 'cause they can sniff out a fake. Some of their parents curse at them and there's a certain culture that is a background culture of our community as African Americans that says we're boisterous and loud and upfront. There are things we can do to help students understand that you can do that respectfully and intelligently without cursing. (Ms. Garfield, 06/11/2013)

Cultural communication differences were a common theme that came up during teacher interviews. Teachers mentioned cultural communication differences as a barrier

to building relationships with their students. Mr. Jacobson provided an example of how he seeks to understand his students by having open discussions about the slang they use.

He shared,

Ask them what they mean, don't assume that you know what they are talking about. One time I asked a student what the phrase, 'you be drawlin' means and he told me. He liked the fact that I took an interest in what he was saying, rather than telling him that it was wrong or not appropriate to use in class. (Mr. Jacobson, 02/08/2013)

Ms. Bradshaw echoed his sentiment and shared, "We have to start them where they are and build them up from there. We can't try to wipe out who they are. So many teachers try to "don't do that, don't do this" approach and it doesn't work." Contrary to Ms. Bradshaw's perspective, some teachers felt differently about culture. Ms. Cornell shared during focus groups at MCHS, "I'm not saying we have to pretend that culture doesn't matter, but every English lesson doesn't have to do with race." Mrs. Bower added, "We also have a responsibility to teach literature and teach other literary elements. We can't always incorporate culture into our lessons." Mr. O'Brien added to Mrs. Bower's point, "Yea, I don't think my math class is a place to have a race discussion."

Being disrespectful appears to be the common theme for both teachers and students that can contribute to negative teacher-student relationship. Moreover, teachers believed that differences in expectation can also result in negative teacher-student relationship. Based on the results of the focus group and teacher questionnaire, there is some indication that culture may play a role in the teacher –student relationship, such as the need to have a common understanding of expectations to prevent conflicts. However,

some teachers and students believed that culture in general do not have any significant role in teacher-student relationship.

Conclusion

Findings from this study support the notion that teachers utilizing confirming communication practices that show that students are value tend to develop more positive relationships with their students. Communication practices such as showing students are valued, demonstrating patience, wiping the slate clean daily, verbal affirmations and praise, and connecting beyond the classroom are all examples of things both teachers and students agreed were imperative to the relationships building process. In addition, communication practices showing that students are not valued by teachers included discipline, and impatience as it relates to the teaching load required by schools. Concepts of respect and care were both consistent underlying themes that came up throughout focus group dialogue and teacher questionnaire responses. Perceived respect and care enhances the relationship-building process, while perceived disrespect hinders the relationships building process. Students reported feeling upset, sad, angry, and depressed when treated with disrespect teachers. Teachers felt frustrated when disrespected by students. The following section provides additional discussion regarding significant gaps and tensions uncovered as a result of the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate and explore how teachers and students perceived teacher confirmation and disconfirmation in urban classroom settings using focus group discussions, teacher questionnaires, and classroom observations. The implications for practice and recommendations for future research will be discussed. The chapter ends with the conclusions of the study, rooted on the themes and findings that were presented in the previous chapter.

Urban classrooms are social spaces where cultural and relational exchanges take place daily and overtime to create an environment that either supports or does not support the growth and development of the teacher-student relationship. Within the school climate literature, research has been conducted on the socio-psychological environments of classrooms and their effects on student outcomes. The interpersonal behavior of teachers is an important factor that effects the classroom environment. Within the extant literature, friendliness, teacher support, and facilitation of a cooperative environment are associated with increased affective outcomes for students (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). For urban students it is particularly important to have caring teacher-student relationships (Baker, Terry, Bridger & Winsor, 1997; Noddings, 1992; Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

Considering caring relationships and teacher support is particularly relevant for urban students. Theorists have suggested that positive relationships with teachers are essential for helping students succeed academically and socially. Gloria Ladson-Billings attributed the success of effective teachers of urban children to utilizing a culturally

relevant pedagogy, or an approach that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 12-18).

Communication is the means through which teachers can achieve the interpersonal connection necessary for a strong teacher-student relationship. For urban students it is important that teachers are aware of and have the skill to utilize a culturally relevant communication approach that fosters the development of a positive teacher-student relationship.

Communication is culturally determined and encompasses the beliefs, values, and experiences of each person in the communication interaction (Ting-Toomey & Gudykunst, 1995). Consistent with this idea stemming from communications research, Montague and Rinaldi (2010) found that teachers’ beliefs, behaviors, and actions affect their communication and ability to relate to students. Historically, teachers have held more negative attitudes toward low achieving students (Montague & Rinaldi, 2010). As a result, they provide lower levels of emotional support, and praise, and greater levels of criticism, ignoring, and negative behaviors (Montague & Rinaldi, 2010). Each of these behaviors negatively impact the teacher-student relationship. Consistent with Sieburg’s (1973) research on disconfirmation, these negative behaviors send the message that students are not valued, which leads to decreased outcomes for students in these learning environments.

As Ellis (2000, 2004) has demonstrated, confirmation leads to improved student learning outcomes. It is important that teachers understand the significance of

confirming communication behaviors that are perceived by students in urban classroom environments. Understanding perceived confirmation and disconfirmation behaviors is the objective of this study. Although the primary focus of this study is concerning confirmation and disconfirmation, the findings will not only contribute to the confirmation and disconfirmation research, but also provide beneficial research on urban teacher-student relationships.

An Overview of Confirming Practices

The prior research on confirmation emphasizes that confirmation is needed to build healthy relationships and societies. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) claimed that it is the “greatest single factor insuring mental development and stability (p.84). We have a need to be valued in order to build quality relationships.

Teachers, who demonstrated, through confirming communication practices, that they valued their students’ opinions, ideas, and perspectives, had stronger relationships with their students. This was evidenced by increased interpersonal interactions where joking, sharing personal stories, and constructive feedback were observed on a consistent basis. Students described these teachers as caring for them and showing them respect. They appreciated teachers whose roles went beyond teaching academic content. Students reported feeling a greater sense of connection with teachers who are “down to earth.” Students were very aware of the teachers who did not value them. Students described these teachers as “disrespectful” and out of touch with their personal issues and challenges. For example, Marisol, a 9th-grader from MCHS shared, “It don’t matter if I’m having a bad day, some teachers don’t care, they don’t know what we be going

through at home.” Students often accused teachers of disrespecting them as students. This accusation was prevalent among student participants and was discussed candidly during student focus groups.

Students wanted teachers who provided agreements with their judgments and emotional acknowledgement. Students had stronger bonds with teachers whose communication practices demonstrated that students were respected and valued. Confirming communication was an essential determinant to the development of quality teacher-student relationships.

Care as Central to the Relationship Building Process

After further analysis of the data, it was evident that the relationship building practices which emerged can actually be conceptualized as elements or dimensions of care where teachers enact academic and non-academic related practices to build quality relationships. Consistent with Noddings’ (2012) concept of “virtue carers” and “relational carers,” the results of this study suggest that urban students need teachers to address their academic and non-academic needs. Respect, care, and cultural awareness are the relationship building practices that address students’ non-academic needs, while reasonable expectations and instructional support address students’ academic needs.

Students conceptualized all of the relationships building practices as elements of care or practices that show them teachers care about them. They did not compartmentalize the practices as appealing to their academic or non-academic needs, but they were able to articulate the necessity for teachers to enact each practice. Students were good at identifying the types of phrases or behaviors of teachers that demonstrated

care. At the basic level, students were always in-tune with what teachers were saying, how they were saying them, and what it meant about their level of care for students. Teachers were less in-tune with how their relational behaviors demonstrated care. They tended to view care as separate and equally important to the other relationship building practices which emerged. For teachers, demonstrating care was one of several relationship practices that build quality relationships. On the other hand, students viewed each relationship building practice as an element of care. This shows that students prioritize care as central to the relationship building process.

Teachers were able to articulate the importance of care, however, based on classroom observations and student focus group data, some teachers may not have the tools necessary to appropriately exhibit care in the classroom under time constraints. The teachers observed rushing from one activity to the next demonstrated the least amount of care for students. They may have the best intentions, but the pressure of not having enough time to do what is required brought out the worst in their caring behaviors.

Cultural Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity

This study sought to identify the extent to which the culture of teachers or students impacted the relationship building process. Based on focus groups with teachers and students, actual culture of teachers and students seemed minimally important to the relationship building process. Rather, the extent to which teachers showed cultural awareness and sensitivity toward students was more significant to the relationship building process. Cultural awareness was an acknowledgment by teachers of students' cultural backgrounds, norms, and beliefs. Cultural sensitivity referred to behaviors of

teachers that demonstrated a deeper understanding of the students' culture and a willingness to incorporate that into the classroom environment. Students reported that teachers who refused to acknowledge their culture or home language (Ex. Spanish) didn't care about them. Both teachers and students were less concerned with their cultures and more concerned with a purposeful demonstration of respect for the various cultures in the classroom. It was less important that the teacher was White or Black, and more important that the teacher, regardless of race was aware and open to everyone else's cultural background. These findings are consistent with the literature on attributes of successful teachers of urban students. Specifically, the idea that urban students need teachers who accept and affirm their cultural identity (Gay, 1995).

Teacher-student relationships are complex and constantly impacted by a variety of structural and individual influences. The relational communication framework lends itself to understanding teacher-student relationships by providing a lens that focuses on micro-level communication exchanges that contextualize the relationship between two individuals. Teachers who utilize confirming communication practices with their students demonstrate through their verbal and nonverbal messages that they care for students. It is important for urban students to receive messages from teachers that demonstrate that they are cared for and valued. The data from this study revealed that both teachers and students believe respect, care, reasonable expectations, and instructional support are essential relationship building practices. Finally, while the culture of teachers and students does not have a significant impact on the relationship

building process, teachers' cultural awareness and sensitivity for the students' culture was shown to have an impact on the relationship building process.

The problem with the data collected on culture in this study is that it was superficial at best. I got a sense that most of the White teachers did not want to "touch" the subject of culture. They had difficulty articulating deeper insights into their view of culture. In hindsight, it may have been better to allow teachers to respond to the culture question privately to glean a wider range of responses.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest more work needs to be done in the area of teacher-student relationships. Although this examination of teacher-student relationships provided insight into how teachers can improve relationships with urban high school students, far more is needed to fully expand what we know about how communication impacts the development of teacher-student relationships in urban classrooms.

The findings of this study suggest that more attention needs to be paid to how teachers communicate with students in urban classrooms. Particularly, how teachers' communication practices are impacted by the classroom environment and school context. This study suggests that teachers, who feel overwhelmed with the amount of work they have to do in a short period of time, may have more difficulty building relationships with students. Because relationships develop over time through a series of communication interactions, it is important that teachers who constantly feel overwhelmed develop ways of communicating that foster the development of quality relationships.

I suggest that urban school administrators must attend to the ways that teacher stress impacts the relationship building process. It is evident from this study that stressed teachers used more disconfirming communication with students. Important questions to ask are: How do resilient urban teachers under stress communicate with their students? How do these teachers counteract organizational stressors to build relationships with students? Asking these questions can provide opportunities in urban schools for teachers to work together with administrators to (a) identify ways in which the school structure can be modified to alleviate teacher stress, and (b) identify professional development resources to assist teachers in improving their relational behaviors with students.

The findings of this study support evidence found in the literature regarding the importance of care in building quality teacher-student relationships with students. Noddings (2003) discussed the value of teachers caring about and caring for students. He emphasized the difference between the two, making the point that caring for students involved encouraging students' "goodness" and nurturing their socioemotional growth.

The underlying theme that encompassed each relationship building practice was care. Students wanted teachers to show that they cared about them by communicating in ways that demonstrated that students were respected and valued. Students also wanted teachers to verbally affirm their academic efforts, connect beyond the classroom, wipe the slate clean daily, give praise, show patience, and demonstrate cultural awareness and sensitivity. For students, each of these relationship building practices was an extension of the overall theme of care, and the extent to which teachers could use their

communication to show that they cared had a direct connection to the quality of the relationship.

The findings of this study suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the ways in which teachers can infuse relationship building practices into their overall instructional approach. This study found the answers to *what* may be helpful in building quality teacher-student relationship, but fell short on gathering substantive data on *how* teachers incorporate these strategies into their teaching practice. Teachers like Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien appeared to seamlessly incorporate confirming communication into their teaching style. Other teachers were confirming when students were behaving and disconfirming when they were not. More research is needed to examine teachers like Mr. Bonner and Mr. O'Brien who have found a balance in their relational communication behaviors.

Currently, research on teacher-student relationships is primarily focused on students in mainstream pre-school, elementary, and high school settings. Future research is necessary to address the various aspects of relationship-building among urban high school students. Although a combination of research can be used to provide a more comprehensive understanding about effective strategies of urban teachers, far more research is needed to zero-in on urban teacher-student relationships. Relationship-building is an essential component of effective urban teaching, but has rarely been the central focus of academic inquiry. As discussed, quality teacher-student relationships have been linked to increased academic achievement and decreased problematic behavior

for diverse students (Foster et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Additional research in this area will provide benefits for teachers and students within these settings.

The current research on teacher-student relationships primarily uses student perceptions and classroom observations as methods for studying effective relationship-building practices. Very rarely are teachers included in the discussion about what works well for them. It is imperative that teachers with insight, experience, and success with urban students are interviewed as a part of research practices about teacher-student relationships. Teacher perspectives are important for three distinct reasons. First teachers can provide information on the relational practices they employ that work for students. In addition, they can speak candidly about their set-backs, biases, values, and past experiences and how they affect their relationship-building approaches. These insights can be used to aid teachers in overcoming potential internal barriers to building quality relationships with their students. Lastly, research that incorporates more teacher perspectives can provide vital information on how teachers learned their relationship-building skills. An underlying assumption in the current research implies that effective teachers of urban students are innately equipped with exceptional relational skills. We are still unclear if teachers learned these skills through teacher-training, on-the-job training, trial-and-error, or a number of other means. This study reveals that there are both internal and external factors that can hinder the relationship-building process between teachers and students. These teacher perspectives can help to close the gap between what we don't know about those internal factors that may be getting in the way of the relationship-building process.

Implications for Practice

Based on the data presented in the previous chapter, the results have implications for practice, specifically to improve the effectiveness of the classroom instruction of teachers in urban classrooms. Confirming behaviors such as checking if students understand, giving praise/positive feedback, and calling students by their names should be practiced. Most importantly given the singling out of respect to define positive teacher-student relationships, teachers should also make an effort to respect their students the same way they want to be respected as human beings. The results of the study show some support that confirming communication practices can benefit students in terms of having positive attitudes towards their teachers.

Teachers should also be aware that their behaviors can be perceived as disconfirming such as having an aggressive tone, putting students on the spot, making sarcastic remarks, and not calling students by their names. These disconfirming communication practices have been observed during the classroom observations. It was unclear if teachers were aware of the potential ramifications of these disconfirming behaviors during class, but teachers should make an effort to be more sensitive to the needs and feelings of the students. Teachers should also make an effort to pay attention to the nonverbal reactions of students from their own behaviors in class.

As revealed in the results regarding cultural differences between teachers and students in urban classrooms, teachers should make an effort to balance their roles and to manage the differences in the cultural backgrounds of students and teachers. Teachers should be culturally sensitive and aware to their students' background in order to

facilitate a more positive teacher-students relationship. One of the students in the focus group interpreted the behaviors one teacher as racist, and this can be avoided when teachers are culturally aware of different cultural practices and behaviors.

Implications for Future Research

Based on the results and findings of the study, several future research studies are proposed. First, another qualitative study can be conducted to further explore the challenges in having a positive teacher-student relationship, focusing on encouraging confirming communication practices and discouraging disconfirming communication practices. Future researchers should explore how challenges such as lack of administrative support and differences in expectations can be addressed to improve the quality of teacher-student relationship. The results of the study indicated that teachers seem to practice both confirming and disconfirming behaviors in class.

Second, there is some evidence that confirmation communication practices can lead to positive academic outcomes, given that students seemed to respond positively with these kinds of communication practices in class such as being respectful and demonstrating positive and caring attitude. A mixed-method study that will utilize objective academic measures of students' performance such as GPA or test scores can be used to examine if confirming behaviors significantly influence academic outcomes of urban students. As supplemental data to support the quantitative data, the qualitative component of the study can explore how teachers and students perceive the relationship between confirming communication practices and positive academic outcomes.

Finally, even though there was an acknowledgment that culture can play a role in the quality of teacher-student relationship, more research should be conducted to examine how culture can affect how teachers interact with their students. For example, future researchers might examine how students from different cultural backgrounds perceive confirming or disconfirming communication practices. This proposed future study can illuminate whether some cultures are more strongly influenced by confirming communication practices, providing teachers of urban classrooms the tools to be more effective.

Limitations of the Study

The current study is significant as it provides insight into how teachers' relational communication practices foster and hinder the development of teacher-student relationships in urban classrooms. However, several limitations should be considered when examining the findings of this study. Data methods were not utilized to learn more about the underlying values, experiences, and attitudes of teachers that could inform and better triangulate the observational data.

Research on interpersonal relationships indicates that relationships are interpersonal and develop differently for different individuals. That said, the findings in this study did not adequately delineate the impact of teacher's communication practices on the entire class versus on individual students. For example, teachers who were observed yelling at the entire class, may have had positive relationships with many of the students in the classroom at a given time. On the contrary, teachers who utilized

compliments and praise may have had negative relationships with some students. Data on individual relational bonds was not collected.

Researcher bias effects presented another potential limitation. In the current study the researcher conducted all data collection. Further, she was the primary person involved in the interpretation process. Thus, there is a possibility that researcher bias influenced the findings. The fact that the researcher conducted all data collection may have had an additional impact on results of the teacher focus groups. Some may find the topic of culture to difficult to discuss, especially in a professional setting, and with a researcher of a different background. Although teacher participants who had a racial mismatch with the researcher did not indicate an challenge with freely expressing their ideas, this may have impacted the teachers' ability to express their true sentiments.

Conclusions

Both teachers and students recognized that the core feature of a positive teacher-student relationship is respect. Given that both students emphasized respect, both expect to receive respect from the each other to facilitate a more positive relationship. Respect should not only come from the students, but teachers should also respect their students, making an effort to understand the situations and needs of their students.

Confirming behaviors such as being honest, checking if students understand, giving praise/positive feedback, being approachable and emotionally available, and calling students by their names emerged as the common practices used by teachers during class. These behaviors reflect an understanding of the needs of the students to be effective learners and the recognition that students deserve respect and positive

reinforcement. As expected, students respond positively to these confirming communication practices, underscoring the mutual utility of engaging in confirming communication practices for both students and teachers of urban classrooms.

Disconfirming communication practices such as putting students on the spot, making sarcastic remarks and comments, having aggressive tone when reprimanding students, yelling, and name calling were observed from the teachers in the study during their classroom instructions. As expected, students tend to have negative perceptions about disconfirming communication practices from their teachers. Students were cognizant of these verbal and nonverbal disconfirming practices, as reflected by their responses in the focus group discussion, underscoring how the behaviors of teachers directly impact the perceptions and behaviors of their students.

Finally, culture can have an impact in the quality of teacher-student relationship because differences in beliefs, expectations, and practices can contribute to conflicts and misunderstanding. Teachers in particular recognize the importance of making an effort to reach out to students and understand their cultural background. Teacher-student relationship can be more positive when there is common ground and both are able to cope and adjust with each other's differences.

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APPENDICES

- A: RECRUITMENT AND CONSENT MATERIALS
- B: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL AND TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE
- C: OBSERVATION RUBRIC

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT AND CONSENT MATERIALS

Teacher Consent Form

Confirming and Disconfirming Communication Practices of Teachers in Urban Classrooms

Principal Investigator:

Tricia Jones, Ph.D.

Professor, Dept. of Psychological Studies in Education

College of Education

215.204.6013

Student Investigator:

Brandi M. Baldwin, M.Ed.

Graduate Student, Dept. of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

College of Education

484.448.2216

Purpose of Research

We are currently engaged in a study of teacher-student relationships. To help us gain further insights into this area we are seeking high school teachers willing to provide perspectives on how they build relationships with students.

Selection of Participants

You are being selected to participate in this study because you are a 9th-grade teacher in Philadelphia, PA at a school located in an urban geographic setting.

General Experimental Procedures

As a participant of the study we are asking that you involve yourself in the following activities:

- Complete a brief teacher information form.
- Allow investigators to observe your interactions with students during one hour a week for 8 weeks.
- Complete the Harvard Implicit Associations Test online.
- Participate in a one-hour focus group with the other teachers participating in the study.

The data you will provide will be recorded anonymously and your participation and anything you say during the session will be held in the strictest confidence.

Risks

There are no inherent or unforeseen risks associated with participation in this study.

Benefits

By participating in this study you will contribute vital information to the literature on teacher-student relationships. In addition, you will be provided with a report on general themes and findings which may include strategies for improving the relationships you have with students.

Confidentiality

Although the study team has placed safeguards to maintain the confidentiality of my personal information, there is always a potential risk of an unpermitted disclosure. To that degree, all documents and information pertaining to this research study will be kept confidential, unless required by applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations to be disclosed. I understand the records and data generated by the study may be reviewed by Temple University and its agents, the study sponsor or the sponsor's agents (if applicable), and/or governmental agencies to assure proper conduct of the study and compliance with regulations. I understand that the results of this study may be published. If any data is published, I will not be identified by name.

Participant Rights

For questions about my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Institutional Review Board Coordinator at (215) 707-3390. The IRB Coordinator may also be reached by email to irb@temple.edu or regular mail:

Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Temple University Research Administration
Student Faculty Conference Center
3340 North Broad Street – Suite 304
Philadelphia, PA 19140

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to take part in this study.

_____	_____
Participant's Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator's Signature	Date

Teacher Consent Form

Confirming and Disconfirming Communication Practices of Teachers in Urban Classrooms

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Selection of Participants

You are being selected to participate in this study because you are a 9th-grade teacher in Philadelphia, PA at a school located in an urban geographic setting.

General Experimental Procedures

As a participant of the study we are asking that you involve yourself in the following activities:

- Complete a brief teacher information form.
- Participate in a one hour focus group with the other teachers participating in the study.

The data you will provide will be recorded anonymously and your participation and anything you say during the session will be held in the strictest confidence.

Risks

There are no inherent or unforeseen risks associated with participation in this study.

Benefits

By participating in this study you will contribute vital information to the literature on teacher-student relationships. In addition, you will be provided with a report on general themes and findings which may include strategies for improving the relationships you have with students.

Confidentiality

Although the study team has placed safeguards to maintain the confidentiality of my personal information, there is always a potential risk of an unpermitted disclosure. To that degree, all documents and information pertaining to this research study will be kept confidential, unless required by applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations to be disclosed. I understand the records and data generated by the study may be reviewed by Temple University and its agents, the study sponsor or the sponsor’s agents (if applicable), and/or governmental agencies to assure proper conduct of the study and compliance with regulations. I understand that the results of this study may be published. If any data is published, I will not be identified by name.

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Student Faculty Conference Center
3340 North Broad Street – Suite 304
Philadelphia, PA 19140

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

Student Assent Form

Confirming and Disconfirming Communication Practices of Teachers in Urban Classrooms

Principal Investigator:

Tricia Jones, Ph.D.

Professor, Dept. of Psychological Studies in Education

College of Education

215.204.6013

Student Investigator:

Brandi M. Baldwin, M.Ed.

Graduate Student, Dept. of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

College of Education

484.448.2216

Purpose of Research

We are currently engaged in a study of teacher-student relationships. To help us gain further insights into this area we are seeking high school students willing to provide perspectives on how they build relationships with teachers.

Selection of Participants

You are being selected to participate in this study because you are a 9th-grade student in Philadelphia, PA at a school located in an urban geographic setting.

General Experimental Procedures

As a participant of the study we are asking that you involve yourself in the following activities:

- Complete a brief student information form.
- Allow investigators to observe your interactions with teachers during one hour a week for 8 weeks.
- Participate in a one-hour focus group with the other students participating in the study.
- Complete a 5-7 minute survey on teacher communication.

The data you will provide will be recorded anonymously and your participation and anything you say during the session will be held in the strictest confidence. There are no inherent or unforeseen risks associated with participation in this study.

Benefits

By participating in this study you will contribute vital information to the literature on teacher-student relationships. In addition, you will be provided with a report on general themes and findings which may include strategies for improving the relationships you have with students.

Confidentiality

Although the study team has placed safeguards to maintain the confidentiality of my personal information, there is always a potential risk of an unpermitted disclosure. To that degree, all documents and information pertaining to this research study will be kept confidential, unless required by applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations to be disclosed. I understand the records and data generated by the study may be reviewed by Temple University and its agents, the study sponsor or the sponsor’s agents (if applicable), and/or governmental agencies to assure proper conduct of the study and compliance with regulations. I understand that the results of this study may be published. If any data is published, I will not be identified by name.

Participant Rights

For questions about my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Institutional Review Board Coordinator at (215)707-3390. The IRB Coordinator may also be reached by email to irb@temple.edu or regular mail:

Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Temple University Research Administration
Student Faculty Conference Center
3340 North Broad Street – Suite 304
Philadelphia, PA 19140

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Assent Form and that you agree to take part in this study.

Print Participant’s Name

Participant’s Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

Permission to Audiotape

Confirming and Disconfirming Communication Practices of Teachers in Urban Classrooms

Principal Investigator:

Tricia Jones, Ph.D.

Professor, Dept. of Psychological Studies in Education

College of Education

215.204.6013

Student Investigator:

Brandi M. Baldwin, M.Ed.

Graduate Student, Dept. of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

College of Education

484.448.2216

Participant Name: _____

Date: _____

Log#: _____

I give Brandi M. Baldwin permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will only be used for the following purpose(s)

X **Research**-This audiotape will be used as part of a research study at _____ . I have already given written consent for my participation in this research study. At no time will my name be used.

When Will I Be Audiotape?

I agree to be audiotaped during the time period _____ to _____.

I understand that this data will be stored for three(3) years after the completion of the study.

What if I Change My Mind?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotape(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with Brandi M. Baldwin in any way.

Other

I understand that I will not be paid for being audiotaped or for the use of these audiotapes.

For Further Information

If I would like additional information about the audiotape(s), or if I have questions or concerns at any time, I can contact:

Brandi M. Baldwin
Graduate Student
Urban Education, Dept. of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Temple University, College of Education
1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19122
484.448.2216

Participant's Name (Printed): _____ Date _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Investigator's Name: _____ Date _____

This form will be placed in my records and a copy will be kept by the person(s) named above. A copy will be given to me.

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL AND TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Focus Group Protocol Teachers

1. How do you define quality teacher-student relationships?
2. What practices have you successfully used to build quality relationships with your students?
3. What practices have not worked to build quality relationships with your students?
4. How does culture impact the relationship-building process? Do you think culture matters when it comes to building teacher-student relationships?

Focus Group Protocol Students

1. How do you define quality teacher-student relationships?
2. Think about the teachers who you have a close relationship with. What did they do to build that relationship with you?
3. Think about the teacher who you do not have a close relationship with. What did they do that hindered your ability to have a close relationship with them?
4. How does culture impact the relationship-building process? Do you think culture matters when it comes to building teacher-student relationships?

