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Developing Effective Classroom Environments in a High School Looping Program: A Narrative Research Study

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

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May 2017

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Keywords: looping, responsive teaching, student-teacher relationships, effective classroom environment, attachment theory, motivational theory

ABSTRACT

Developing Effective Classroom Environments in a High School Looping Program:

A Narrative Research Study

by

Caleb C. Tipton

This study captures the narrative of the lived experiences of four teachers as they developed effective classroom environments in a high school looping program in an Eastern Tennessee school district. The study examined the stories and reflections of the participants in order to discover teacher perception, behaviors, and attitudes that help to establish teacher-student relational involvement which produces positive academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional student outcomes. The stories collected during the narrative study provide real-life, contextual data with which other practitioners might reflect upon their own teaching experiences and practices. The study also adds to the discussion on the potential impact of looping programs as a structure for improving student-teacher relationships and maximizing responsive teaching in secondary schools in order address student engagement and motivation.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family: My wife, Katharine, who is my best friend and provided constant encouragement and the occasional, and much needed, pep talk. Sophia and Aubrey who consistently remind me of the joy in discovery and investigation. And, finally, the triplets: Jack, Luke, and Stella who keep me young and help me focus on what's important each day.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

- Robert Frost

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School leaders are bombarded with such a quantity of student needs, parent concerns, teacher concerns, district requirements, state requirements, and federal requirements that the task of improving the level of teacher effectiveness is a sizeable challenge (Glickman, 2002). The implementation of evaluation systems based on teacher effectiveness ratings has produced feelings of anxiety among professional educators. Incentive pay scales based upon student performance on standardized assessments also do little to reduce increased levels of anxiety for teachers. Classroom teachers and school leaders are currently faced with the challenge of reaching the highest levels of instructional rigor while simultaneously meeting the needs of diverse learners. The emphasis on improved student achievement has given educators and researchers cause to examine the impact of teacher credentials, professional development, class size, differing instructional techniques, curricula, and teacher preparation programs as they relate to student achievement. Additionally, understanding what aspects of a student's educational experience produce positive effects in student achievement is warranted. Examination of the development and impact of effective learning environments is a noteworthy pursuit because of the encompassing nature of a classroom environment. The classroom environment is crucial at the high school level because it is a point in the educational experience of a student when poor academic performance and lack of positive teacher and peer relationships result in a higher risk for student dropout (Dika & Singh, 2002; Wentzel, 2003).

Creating teaching and learning environments that are conducive to the development of caring student-teacher interactions is vital to student learning at the secondary level. High school students begin to make decisions about their future educational plans and aspirations as they

approach an age that allows them to legally withdraw from school (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012). High school students who have not previously established a history of either social success or academic achievement express declining interest in their studies and, in turn, have little hope for their academic or occupational futures (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horset, 1997; Cataldi & Kewalramani, 2009; Dika & Singh, 2002; Muller, 2001). The quality of teacher-student interactions and relationships has a direct bearing on student engagement, academic achievement, and overall educational experience (Pianta, Belsky, Vandergrift, Houts, & Morrison, 2008). The development of effective classroom environments which provide responsive emotional, social, and academic supports as well as having clear organizational and behavioral expectations can provide at-risk secondary students with a structure for improved academic and social success (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012).

This qualitative narrative study explores the stories of four teachers efforts to develop effective classroom environments in a high school looping program. Capturing the reflections and stories of the teachers experiences underscore teacher practices and strategies that help to create effective learning environments. The collected narratives also allow for an examination of looping as a meaningful framework for supporting the establishment of effective classroom environments at the secondary level. Additionally, the study includes narrative data addressing looping as a viable strategy relating to increasing student achievement while minimizing risk of student disengagement and dropout.

Statement of the Problem

A small high school in Eastern Tennessee, has a level 5 effectiveness rating according to the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) data for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. A level 5 effectiveness rating is earned when students at a school make

substantially more progress than their expected academic growth (Tennessee State Board of Education: Technical Report and Definitions, 2014, p. 3). The school's effectiveness rating is in part due to recent student success in English I and Algebra I. Students in English I and Algebra I have consistently reached high levels of success with regard to both achievement and growth on state mandated assessments over the past five years and have consistently scored above expectations on TVAAS. The yearlong freshman academy model for English I and Algebra I are associated with raising and sustaining student achievement in English and math. Yearlong academy programs are designed to support students as they transition from middle grades to the more demanding secondary curriculum. A successful transition from eighth to ninth grades is pivotal in helping students earn a high school diploma (Dedmond, 2008). Students that experience poor academic, social, and behavioral adjustments when transitioning to high school are at an increased risk of dropping out (Wiess & Bearman, 2007). The freshman academy program provides students with academic and relational support via yearlong instruction in English I and Algebra I. Students benefit from the personalization and bonding that occurs in yearlong courses (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001; Knesting, 2008). These transitional years are a critical time for building significant student-teacher relationships and classroom contexts encourage students to remain in school and provide motivation for improved academic performance (Cataldi, Laird, & Kewalramani, 2009).

The ninth grade academy framework has been successful in providing needed academic, social, emotional, and behavioral scaffolding for students as they transition to the rigor of a high school environment (Chmelynski, 2004). Student progress at the study site is reflected in improved academic success and a decline in behavioral referrals for ninth grade students.

Student achievement and growth, as measured by TVAAS scores, have resulted in declining scores in English and math courses as students leave the freshman academy. Teachers at the study site implemented looping classrooms in English II and geometry during the 2015-2016 school year as a strategy to address lower English and math scores in sophomore courses. The decline in academic performance could be attributed to the movement of students from familiar, positive classroom environments established with their 9th grade teachers to unfamiliar classroom contexts or less positive relationships with their sophomore instructors (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989).

Looping classrooms were implemented to capitalize on the existing student-teacher relationships and classroom environments formed in the freshman academy. Looping would provide supports for sustained academic, socio-emotional, and behavioral success as freshman transition from the yearlong academy to their sophomore year. Teacher volunteers continue with the students from their freshman academy courses into the fall semester of their sophomore year. This narrative study will explore how teachers at high school in Eastern, Tennessee describe the development of effective classroom environments in the context of a high school looping program.

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry is to explore how teachers reflect upon the development of effective classroom environments in a high school looping.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers describe their experiences of developing the classroom environment in a looping structure?

2. What are teacher perceptions of their own relational involvement with students in a looped high school classroom?
3. How do teachers in a looped classroom provide responsive emotional, social, and academic supports for students?
4. What are teacher perceptions about the role of looping in helping to establish clear organizational and behavioral expectations for students in the classroom environment?

Significance of the Study

This study is a narrative analysis of the development of effective classroom cultures by four classroom teachers within the framework of a high school looping program. Research underscores the importance of effective classroom environments and teacher-student relationships at the early and elementary levels. Positive teacher-student interactions lead to improved social outcomes and narrow the achievement gap for students at the Pre-K and elementary levels (Pianta et al., 2008).

There is a difference when comparing the impact of classroom cultures and teacher-student relationships during students formative early years of education versus the amount of research that examines the effects of classroom environment on high school age students (Hamre & Pianta 2001; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992). High school students are at a point in their educational journey in which they begin making decisions that will have lasting impacts on their lives. High school students that have had little academic or social success during their schooling are more at-risk of not graduating (Alexander et al., 1997; Cataldi et al., 2009; Henry et al., 2012). Researchers have found that older students still experience academic and social benefits from classroom environments that are characterized by positive and respectful teacher-student interactions (Alexander et al., 1997, Cataldi et al., 2009; Entwisle, & Horset, 1997). Teachers

build productive relationships with students and exhibit high expectations for student performance are those successful at keeping students engaged and motivated (Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999).

The teacher-student relationship in effective classroom environments is a powerful combatant against many primary factors that lead to students dropping out of school such as, little family support, poor relationships with adults and peers, and economic disadvantages (Henry et al., 2012). Consequently, sharing the lived experiences of teachers as they work to develop effective classroom environments could offer naturalistic, contextual data on the effect of classroom cultures on a student educational experience. Examining teacher narratives within the context of classroom experiences and teacher-student interactions could also reveal strategies and practices that improve classroom environments. It is important to provide such opportunities for educators to reflect on instructional practices via stories that are rich, contextual, personal and relevant (Farrell, 2004).

This narrative analysis will provide an opportunity to assess whether a high school looping program assists in facilitating more effective classroom environments. Classroom looping strategies have been used much more frequently in elementary and early education as a structural method for building student to teacher relationships, supporting students in transition years, and offering consistent instructional practices for developing learners (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008). Looping occurs with much less frequency at the high school level (Drew, 2014). The absences of frequent looping at the high school level limits the body of research on the value of looping for the enrichment of high school classroom environments. There is a need for exploring methods of improving student-teacher relationships at the high school level because of the potential impact on student achievement and dropout prevention (Alexander et al., 1997;

Cataldi et al., 2009; Gallagher, 2014). This research study will add to the limited literature on applying looping at the high school level as a method of supporting effective classroom environments, increasing student success, and reducing student dropout.

Definition of Terms

The subsequent terms and definitions will be employed for purpose of this study.

1. Academic Achievement: Achievement is a representative measure of students' performance on the goals of instructional environments. Common representations of academic achievement include course grades, scores on standardized assessments, student grade point averages (GPA), and attainment of educational degrees or certificates (Steinmayr, Dinger, & Spinath, 2012).
2. At-risk Students: Students at risk of educational failure, which is typically manifested in withdrawal from high school before earning a diploma or failure to graduate on time (Kaufman & Bradby, 1992).
3. Effective Classroom Environments: Effective classrooms will be defined using the conceptualized framework developed by the work of Pianta, Hamre, and Allen (2012), which describes an effective classroom context as having the following characteristics: (1) teachers and students have a close relational involvement, (2) teachers are responsive to student academic and socioemotional needs, and (3) the teacher-student relationship provides clear organizational and behavioral expectations.
4. Student Growth: Growth is a measure of gains made by individual students between specific points in time as assessed by performance on an assessment, end-of-course test, performance-based assessments, mastery of student learning objectives, or other

measures of student achievement that are rigorous and comparable across schools within an LEA (McGuinn, 2006).

5. Looping: Looping is the practice of keeping groups of students with the same teacher over a long period of time to provide continuity and instructional support (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996).
6. Responsive Classroom Environment: A classroom environment in which teachers work to create a sense of community and attempt to support student academic, social, and emotional learning (Rimm-Kaufman & Wanless, 2012)
7. TEAM Evaluation Model: The TEAM (Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model) evaluation process is a means of evaluating teacher effectiveness based upon qualitative classroom observations and quantitative measures from student performance on state assessments (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011).
8. TVAAS: TVAAS (Tennessee Value Added Assessment System) is the statistical method used by the state of Tennessee to measure the effect of school systems, schools, and teachers on student learning (Sanders & Horn, 1998).

Limitations and Delimitations

The potential for subjectivity in narrative analysis can produce distrust among researchers in social science, though telling stories of participants is not a novel phenomenon in qualitative research (Riesmann, 1993). The researcher must protect the integrity of the narratives and not retell the stories in a manner that creates distinction between what is told to the researcher and what is reported. The relationship between the researcher and the participants must be transparent to ensure credibility in research.

The possibility that either researcher or participants could possess agendas for falsifying, fictionalizing, or misrepresenting stories is also a limitation of narrative research. “Narrative research requires an interpretive analysis of stories which results in a hybrid text, that aims to straddle the boundary between actual and virtual worlds, one foot firmly planted in each (Barone, 2000 p. 61-62). Narrative researchers then must address these plausible concerns by faithfully adhering to the criteria and techniques for establishing the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative research that are most widely accepted in the qualitative research community (Loh, 2013). The researcher will employ triangulation of data, member checks, thick descriptions, peer validation, and audience validation to support the trustworthiness, or verisimilitude, and utility of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2011).

Another limitation of the study is the researcher’s role of school principal. The researcher’s role as a supervisor may potentially and inadvertently impact the faithfulness with which looping teachers convey their experiences of creating classroom environments. Teachers could be overly optimistic about their experiences in interviews because they want to paint themselves or the looping program in a positive light. The researcher will mitigate this limitation by employing a surrogate interviewer that is not in a supervisory role. The interviewer is familiar with the qualitative research methodologies and interview processes. Moreover, the interviewer will undergo training in the interview processes for this research to insure credibility and trustworthiness.

This study has been delimited to a small sample of four classroom teachers that have had the opportunity to spend an extended amount of time building classroom environments with their student groups. The teachers remained with student groups in a yearlong freshman academy and looped with the student groups into a 3rd semester of the students sophomore year. The sharing

and analysis of the teacher narratives could provide beneficial information about the process of building effective classroom environments and the potential of a looping program as a framework for supporting positive classroom environments.

This study will also be delimited to the teachers perspective of the classroom environment and will not include the voices of students. This is a notable delimitation of the study because research suggests that students and teachers may have different perspectives of the same classroom context. Though there is an absence of such data at the secondary level, research studies of teacher and student perceptions of teacher-student relationships at the elementary level suggest that teachers and students perceive relationships differently (Hughes, 2011). Specifically, teachers and students do not always agree in their perceptions of relational support (Li, Hughes, Kwok, & Hsu, 2012). However, there is also a question in narrative research as to the ability of participants to adequately tell their stories in a manner that would, as Patton (2015) writes, "offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings (p. 128)." Student experiences are not necessitated by this research study because the focus is on teacher experiences in developing an effective classroom environment. This study will collect narratives to highlight teacher interpretations and reflections of their own behaviors, thought processes, strategies, etc. The sharing and analysis of their personal narratives could provide beneficial information both about the process of building effective classroom environments and the potential of a looping program as a worthwhile structure for supporting positive classroom environments.

The limitations of this study and research methodology do not discount the value of research conducted. Narrative inquiry is valuable in the field of educational research because it provides a manner of accessing the lives of people with experiences that are relevant to addressing real life problems (Lieblich, 1998). Narrative research is also an appropriate and

viable manner in which to explore the social organization of a classroom environment (Patton, 2015). This narrative study will allow the researcher to share the stories of four teachers that can contribute their knowledge and expertise in developing effective classroom environments that address issues of student achievement and high school dropout. This narrative research is not focused on being predictive. Rather, the study will offer descriptions, interpretations and explanations of teacher experiences that enrich the existing cannon of research regarding the development of positive classroom cultures.

Overview of the Study

The primary objective of this qualitative inquiry addresses research question one: How do teachers describe their experiences of developing the classroom environment in a looping structure? The gathering of narratives from teachers as they work to develop effective classroom environments in a looping structure will provide lived experiences that may be analyzed as a means of adding to the knowledge and research on the significance of teacher-student interactions at the secondary level. The qualitative study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 underscores the utility and basis for the study in an introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, definition of key terms, and the limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 consists of a review of relevant literature in the significance of effective classroom environments at the high school level and the potential impact of classroom environments on student academic and social success as well as dropout reduction. Chapter 2 also closely examines the research on teacher-student relatedness and student motivation and engagement. Chapter 3 includes a presentation of the research methodology, design, and procedures. Chapter 4 provides a presentation of the data gathered from the interviews with the four teachers including analysis of the narratives, analysis of professional learning community (PLC)

documents, observational notes, and resultant findings. Finally, chapter 5 presents a summation of the research study findings, conclusions drawn from the study, implication for future practice, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Effective teachers help facilitate positive student perspectives concerning school and learning, and the effectiveness of the classroom teacher has a direct impact on student growth and academic achievement (Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Teacher effectiveness may be the most critical factor in affecting student learning (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). The classroom teacher has more influence on student learning than school administrators, peer groups, and even overall school culture (Hattie, 2003). Research findings support the fact that an effective classroom teacher can even stimulate achievement growth at a rate that negates the adverse impact of environmental factors such as a student's home life or socio-economic status, both of which are consistently noted as obstacles to student achievement (Hattie, 2012).

The quality of the student-teacher relationship is pivotal in producing positive learning outcomes for students and schools (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004). The ability of the teacher to create a classroom environment that supports the needs of individual students may be one of the most impactful avenues for fostering student learning and keeping high school students engaged in their education (Bandura, 1997; Fan & Willams, 2010). Effective classroom environments are learning contexts in which teachers are relationally involved with their students. The culture of an effective classroom is characterized as a safe place for student learning, in which the teacher is able to provide responsive emotional, social, and academic supports as well as establish clear organizational and behavioral expectations that facilitate engagement and student motivation (Pianta et al., 2012).

The Dropout Issue

Students that have reached high school enter a time at which the prospect of leaving school is a real and viable option. Student failure to obtain a degree before leaving high school is detrimental both at an individual and national level (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009). The Center for Labor Market Studies (2009) asserts that individuals that do not complete high school with a diploma, "experience a wide array of labor market, earnings, social and income problems that exacerbate their ability to transition to careers and stable marriages from their mid-20's onward" (Sum et al., 2009, p. 1).

The unemployment rate for dropouts is nearly five times that of the national unemployment rate. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) reports that the labor force status of 2014-2015 high school dropouts reveals an unemployment rate of 19.8 percent for students with no high school degree. Simultaneously, the national unemployment rate in May of 2016 had declined to 4.7 percent (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016).

According to the Center on Education and the Workforce (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013), failure to obtain a high school diploma will continue to limit prospective employment opportunities in the United States. The *Recovery: Job Growth and Educations Requirements Through 2020* (2013) executive summary projects that, "by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the economy will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school" (Carnevale et al., 2013, p. 3). Students that do not earn a high school diploma will only have access to approximately 7 million of the projected 55 million job openings between 2010 and 2020. Only 12 percent of the workforce will have less than a high school diploma by 2020 (Carnevale et al., 2013).

Students that do not graduate high school will not be able to keep up with the demands for a more skilled and educated workforce. “The demand for physical skills has continued to decline over time, except for ‘near vision,’ which is necessary to read computer screens and other types of documentation”(Carnevale et al., 2013, p. 2). Employment opportunities for high school dropouts will continue to decline as demand for physical or manual labor jobs diminishes. The continued decline in job availability for high school dropouts makes earning a high school diploma critical.

Dropout rates have an adverse impact on future earning potential and an individual’s overall quality of life. The continued decline in earnings for high school dropouts over recent decades has contributed to decreases in home ownership, reduction in marriage rates, and a rise in the number of single parents in the U.S. (Sum et al., 2009). The Alliance for Excellent Education (Amos, 2009) reports that the annual earnings of a high school dropout is nearly $8,000 less than an individual with a high school diploma but no college education. High school dropouts earn $260,000 less over the course of their lifetime than a high school graduate (Sum et al., 2009). Earning potential for high school dropouts has decreased by over 35 percent since the early 1970’s, and employment projections suggest that this trend will continue (Amos, 2009).

Students that leave high school without graduating tend to remain in low socioeconomic environments. Low socioeconomic environments provide fewer academic supports for future generations (Sum et al., 2009). Lower incomes and limited earning potential inhibit high school dropouts from pursuing future educational opportunities or training, which continues to be detrimental to their personal, financial futures. The lack of educational opportunities continues to inhibit the academic and economic future of their children (Sum et al., 2009). High school

dropouts are also the least likely demographic group to be provided with continued training from respective employers (Zhao, 2008).

The employability and financial status of high school dropouts produces a sizeable fiscal burden for federal and local governments. In comparing the lifetime fiscal contributions of adults ages 18 to 64, the Center for Labor Market Studies (2009) determined that, "the average high school dropout will cost taxpayers over $292,000 in lower tax revenues, higher cash and in-kind transfer costs, and imposed incarceration costs relative to a high school graduate" (Sum et al., 2009, p. 15). High school dropouts are six times more likely to be incarcerated than individuals with only a high school diploma and over 63 times more likely to be imprisoned than a college graduate. High school dropouts also constitute 22.6 percent of single mothers ages 16 to 24 (Sum et al., 2009). High school dropouts disproportionately use more public resources and government assistance than they contribute to the economy via taxes or spending (D'Andrea, 2010).

Increasing student graduation rates is a critical initiative for improving opportunities for employability, earning potential, standard of living, and quality of life High school graduates earn more, are more employable, and live longer than dropouts (Sum et al., 2009). Increased graduation rates also have positive economic implications nationwide. Increasing high school graduation rates could help save the country billions of dollars on assistance programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Just a 5 percent increase in the high school graduation rate of males would result in a $4.9 billion savings for the nation's criminal systems (Amos, 2009).

Factors for Student Withdrawal from School

The social and fiscal fallout of student dropouts necessitate an examination of antecedent factors that might be mitigated by schools and teachers. Jordan, Lara, and McPartland (1994) and Watt and Roessingh (1994) created a framework for understanding the litany of reasons that students leave high school before graduation. External risk factors such as the level of parent educational attainment and socioeconomic status certainly contribute to a student's desire or need to leave school prior to graduation. Jordan et al. (1994) labeled these factors as pull factors. For example, many high school dropouts cite factors such as childbirth, needing a job, illnesses, or financial concerns as reasons for dropping out of school (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). In such cases, the student is pulled away from school because he or she determines that something outside of school has a greater value, or requires more attention than earning a diploma.

Jordan et al. (1994) suggested that pull factors may also result from internal thoughts or concerns. "Understanding Why Students Drop Out of High School According to Their Own Reports," (Doll et al., 2013) reports that the highest rated pull factor for high school dropouts was the belief that earning a GED would be easier than a high school diploma. The report, which collected data on why students drop out of school from seven nationally representative studies, found that 41.5 percent of male students and 39.1 of female students stated that they had dropped out of school because they believed it would be easier to earn a GED (Doll et al., 2013).

Jordan et al. (1994) also identified push factors that influence student dropout rates. Push dropouts occur when students experience adversity or negative consequences within the school setting. Unlike pull factors, push factors are solely school related. Factors such as consistently poor academic performance and low course grades are considered push factors. Students feel that they are being pushed out of school because they cannot keep up with the academic requirements

of the school. 40.1 percent of male dropouts and 35.2 percent of female dropouts cited failing grades as the primary reason that they dropped out (Doll et al., 2013). Other leading push factors result from issues such as attendance, poor relationships with teachers, poor relationships with peers, and suspensions or other consequences of student failure to adhere to discipline policies. (Doll et al., 2013).

Balfanz and Fox (2011) found that dropout factors which align with student attendance, student behavior, and academic course performance continue to rank as the highest risk factors for student withdrawal from school. Students that have a history of academic, behavior, and attendance issues are at great risk of deciding to drop out of school. Students that exhibit such behaviors also make the decision to drop out early in their high school career (Balfanz & Fox, 2011).

Student absenteeism been noted as an early warning sign of student drop out (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006) Doll et al. (2013) found that 44.1 percent of males and 42.7 percent of females responded that they dropped out because they had missed too many days of school. Student absenteeism was the highest rated cause of dropout given by the respondents in the study.

Watt and Roessingh (1994) added to the framework developed by Jordan et al. by labeling a third category of dropout factors as fall out factors. Watt and Roessingh argued that many students fall out of school as the result of apathy or disengagement that results from poor academic progress and "insufficient personal or educational support."(p. 293). High school students frequently cite boredom, lack of academic success, and failure to connect with school personnel as reasons for dropping out of school (Azzam, 2007). High school dropouts that cited falling out factors as a primary reason for leaving school most commonly expressed that they did

not like school, or that they did not feel a sense of belonging in the school environment (Doll et al., 2013).

The reasons why students drop out of school may differ depending upon the age of the student. The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88) found that fall out factors, such as disengagement and apathy, had a more significant influence for students that made the decision to drop out later into their high school careers. Push factors, such as poor grades or relationships, are more prevalent for students that decide early in high school that they will drop out when they reach an age that will allow them to do so (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). These findings provide early warning signs for identifying at-risk students, but they also support the disengagement theory of school dropout. Disengagement theory of dropout asserts that at-risk students exhibit behaviors such poor academic performance early on and then gradually lose interest in school and ultimately lose hope of graduating (Finn, 1998; Finn & Fish, 2007).

School Disengagement and Early Warning Behaviors

Doll et al. (2013) ranked the most frequent reasons why students drop out of school. Doll et al. (2013) utilized the frameworks developed by Jordan et al. (1994) and Watt and Roessingh (1994), which categorized reasons for student dropout as falling out, push, or pull factors. The findings of the report underscore that the many of the reasons that dropouts provided for leaving school, whether internal or external in nature, where not related to single events. Dropping out of school for many students is the culminating event of the process of school disengagement (Henry et al., 2012).

The process of disengagement from school begins to manifest early in students educational career (Henry et al., 2012). Early warning systems have been developed based upon research that has linked student data and dropout risk. Early warning systems are designed to identify at-risk students by examining student academic performance, attendance rates, performance on standardized assessments, and behavioral incidents. Students that exhibit a higher number of risk indicators are more at risk of dropping out of school (Heppen & Therriault, 2008; Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007). The use of early warning systems has proven effective in both predicting student disengagement and preventing student dropout (Dynarksi, Clarke, Cobb, Finn, Rumberger, & Smink, 2008; O'Cummings & Therriault, 2015).

Henry et al. (2012) developed an early warning index, which they called the school disengagement index. Henry et al. (2012) then conducted research to assess the relationship between student disengagement behaviors during middle adolescence and a variety of negative outcomes into late adolescence and early adulthood. The study built upon the previous research findings on early warning systems in order to examine the "predictive utility of the early warning index on high school dropout and other problem behaviors" (p. 157). The research specifically reviewed student academic, attendance, and behavior data from the eighth and ninth grades. Longitudinal data was collected to determine if early signs of disengagement were related to school dropout and other behaviors such as delinquency or substance abuse as late adolescence and young adults. Henry et al. (2012) found that the disengagement index was positively correlated with dropping out of high school. Students that demonstrated a higher frequency of disengagement behaviors in early adolescence had a significantly higher likelihood of dropping out of school. Students that demonstrated a higher number of disengagement factors in 8th and 9th

grades also had a higher rate of criminal behavior, alcohol abuse, and substance abuse even in early adulthood (Henry et al., 2012).

The ninth grade year is critical for identifying student disengagement and supporting high school success (Heppen & Therriault, 2008). Failure in ninth grade has consistently been a key predictor of student drop out (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). More students are retained due to academic failure in the ninth grade than any other year of high school. Students retained in the ninth grade account for a disproportionate number of students that drop out of school (Herlihy, 2007). Ninth grade students that experience success early in high school have a greater probability of graduating than students that fall behind (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).

A study of students in Chicago Public Schools revealed that student course grades and earned credits during the ninth grade were a better predictor of graduation than either student home environment or academic performance in middle school (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Allensworth and Easton (2007) revealed that ninth grade students earning a minimum of five credits their first year had a greater probability of graduating compared to students that did not, regardless of eighth grade achievement. Students that scored in the lowest quartile on eighth grade achievement that earned five credits their freshman year were more likely to graduate than students scoring in the highest quartile in eighth grade and failed to earn five credits their freshman year (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Absentee behavior has also been consistently linked to student disengagement from school and eventual dropout. Students that have a history of poor attendance are academic risks because of missed assignments and instruction (Heppen & Therriault, 2008). Higher levels of absenteeism put students at greater risk of grade failure (Neild & Balfanz, 2006).

Bridgeland et al. (2006) suggested that absenteeism is part of a cyclical pattern of student disengagement and eventual dropout. Students with attendance issues reported that they did not feel connected to the school community, were unmotivated or bored, or felt that courses were too challenging (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Henry et al., 2012). Missing school can be an avoidant behavior that signals student disinterest or disengagement. Students with an accumulation of absences experience truancy issues and are then forced to return to school. Students that were court ordered to attend school expressed resentment at being returned to school and become more disengaged (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

The Influence of Interpersonal Relationships

The impact of interpersonal relationships on human behavior is related to a natural need to feel a sense of belonging (Martin, 2014). Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested that "human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships (p. 497)." The influence of supportive interpersonal relationships that provide a sense of belonging have been linked to numerous psychological, emotional, and social benefits (Martin, 2014). Quality interpersonal relationships improve an individual's ability to handle adversity and stress. Positive relationships produce feelings of companionship and connectedness that support daily living and lead to the development of healthy social and emotional skills that allow individuals to deal with difficult circumstances (De Leon, 2000; Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002; Martin, Marsh, McInerney, & Green, 2009; Martin, 2014; Pianta, Mimetz, & Bennett, 1997).

Interpersonal relationships that are supportive yield positive emotional responses that improve mood and energy (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). The positive emotional responses that students derive from good relationships have also been linked to student achievement behaviors

such as increased levels of class participation, improved strategy use, better self-regulation, and resiliency (Meyer & Turner, 2002).

Close relationships also influence our belief and value systems and are a context for learning adaptive behaviors. Students demonstrate the tendency to express values, beliefs, and orientations that are aligned with the perspectives of people that they are relationally involved with (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The beliefs and values of significant others are internalized and then manifest in the student's functioning in school (Wentzel, 1999). Positive interpersonal relationships are a foundational part of student success in school. Failure of the school environment to meet the relational needs of students can lead to poor adjustment behaviors and disengagement (Wentzel, McNamara-Barry, & Caldwell, 2004).

Martin and Dowson (2009) assert that there are three primary relationships that have an impact on student academic and non-academic outcomes in the school environment. A study of 3,450 high school students evaluated the impact that interpersonal relationships with parents, teachers, and peers had on academic and non-academic outcomes. Martin et al. (2009) found that the quality of student relationships with parents and teachers, "significantly predicted motivation, engagement, self-concept, and general self-esteem" (pg. 23). Students with more positive interpersonal relationships performed better with regard to literacy and numeracy and expressed greater levels school enjoyment (Martin et al. 2009)

The parental relationship is a strong predictor of student academic outcomes. Students whose parents take an active role in their education experience more school success than students with little parental involvement (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012; Mansour & Martin, 2009; Pomerantz & Moorman, 2010). Parental involvement in a child's schooling has been linked to improved academic and motivational outcomes such as achievement test performance,

graduation rate, attendance, GPA, and more positive perspectives on education (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012).

The student-teacher relationship is another significant influence in the life of children. Supportive and positive teacher-student interpersonal relationships have proven influential in academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for students (Martin, 2014; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Pianta et al., 2012; Wentzel, 2010). Students that perceive a caring relationship with a teacher report increased motivation and learning (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). In a study conducted by Martin et al. (2009), which compared the influence of relational groups on student academic and non-academic outcomes, the teacher-student relationship accounted for the greatest variance in student motivation and engagement.

Students that feel accepted by their teacher also demonstrate more positive emotional and behavioral characteristics in school (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Learners show greater resiliency in cognitive engagement when they feel supported and encouraged by a classroom teacher. Flink, Boggiano, and Barrett (1990) found that teachers can build student confidence and motivation when they implement practices that support student autonomy. Students try harder in classes when they feel safe to take risks and believe that the teacher will provide support when needed (Liem & Martin, 2011).

Poor student-teacher relationships may also have a greater influence in producing negative outcomes for students than either peer or parent relationships (Martin, 2014). A study of 8,300 high students reiterated previous findings linking positive interpersonal relationships with peers, parents, and teachers to student enjoyment of school and class participation. The study also established that the teacher-student relationship was the most predictive of student absenteeism. The teacher-student relationship was found to have a strong negative correlation

with student absenteeism. The quantity of student absences significantly increased as the quality of the teacher-student relationship declined (Martin, 2014).

Martin asserted that the connection between absenteeism and negative teacher-student relations was a product of avoidant behavior. Poor relationships with peers, and parents to some extent, might be avoided during the school day while students are confined to the teacher-student relationship by their course schedule. Students may perceive absenteeism as the only viable option for avoiding a negative relationship with a teacher (Martin, 2014).

The Need for Effective Classrooms and Positive Teacher-Student Relations

The literature addressing the issue of student disengagement and eventual dropout underscores the value of positive interpersonal relationships and the need for effective classroom environments. School leaders and teachers must earnestly consider how disengagement factors might be reduced or mitigated through improved instructional practices and classroom environments (O'Cummings & Therriault, 2015). The effectiveness of classroom teachers in improving and supporting student academic achievement is manifest in the classroom environment.

Benner and Mistry (2007) found that students experienced higher rates of educational successes in classrooms in which the teacher modeled a positive attitude, held high expectations for students and built close and supportive relationships with students. Furthermore, Benner and Mistry (2007) found evidence that positive school experiences can buffer detrimental risk factors that stem from negative home environments and other external sources.

Bridgeland et al.'s (2006) study of the perspectives of high school dropouts underscored the influence of the teacher-student relationship and the classroom environment in dissuading

students from leaving school without a diploma. The student perspectives collected in the study by Bridgeland et al. (2006) most frequently suggested actions for improving student completion of high school that focused on academic supports for struggling learners, positive student-teacher relationships, relevant instruction, and high expectations for student discipline. Bridgeland et al.'s (2006) collection of student perspectives support the substantial body of research that demonstrates students have a greater likelihood of improved academic achievement in classroom environments in which they feel connected and supported. Additionally, teacher enthusiasm, approachability, respectfulness, consistency, and ability to make learning relevant are characteristics that are continually identified by students as teacher qualities that improve their feelings towards school (Betts, Zau, & Rice, 2003; Groves & Welsh, 2010; Postlethwaite & Haggarty, 2002).

Students with a positive relationship with at least one adult in a school are less likely to drop out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). An acknowledgment and identification of risk factors for student withdrawal is necessary, but developing classroom cultures, structures, and environments that serve students at a more individualized level is critical to improving the educational experience of high school students and, in turn, supporting students in completing high school with a diploma (Knesting & Waldron, 2006). The influence of teachers and effective classroom environments impacts the lives of students beyond graduation and into adulthood (Barry & King, 1998).

Outcomes from Teacher-Student Relational Involvement

Longitudinal studies conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2006), underscore the connection between student achievement and the lasting influence of positive teacher-student relationships. Students that experience positive relationships

with their teachers in early grades continue to reap the academic and socioemotional benefits of that impactful experience into later grades (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

The quality of teacher-student relationships has been significantly connected to student engagement in classroom activities, behavioral and social functioning, and academic performance (Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Calkins, 2007; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008). According to Dika and Singh (2002), quality teacher-student relationships can substantially reduce dropout rates by providing students with a resource and support system for achieving future academic and vocational goals. Hamre and Pianta (2001) assert that when teachers build positive relationships with students that a strong bond can form that equips the students to develop socially appropriate behaviors and provides a clear understanding of academic expectations. Students are most productive and more engaged in learning when they experience caring and warm interactions in class (Fraser, 2012; Wubbels, Brekelmans, Den Brok, & Van Tartwijk, 2006).

Research indicates that positive student-teacher interactions are more meaningful for economically disadvantaged students than their non-economically disadvantaged peers (Murray & Malmgren, 2005). Positive teacher-student relationships seem to be critically important to the development of students living in poverty with unequal access to educational opportunities (Zandvliet, Den Brok, Mainhard, & Van Tartwijk, 2014). These findings are especially significant because impoverished students often struggle with low self-confidence in terms of academic and vocational success. At-risk students will project current academic struggles to future struggles in the workplace or life after school (Wentzel, 2003). Positive teacher-student relationships provide much needed supports for students that struggle with self-doubts that make

future successes unlikely. Continued struggles and poor school performance ultimately lead to disengagement from schooling (Wentzel, 2003). Students that characterize their relationship with a teacher as a close are more likely to be motivated to continue to improve and grow academically (Bandura, 1997; Fan & Willams, 2010; Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994; Wentzel, 2003; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992).

There are also social and emotional outcomes for students that have positive interactions with their teachers. Learning is the product of changed behavior, perspectives, and thinking (Allen & Wergin, 2009). Change in all learners, regardless of age, is a personal matter that requires that the learner take risks to achieve new learning. Teachers that establish learning environments that foster high levels of trust, inspire confidence, build a sense of community, and provide a balance between challenge and support can produce changes in student learners (Allen & Wergin, 2009). Teachers can empower students and develop a learning environment conducive to learning by building trusting relationships. Students understand that learning requires being open to new experiences, which entails personal risk of making errors and receiving feedback. Students that have had a history of poor academic performance are much more reluctant to take risks without a positive relationship with a teacher (Hughes & Cavell, 1999). Students need to trust that the teacher will support them when they struggle (Hattie & Yates, 2013). In effective classroom environments, the teacher-student relationship is such that students feel secure in that they will have the support to reach academically challenging goals. Students will take more risks in a classroom environment that is characterized by safety and support. Students that may be anxious or feel overwhelmed by difficult academic tasks are encouraged to stay engaged with future tasks when they begin to experience even small successes (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Teacher-student relationships also have a significant influence on peer relationships. Hughes, Cavell, and Willson (2001) posit that teacher interactions with a student can affect peer interactions by indirectly impacting student perceptions of individuals within the classroom. Students that are perceived has having a poor relationship with the teacher might be rejected by their peers, which could ultimately impact student self-esteem and sense of belonging (Hughes et al., 2001). Classmates that are perceived as being accepted by the teacher are more likely to have positive interactions with peers (Hughes et al., 2001).

A high school student's academic trajectory has a significant impact on their future aspirations. Lack of family support, a history of poor academic success, and the absence of positive relationships with peers and adults are key factors for students that dropout of school (Henry et al., 2012). Teachers are an integral component in a learner's view of self and also how they are perceived by peers. If a teacher extends supportive and positive social interactions to a student then the student is more likely to receive similar interactions from classmates. Collaborative and encouraging teacher-student interactions lay the groundwork for an accepting and emotionally safe classroom environment (Hughes, 2011).

The research of Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) further illustrated the value of establishing a culture of trust and support in order to improve the effectiveness of schools. Marzano et al. (2005) found that the greatest influence on student achievement results from "creating a school culture that is conducive to cooperation, builds a sense of community, and establishes shared beliefs" (p. 48). A review of the literature underscores the significance of teacher and student interactions, and support that the quality teacher-student relations are a vital component of developing a classroom environment that is conducive to improving student academic and socioemotional outcomes.

Pianta's Dimensions of Teacher Student Relations: Closeness and Conflict

Pianta's (1997) research of teacher-student relationships in early school years provided a framework for measuring and assessing the teacher-student relationship in terms of two primary dimensions: closeness and conflict. These dimensions were developed to help define and characterize teacher and student behavioral patterns. Closeness is considered to be typical of positive teacher-student relationships while conflict is the typical hallmark of negative teacher-student relationships (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Pianta's dimensions for examining teacher-student relational involvement have proven consistent and stable from kindergarten to high school. The dimensions have also been consistent indicators of teacher-student relationships across ethnicities and socioeconomic status (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992).

Pianta's closeness dimension refers the emotional context and exchanges involved in teacher-student interactions. Interpreting the closeness of the teacher student relationship involves both the perceptions of the teacher and students (Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003; Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002). Settanni, Longobardi, Sclavo, Fraire, and Prino (2015) assert that, though these perceptions are byproducts of personal expectations, feelings, and evaluations, "they are important because they are real, from a psychological standpoint, and they have the power to influence the behavior of each party significantly" (p. 1).

Closeness in the teacher-student relationship indicates that a congenial and warm relationship exists in the classroom between teachers and students. A relationship that is characterized as close actually promotes positive student attitudes towards school, increases student engagement, and fosters respectful and open communication between student and teacher (Birch & Ladd, 1997).

Students who perceive a close relationship with their teacher are more likely to use the teacher as a resource for both academic and socioemotional challenges (Pianta et al., 2003). Similarly, students that enjoy close relationships with teachers also experience fewer disciplinary or behavioral issues and exhibit a better aptitude for behavioral and social skills. (Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, VanDamme, & Maes, 2008; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Teacher-student relationships that demonstrate closeness produce students that are better adjusted to the overall school experience when compared to peers that do not perceive a close relationship with their teacher (Hattie & Yates, 2013).

The conflict dimension of Pianta's assessment of teacher-student relationships measures the frequency of the negative, dissonant interactions between teacher and students. Conflict based relationships lack the emotional supports that can occur in quality teacher-student interactions. Teacher-student relationships that display high levels of conflict and dissatisfying behaviors, on either the behalf of the teacher or the student, create tension and produce negative academic and socioemotional outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2007).

Discordant relationships between teachers and students can adversely affect student social skills and interactions with peers. Students who are perceived negatively by their teacher are frequently perceived negatively by peers. (Doumen et al, 2008; Mantzicopoulos, 2005). Students that experience higher levels of conflict in their relationships with teachers are also at greater risk of absenteeism from school, poor academic performance, and a declining attitude toward their educational experience (DiLalla, Marcus, & Wright-Phillips, 2004; Hamre & Pianta, 2007).

Responsive Teaching

High school students recognize that relationships with school personnel, particularly classroom teachers, are significant components of their educational experience. Students are also cognizant of how these interpersonal relationships affect their attitudes towards school and learning in general (Groves & Welsh, 2010). Students prize responsive relationships and one-to-one attention that they are given from teachers (Saul, 2005). Teachers that are adept at both recognizing and responding to the needs of individual students create a classroom atmosphere for improved academic and socioemotional development. Students have the greatest potential for school success when the teacher is responsive in supporting student development in cognitive, behavioral, and socioemotional areas (Eccles & Roeser, 1999).

While research is more substantial with regard to the connection between emotional supports and student achievement in lower grades, long-term academic success for students in upper grades has also been linked to student emotional connections with adults in school contexts (Bell, Allen, Hauser, & O'Connor, 1996). Students experience achievement growth in classrooms in which they feel that their teachers are sensitive to their needs and provide students with quality feedback. Furthermore, teachers that actively listen to students provide better academic feedback and more accurately evaluate student comprehension of content (Funk & Funk, 1989).

Groves and Welsh (2010) found that students described learning as "much easier", "more fun", and "more interesting" if students perceived that teachers took the time to incorporate student needs and interests into course curriculum and lesson activities (p. 8). Additionally, teacher-student relationships that reflect higher levels of teacher responsiveness in providing instructional supports and incorporating student needs and interests into the classroom and

content are predictive of student academic performance (Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Lun, Hamre, & Pianta, 2013). Teacher effectiveness in offering instructional supports that focus on assisting students in analytical thinking and problem-solving continues to be linked to improved student learning (National Research Council, 2005).

Students grow academically, emotionally, and socially in classrooms in which they feel secure in revealing their thinking and expressing emotional responses (Stronge, 2002). Kottler and Kottler (1993) found that teachers that practiced active listening, and gave students their undivided attention when they were speaking, helped to create learning environments that students described as welcoming. Research supports that students feel a more intimate relational connection to both the teacher and the classroom community when they trust that a teacher cares and listens to their questions and concerns. When teachers are responsive to students at an individual level, students feel that they are a significant piece of the classroom environment and have the tendency to view learning in a more positive manner (Kottler & Kottler, 1993). Allen, Witt, and Wheeless (2006) and Witt, Wheeless, and Allen (2004) discovered substantial associations between students perceptions of their own learning and levels of engagement with the immediacy of teachers verbal and nonverbal communication with students.

According to a study done by Roorda et al. (2011) teacher responsiveness and teacher-student relationships have an even greater association with student behavioral and social adjustment than academic achievement. High school students report an awareness of how the classroom teachers attitude influences their own perspectives towards school and learning. Students feel that they are more capable of success and enjoy school more when the teacher expresses a positive view of student abilities (Groves & Welsh, 2010). Cornelius-White (2007) found that students experience positive behavioral and academic outcomes when teacher actions

and behaviors are student-centered and communicate feelings of warmth and empathy. In fact, feelings of teacher-student connectedness has stronger behavioral implications for secondary age students than for primary age students (Furrer & Skinner, 2003)

Martin (2014) theorized that effective classroom environments are the result of connective instruction. Teachers must connect with students through relationships, the course content, and instructional tasks. Martin asserted that connective instruction means that teachers engage students through the who, what, and how of the class environment. “Students are optimally motivated and engaged when they connect to ‘who’ the teacher is, ‘what’ the teacher is saying and ‘what tasks and activities are being administered, and ‘how the teacher administers these messages and tasks (Martin, 2014, p. 17). Connective instruction is a method for developing student motivation and integrating relationships into the everyday functions of a classroom. The notion of connective instruction aligns with responsive teaching’s emphasis on making the classroom environment accessible to learners. Students respond in classrooms where they perceive that the teacher is incorporating relational and instructional techniques that exhibit caring and support (Martin, 2014).

Stage-environment fit theory provides another research-based, theoretical framework for understanding the value of responsive teaching in producing student outcomes (Kiefer, Ellerbrock & Alley, 2014). According to stage-environment fit theory, student motivation is enhanced when educators adjust classroom practices to fit the developmental needs of students. Stage-environment fit theorists posit that responsive teaching occurs when teachers recognize that students have evolving cognitive, personal, and socio-emotional needs. Educators are able to provide an environmental match when they adjust learning opportunities and instructional practices to these student needs (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman,

Mac Iver, & Feldlaufer, 1993; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Students then experience an increase in motivation and engagement when they perceive their teacher as caring and feel that their needs are being considered in the classroom context (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993).

Students that perceive a mismatch between their needs and the school or classroom environment experience a decline in school engagement. Students lose interest in school when they feel that the learning opportunities do not fit their needs or desires (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993). Students in such classrooms perceive a teacher-centered relationship. Learning environments that lack an attempt to make schoolwork relevant diminish student motivation and achievement (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Schools foster student success when classrooms are responsive to the changing developmental needs of students. Responsive teaching is an instructional practice that can both protect against, and mitigate, student risk factors by offering a context that makes students feel valued and important (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Eccles (2004) suggests that "schools need to change in developmentally appropriate ways if they are to provide the kind of social context that will continue to motivate students' interest and engagement as the students mature" (p. 125-126).

Hughes (2012) emphasizes that research needs to address both the effect of teacher-student relationships on student outcomes and their implications on teacher practices. Teachers must recognize the power of positive interpersonal relationships on student academic and non-academic outcomes and adjust their teaching practices accordingly to incorporate techniques to maximize student relatedness. Hughes suggests that need educators need to raise, "our understanding of the development of these relationships, and the processes responsible for their effects, as well as to evaluate theoretically-informed interventions designed to enhance teacher-student interactions" (Hughes, 2012, p. 319). Responsive teaching, which focuses on making

relational and curricular elements of the learning environment accessible to students, is a crucial step developing learning environments that are characterized by positive interpersonal relationships (Higgins, 2014).

Attachment Theory, Social Motivation Theory, and Self-Determination Theory

Much of the existing literature and academia on the influence of classroom environments and student-teacher relationships with regard to student outcomes stems from the theoretical frameworks of attachment theory, social motivation theory, and self-determination theory. These theoretical frameworks provide a means conceptualizing the connection between student outcomes and classroom practices (Maulana & Opdenakker, 2014). For the purposes of this study, it is appropriate to address the theories that help provide frameworks for explaining the effects of classroom environment factors on a student academic engagement and achievement.

Attachment Theory

Many educational research studies conceptualize the role of teacher-student relationships within the attachment theory perspective (Roorda et al. 2011). The attachment theory perspective of teacher-student relationships draws upon research originating from earlier studies of the mother-child relationship (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1969). The foundational assumption of attachment research indicates that humans develop a secure relational attachment when they perceive that a parent responds sensitively to their needs. An insecure attachment exists in the absence of a caring parent-child relationship (Lamb, Thompson, Gardner, Charnov, & Estes, 1984). Feelings of security and safety occur in children that have positive relationships with their parents. The emotional security of the parent-child relationship then enables the child to grow and develop healthy emotional, social, and

cognitive skills as they explore their respective environments (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969).

Attachment theory research also underscores the role of relationships in the formation of personalities, beliefs, and values (Hughes, 2012). The security and reciprocity of relational attachments allows an individual to develop healthy self-concepts and a sense of well-being (Cornelius-White, 2007). Children that feel secure attachments are afforded the comfort of social relatedness while simultaneously being free to develop self-identity (Blass & Blatt, 1996). The safety of the adult relationship actually facilitates the creation of personality by providing confidence and feelings of acceptance (Blatt & Levy, 2003; Blatt & Shichman, 1983; Erikson, 1950).

The influence of the powerful emotional connections between adults and children that is underscored in attachment theory has been extended to, and validated in, research in educational contexts. Research of teacher-student relationships drawing from attachment theory posit that a sensitive and supportive teacher-student relationship provides learners with feelings of security and connectedness that promote student engagement and greater levels of motivation (Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994). Students that feel an attachment to their teacher are more likely to be engaged in classroom activities and develop social and emotional skills that help them be successful in a school context (Al-Yagon & Mikulincer, 2004; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Rey, Smith, Yoon, Somers, & Barnett, 2007). A teacher-student relationship that fosters attachment, or closeness, provides a foundation for building student self-esteem and simultaneously reducing anxiety. Positive self-esteem and sense of self are especially important for adolescent mental health, the formation of relationships, and academic or vocational aspirations (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012).

According to attachment theory, the phenomenon of attachment does not have to be reciprocal. A person may have an attachment to an individual which is not returned (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theorists assert that teachers that also experience close relationships with students are more effective at providing responsive instruction and responding appropriately to student needs. Teachers that have close relationships with their students are more apt to incorporate student interests in the class curriculum and recognize when students are having difficulties. Teachers that are skillful at developing safe, respectful classroom climates also have better managed and organized classrooms (Mashburn et al., 2008).

Social Motivational Theory

Motivational theorists assert that the manner in which students perceive their relationships with a classroom teacher is a key component in producing motivation to perform well in school (Bandura, 1997; Fan & Williams, 2010, Wentzel, 2003). Students that feel a close connection to their teacher, or even their classmates, are more likely to be involved in school and work to have academic success (Hughes & Cavell, 1999).

The research of Connell and Wellborn (1991) revealed that the degree to which students feel an emotional safety in their relationships with teachers and peers was directly predictive of student motivation and engagement. The level of student motivation or engagement was then highly predictive of student academic achievement. As the student's self-perceptions and feeling of support increased, so did a student's level of effort to achieve academic success (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

Student engagement has been found to be predictive of both short-term outcomes such as course grades and achievement scores and long-term outcomes such as school attendance,

graduation completion, grade retention, and academic persistence (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004; Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kinderman, 2008). The positive relationships, both teacher-student and peer, that can exist in effective classroom environments help to support student academic achievement, as well as other student outcomes, indirectly via improving student academic motivation (Hughes & Cavell, 1999).

Furrer and Skinner (2003) found that students that experience quality social support from teachers put forth more effort in classes and exhibit greater academic persistence. A study of middle and high school students discovered that adolescent learners form their personal educational expectations based upon how they believe the teacher views them as learners. Students that believed their teacher had high expectations of them were more motivated to try and meet classroom expectations than students that believed their teacher had a low opinion of their abilities (Muller et al., 1999).

The connectedness that a student can experience in the teacher-student relationship influences a student's sense of belonging within the classroom and the school community. Feelings of school membership also impact student willingness to adhere to school norms and rules (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Teachers that are able to create classrooms that learners perceive as being warm, responsive, and well-organized help to create a learning environment that encourages students to develop academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally (Stronge, 2002). O'Farrell and Morrison (2003) suggest that academic motivation and engagement also serve as factors that discourage students from participating in adverse behaviors outside of the school context such as drug or alcohol abuse, criminal behavior, or unsafe sex.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory is distinguished from social motivation theory in that self-determination theory examines more closely the intentionality and locus of motivational behaviors. Self-determination theory extends upon motivational theory and attempts to delineate between behaviors that are controlled or compelled by external factors and those behaviors that are self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991, 2007). Motivational responses that occur because of interpersonal relationships or social expectations are considered controlled behaviors. Self-determination theorists postulate that controlled behaviors occur in response to external factors and are driven by compliance, or in some cases defiance. Internally motivated behaviors are self-determined and the product of choice (Deci & Ryan, 1991).

According to Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991), "self-determination theory when applied to the realm of education, is concerned primarily with promoting in students an interest in learning, a valuing of education, and a confidence in their own capacities and attributes" (p. 325). Schools provide a social context for promoting student enthusiasm and engagement in their own learning. Self-regulatory behaviors and higher degrees of intrinsic motivation suggest that student behaviors are more closely connected to sense of self (Opdenakker, Maulana, & Den Brok, 2012). Self-determined behaviors are the result of personal choices. If a student is internally motivated to study for an exam then it is because he/she personally believes that it is important to do so.

Internally driven motivation produces greater academic engagement, learning, and adjustment outcomes (Maulana & Opdenakker, 2014; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). Grolnick and Ryan (1987) found that students demonstrated greater conceptual understanding of content when they expressed autonomous motivation compared with students

that expressed less intrinsic motivation. Students who are more intrinsically motivated develop regulatory behaviors that improve their likelihood of graduation and are related to more conceptual learning and higher academic achievement (Connell & Wellborn, 1990). Higher levels of autonomous motivation have also been linked to better self-esteem and positive emotional responses in school (Ryan & Connell, 1989).

Students that primarily find motivation in external factors take less ownership in their own educational behaviors and experience more short-term learning outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Deci et al. (1991) argued, "Simply fitting in or complying with social demands is a non-optimal form of adjustment and may even be counterproductive to personal and social development" (p. 326). Student academic engagement has been shown to decrease over time if the school environment fails to help support autonomous motivation (Corpus, McClintic-Gilbert, & Hayenga, 2009; Opdenakker et al., 2012). Research also shows that there is a noticeable decline in autonomous motivation as students get older (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2001; Spinath & Spinath, 2005).

Self-determination theorists suggest that teachers, and educational settings, can aid student adjustment and personal growth by providing personal involvement, structure, and supporting autonomy (Maulana & Opdenakker, 2014). Teacher involvement includes demonstrating legitimate concern and regard for students (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Teachers that are relationally involved with students can slow the decline of internal motivation by providing a classroom environment that encourages students' sense of self-worth (Lapointe, Legault, & Batiste, 2005; Wentzel, 2010). Quality teacher-student relationships "serve as a protective factor for the decline in students' autonomous motivation," and, "the better the classroom social climate, the more likely progressive changes in students' interest and learning

value are promoted, irrespective of the cultural background" (Maulana & Opdenakker, 2014, p. 137).

The structure of the classroom environment can also help increase student self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2007). Teachers must offer support for the accomplishment of challenging tasks as well as provide clear communication for task completion (Maulana & Opdenakker, 2014). Students feel overwhelmed and become frustrated when they are unclear of expectations or perceive teacher indifference to their learning struggles. Establishing clear academic and behavioral expectations provides students with a needed sense of competence (Skinner, 1995). Students become internally motivated when they trust that they will receive ample support and do not fear criticism when they struggle (Reeve, 2002). Teachers that create a classroom culture with clear expectations and support structures provide an environment that appropriately basic needs for human growth (Maulana & Opdenakker, 2014).

Self-determination theorists suggest that autonomous motivation is the most critical motivational drive for producing lasting student engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Classroom environments built upon cooperation and support promote self-determination and improve autonomous motivation (Maulana, 2012; Opdenakker et al., 2012). Teachers can support student autonomy by incorporating choice and limiting controlling language (Reeve & Jang, 2006). Students become more interested in classroom activities when they feel that they have some choice and that they are not limited by the teacher. Vallerand's (1991) research indicates that high school students are less motivated if they perceive the classroom teacher as controlling versus supportive. Students that believed their teacher supported student autonomy reported higher levels of personal competence, self-esteem, and intrinsic motivation. Students that

perceived their teacher as controlling expressed lower self-esteem and feelings of incompetence (Vallerand, 1991).

Teachers that connect learning activities to student interests also support student autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Students experience greater self-determination in classroom environments that they deem personally important (Ryan & Stiller, 1991). However, self-determination theorists suggest that educators have the capacity to help students value learning even if they are not immediately interested in a topic or activity (Deci et al., 1991). Grolnick and Ryan (1989) found that educators can build self-determination behaviors by helping students find value in an activity even if it not personally interesting. Teachers can help students internalize the value of an educational activity by helping students understand the personal utility, providing student choices, and acknowledging student perspectives on the topic (Deci et al., 1991; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989).

The Impact of Teacher Expectations on Student Outcomes

Student academic motivation can be supported by the development of classroom environments that are characterized by quality teacher-student relationships, instructional practices that are responsive to student needs, and teacher expectations (Kiefer, Ellerbrock, & Alley, 2014). Communicating high expectations has been found to support student academic motivation. Teachers that communicate high expectations are also communicating their belief in students' ability to be successful (Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009). Students are more motivated to achieve academic success when their teachers express a belief in their abilities and hold them to high performance standards (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). High expectations for student success have also been found to be especially significant for improving student

outcomes in high need or urban schools (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2002; Matsumura, Slater, & Crosson, 2008).

The theory of self-fulfilling prophecy within an educational context suggests that student behavior and academic performance will increase or decrease to meet teacher expectations (Boehlert, 2005). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that teacher expectations of student ability had an impact on student academic performance. Rosenthal and Jacobson's research underscored that student academic achievement aligned with how teachers expected students to perform and helped to initiate conversation about the role of teacher expectations in student behavior (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010). The self-fulfilling prophecy, or Pygmalion effect, conceptualized the influence that teacher expectations can have on student self-esteem, motivation, attitude toward learning, and academic achievement (Dusek & Joseph, 1983; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Weinstein, 2002).

Research on the influence that teacher expectations have on student performance and motivation has also been framed within the notion of goal theory (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Goal theory underscores the desires of students to meet mastery goals, performance goals, and social goals in a school context. These goals theorize the meaning or purpose that students attach to their own actions towards achievement (Ames, 1992; Barker, McInerney, & Dowson, 2002; Dweck, 1992). Mastery and performance goal achievement allow students to "affirm competence" and "demonstrate superiority" (Martin & Dowson, 2009, pg. 334). Social goals are driven by the desire to gain approval, comply with group norms, or form relationships (Dowson & McInerney, 2001, 2003; Elliot, 1999; Middleton & Midgley, 1997).

The goals that students set and value can be influenced by peers, parents, and teachers (McInerney, Hinkley, Dowson, & Van Etten, 1998; Wentzel, 1994). Martin, Marsh, McInerney,

Green, and Dowson (2007) discovered a significant correlation between the quality of teacher-student relationships and student desire to achieve mastery goals. The quality of student relationships with peers and parents was also associated with student mastery goals, but the teacher student relationship had the most sizeable influence (Creasey, Ottlinger, Devico, Murray, Harvey, & Hesson-McInnis, 1997; Martin et al., 2007). Such research suggests that the goals that students set, and strive to achieve in the classroom, can be influenced by the classroom teacher. Clearly communicated expectations of student performance can provide students with an understanding of how to achieve performance, mastery, and social goals (Martin & Dowson, 2009).

Kiefer et al., (2014) qualitative study about responsive teacher practices demonstrated that both students and teachers cite teacher expectations as being influential on student motivation and performance. Teacher participants in the study expressed a belief that communicating high expectations supported student motivation and success. Teachers indicated that it was important to recognize hard work, celebrate improvement and goal attainment, and encourage struggling students in order to establish high expectations. Student participants in the study associated teacher expectations with caring and support. One participant shared her belief that setting high expectations was a way for teachers to help students be successful, "They want you to have a good future, and they really do want you to pay attention. They don't just teach you, and here you are. They give you everything that they need to give you. They want you to succeed" (Kiefer et al., 2014, p. 8).

Kiefer et al. (2014) also found that teacher expectations had to appropriately match student needs. Students that perceived that teacher expectations were excessively high expressed a decline in academic motivation (p. 9). These findings were consistent with other research that

student motivation declines when they believe a teacher is setting unrealistic expectations (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009). The study also reaffirms that teacher expectations must be framed within a positive student-teacher relationship. Challenging instruction that is supported by trusting relationships and supportive interactions can raise the level of student performance. Students will be motivated by high expectations if they perceive that their teacher will support their learning and will help them be successful (Fulmer & Turner, 2014).

Skinner and Belmont (1993) conducted a yearlong study of the influence of teacher behaviors on student engagement. The study focused on the relationship between student academic engagement and teacher behavior with regard to relational involvement, classroom structure, and autonomy support. Skinner and Belmont (1993) posited that two reciprocal relationships existed between teacher expectations and student engagement. "Teachers could respond to children who are relatively less engaged by increasing involvement, structure, or autonomy support. On the other hand, teachers could respond to children in ways that would magnify children's initial motivation: Teachers could respond to children who are passive and show negative emotion by being less involved, structured, or autonomy supportive" (Skinner & Belmont, 1993, p. 573).

The study found evidence that teacher behaviors in the classroom were related to student academic engagement. Teacher-student interactions, and student perceptions of these interactions, were a strong predictor of student behavioral and emotional engagement. Children exerted more effort and persistence in classrooms in which levels of teacher structure were perceived as high (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The study demonstrated that students are motivated by clear expectations and classroom structure. Teachers optimize student engagement

and learning by establishing expectations that meet students' developmental needs to feel secure and supported. Teachers that communicate high expectations and structure the classroom to scaffold student mastery provide an environment that students perceive as dependable and responsive (Ainsworth, 1989).

Looping Programs for Developing Effective Classroom Environments

Alternative methods of scheduling and teaching provide options for educators attempting to work with diverse populations to raise student achievement. In an era of increased educational reform and high-stakes accountability, the concept of looping is a relatively inexpensive and low-risk reform strategy (Pecanic, 2003.) Research findings suggest that there are tangible benefits for looping that have been linked to increased student achievement, which include increased instructional time, more responsive teaching, and improved student-teacher relationships (Gaustad, 1998; Krogmann & Van Sant, 2000).

The practice of looping allows students to remain with the same teacher for multiple courses or years. Extending the amount of time that teachers spend with groups of students helps form longer-lasting, stronger relationships that produce positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students (Pecanic, 2003). The amount of time that student groups work with a teacher in looping allows students and teachers the opportunity to form more supportive learning communities within the classroom environment. Teachers in a looping classroom may also develop an increased understanding of each student's learning styles, personalities, and developmental needs (Wasley, 2002).

Looping gives teachers the chance to work with a smaller group of students over a longer period of time. A teacher in a looped class has a greater opportunity to incorporate responsive

teaching, and develop a classroom that is more individualized to student need (Swanson, 1999). Teachers in looping classrooms have more interactions with their students over time than teachers in non-looping class schedules. The increased interactions allow teachers to become more adept at observing, analyzing, and addressing learning deficits via re-teaching or interventions that suit a students learning style (Johnston, 2000). Looping provides a structure for facilitating deeper teacher-student relationships that better equip teachers to meet the needs of students (Baran, 2010).

Improved teacher knowledge of students provides an increased amount of instructional time for looped classrooms. Teachers generally spend the initial month of a semester or school year assessing student ability, getting to know personalities, and clarifying classroom structures (Pecanic, 2003). Teachers also report that it takes several months of each school year before they adequately understand student ability and learning styles (Krogmann & Van Sant, 2000). Looped classrooms provide a consistency of the teacher-student relationship that allows the learning community to forego these introductory weeks. Instruction and learning can begin from day one because the teachers are familiar with student needs, and students are familiar with the classroom procedures and have existing relationships with the teacher and their classmates (Brandt, 1998, Hanson, 1995, Pecanic, 2003).

A comparison study of the use of strategic scheduling in elementary classrooms found that looping increased instructional time and eased student transitions between grade levels. Harding (2015) conducted observations and interviews to determine what types of scheduling seemed most beneficial for supporting student learning. The study found evidence that looped classrooms provided deeper student-teacher relationships that supported emotional and academic outcomes when compared to other types of scheduling. “When the students and teachers loop

together for more than one year, the teachers have a better grasp on the scope of their student's learning. This insight creates stronger relationships between peers and the teacher and students" (Harding, 2015, p. 44). Harding (2015) also asserted that the looping structure improved classroom environments and made the beginning of the year less challenging for students and teachers.

Denault (1999) suggests that the learning communities that can develop from the multiyear or multicourse consistency of a looping classroom environment is a powerful resource for helping students develop social and emotional confidence. Many students that might otherwise feel uncomfortable speaking out in class or engaging with their peers might do so in a classroom environment that feels more like a family. Students in a looping classroom often report higher levels of emotional and social support because of the encouraging and supportive relationships that they perceive from their teacher and peers (Muller, 2001). Students perform at higher levels in classroom environments in which they feel loved, and in which they believe there is an expectation that they will succeed (Muller, 2001).

Research on the social and emotional benefits of looping have shown that looping has been related to stress reduction and student happiness at school (McBrady & Williamson, 2010). Looping classrooms help to provide students with a sense of connectedness to the school and teachers. The sense of belonging that students perceive in a looped classroom improves student emotional stability (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Checkley, 1995; McIntosh & White, 2006). Students in looped classrooms experience a personalized educational setting that encourages more positive feelings about school (McBrady & Williams, 2010) Students in looping classrooms also have a better understanding of classroom expectations and procedures, which provides feelings of familiarity and stability (Little & Little, 2001; Skinner, 1998).

Baran (2010) conducted a study of teacher and student perceptions of a middle school looping program. Teachers cited better relationships with students as an advantage of looping. Teachers in the study expressed that participation in a looping program provided a context for building positive relationships with students. The teachers also believed that classroom instruction and student learning benefited from the deepened relationships in a looped classroom (Baran, 2010).

The seventh and eighth grade students in Baran's study also cited better interpersonal relationships as the primary advantage of looped classrooms (Baran, 2010; Harding, 2015). Students in the study perceived that their relationships with both teachers and peers improved over the course of the looping program. Eighth grade students reported feelings of anxiety over leaving the familiarity of the looping program and transitioning to high school (Baran, 2010).

Moore (2015) suggests that the quality of relationships that are built in looping classrooms provide a context for responsive teaching that can improve student academic performance. Moore's (2015) quantitative study of student performance on the mathematics component of the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) revealed a difference in student achievement between students in looped classrooms versus students that were not in looped classrooms. The study, which examined math achievement scores for urban middle school students in a pilot looping program, found that students in the looped classrooms performed better on the CRCT than their peers. Both male and female students experienced greater improvements in math achievement scores from the pretest to posttest when compared to peers in non-looped classrooms. The achievement growth for male students was significantly different for students in the looping program. Male students that were not in looping classrooms experienced a decline in achievement scores from pretest to posttest, while male students in the

looping program showed improvement (Moore, 2015). Moore (2015) suggested that the extended amount of time that teachers spent with students in looped settings provided students with more individualized support than peers that were in non-looped classes.

Looping is not utilized widely within the United States' educational system though research reveals positive outcomes for students (Chaika, 2005). The majority of research on looping has been conducted at the primary level, but looping's structural provision for improved learning environments and responsive teaching are equally applicable at the secondary level. The influence of teacher-student relationships and responsive classroom environments has been related to stronger behavioral outcomes for high school age students than for elementary age students (Cornelius-White, 2007; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). The significance of quality interpersonal relationships for improving high school students' motivation and engagement is also notable. High school students are more inclined to remain in school and pursue academic success when they feel supported by their classroom teacher and peers (Henry et al., 2012; Hughes, 2011).

The advent of ninth grade, or freshman, academies and smaller learning communities has risen in the past decade as a method for increasing early success for high school students. Many freshman academy models are akin to the philosophy of the looping classroom. In a freshman academy models, students are grouped with teachers to create a more individualized high school experience (Reents, 2002). The freshman academy model is a structure for organizing the school in a manner that emphasizes student and teacher connectedness. Freshman academies are designed to operate as a school within a school. Academies establish their own structures, policies, and instructional practices aimed at building collaborative and supportive classroom environments for ninth grade students (Breunlin et al., 2005). Feelings of anonymity is a

significant risk factor for student disengagement, especially for ninth grade students in large schools (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). The freshman academy model facilitates small learning communities and promotes teacher-student connectedness (Murray & Malmgren, 2005).

A recent study funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (Somers & Garcia, 2016) examined the academic and behavioral outcomes for students in ninth grade academies. The researchers utilized academic and behavioral data from a sample forty-three Florida high schools that were using ninth grade academies from 2001-2008. The researchers specifically addressed the effect of ninth grade academies on graduation rate, course grades, state assessment scores, attendance, suspensions, and expulsions. The researchers also assessed each school's level of implementation based upon four common characteristics of ninth grade academies: "(1) a designated separate space within the high school, (2) a ninth-grade administrator who oversees the academy, (3) a faculty assigned to teach only ninth-grade students, and (4) teachers organized into interdisciplinary teams that have both students and a planning period in common." (Somers & Garcia, 2016, p iii). The researchers also identified schools within the study that were similar demographically in order to improve the credibility of the evaluations.

Somers and Garcia (2016) found no significant evidence that the ninth grade academies in the study helped to improve student academic or behavioral outcomes. "Even ninth grade academy schools that implemented all four core structural components [did] not appear to have improved student outcomes" (p. 38). The researchers hypothesized that the results of the study indicated "that the core ninth grade academy components may not have been implemented as intended in the study schools, and that as a result, the staff was not able to create a more personalized ninth-grade experience for students' (p. 39). The study also suggested that the lack

of positive outcomes might have resulted from the failure of the teacher interdisciplinary teams in meeting or discussing student needs. The researchers recommended that ninth grade academies should work in theory, but that academies, "should build in processes and forms of support to engage staff and help them take advantage of the ninth grade academy structure to personalize ninth-grade students' experience" (p. 41).

Promising research that underscores the influence of effective classroom environments and quality student-teacher interaction has led to wider implementations of smaller learning communities through structures like freshman academy (Somers & Garcia, 2016). The effectiveness of the ninth grade academy structures are still in question, but a review of the literature does provide support for the effectiveness of classrooms that encourage positive teacher student-relationships, responsive teaching, and clear expectations (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Fraser, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011). A looping strategy is a potentially impactful reform tool because of the depth of the teacher-student relationship. Although looping has been more widely applied in the lower grades, looping could allow high school educators and students an avenue for establishing longer lasting teacher-student relationships. The literature supports the notion that a looping structure at the high school level could be a viable option for improving the social, emotional, and academic climates of high school classrooms (Zahorik & Dichanz, 1994).

Summary

The literature reviewed validates the need for a continued examination of how to carry out the work of developing effective classroom environments. Classroom environments that are characterized by quality teacher-student relationships and responsive teaching yield positive academic, behavioral, and socioemotional outcomes for students (Eccles & Roeser, 1999). Transition years to middle school and high school are especially pivotal for adolescent learners,

and the literature reveals that there is a noted decline in student engagement in learning and motivation for academic success during those years (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006). The ability of teachers to develop classroom environments that high school students perceive as responsive, warm, and encouraging may be one of the greatest factors in effectively improving student academic achievement and combating student withdrawal from school (Pianta et al., 2012).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to share teachers stories about how they develop effective classroom cultures in a high school looping program. The study will be focused on the stories and narratives of four classroom teachers, and how these teachers attempted to create classroom environments that support student learning, encourage student social and emotional development, and establish expectations for academic and behavioral outcomes.

This study identifies characteristics of effective classroom environments that are linked to student motivation and engagement. Effective classroom environments that foster relational involvement, responsive teaching, and clear expectations support student academic achievement and feelings of school connectedness (Pianta et al., 2012). Improved academic achievement and school connectedness are powerful deterrents to student withdrawal from school prior to earning a diploma (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Resnick et al., 1997; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon 1997, 2004). The interviews conducted during the study will allow teachers to share their own perceptions and reflections about the quality of teacher-student relationships in their classes and the resultant classroom culture.

The study of these teacher narratives provides an understanding of teacher perceptions about how effective classrooms are built, managed, and maintained. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) assert that narratives allow for the characterization of the human experience. Narrative researchers present the story of a life that can serve both as a model and a method for attempting to understand phenomenon (Heilbrun, 1988). According to Elbow (1986), narrative inquiry

allows us to enter into another individual's thoughts and perceptions. This study will capture the stories of teachers and how they approach the relational, behavioral, organizational, and instructional needs of a high school classroom context.

Research Questions

The study will address the following questions:

1. How do teachers describe their experiences of developing the classroom environment in a looping structure?

2. What are teachers perceptions of their own relational involvement with students in a looped high school classroom?

3. How do teachers in a looped classroom provide responsive emotional, social, and academic supports for students?

4. What are teachers perceptions about the role of looping in helping to establish clear organizational and behavioral expectations for students in the classroom environment?

These research questions are reflective of the research base and theoretical framework which asserts that strong teacher-student relationships and responsive teaching can produce positive social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for learners. This study will seek to relay the stories of the teachers involved in the research and understand the phenomenon of developing effective classroom environments in a high school looping program. The narratives gathered through interviews, observations, and artifacts will serve to illuminate the educational experiences of the participants, which could provide models and strategies for continuing discussions about improving learning environments at the high school level in order increase

student achievement and combat dropout rates. Additionally, the perceptions and reflections of the teachers could provide a useful lens for examining the benefit of looping programs in creating effective classroom environments for learners.

Narrative Inquiry Research Design

This study attempts to understand the central phenomenon of the creation of effective classroom environments by asking teachers to share their stories about how they try and develop classroom cultures in the context of a high school looping program. Narrative inquiry provides an avenue for researchers to study the lives and perspectives of individuals through capturing their respective stories (Riessman, 2008). The potential knowledge and understanding that can be gained from the examination of lived experiences make them an invaluable source for researchers (Clandinin, 2013).

This study will capture the stories of teachers as they operate within the classroom environments that they have constructed. However, narrative methodology goes beyond retelling stories. Bochner (2001) asserts that the narrative examined in narrative inquiry can serve as both the phenomenon and the method. A researcher may simply value an individual's story as data that can serve as a documentary of experience, or the story may be analyzed as a narrative that contains a potential for larger patterns and themes that help us learn more about the human experience in general. In such terms, the protagonist of the story and the researcher work in tandem to interpret the narrative in a manner that places the story in a context that allows it to be compared to other stories (Bochner, 2001). Narrative inquiry might seek to go beyond retelling a story to placing the story within a narrative context that provides a defined purpose for its retelling (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Narrative analysis has recently become a more popular methodological approach for studying how organizations function. Such organizational research often involves collecting stories from individuals working and living within the organizational context (Czarniawska, 2004). Similarly, O'Reilly (2013) also suggests that practice stories can be collected from personal narratives to explain phenomenon such as professional practices. Practice stories account for the feelings, emotions, and experiences of individuals while simultaneously attending to the social context and community in which the individual operates (O'Reilly, 2013). The collection of narratives and stories help to communicate human experiences, but analysis and interpretation of the collected narrative helps to make sense of a phenomenon.

The narrative research methodology allows for the opportunity to understand how teachers set about developing effective classroom environments. The findings of the narrative study could generate insights into how teachers perceive that their own actions influence the educational experiences of high school students. The teachers' stories that are collected may be examined and compared to identify patterns, norms, structures, and behaviors that help to explain how teachers develop effective classrooms.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in narrative inquiry revolves around the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories. Narrative research has long been considered an appropriate methodology for educational research because humans are innate storytellers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The study of narratives is historically rooted in education and learning. Storytelling has a long-standing history as an instructional practice, and narrative inquiry is simply the study of how humans experience the world. The construction and reconstruction of stories, either heard or retold, teach and instruct those that listen to, or hear

them (Heilbrun, 1988). The role of the researcher in narrative research is to organize the collected data and provide a sequence of time and order to create a plot that communicates a story to the reader (Holley & Colyar, 2009)

Reissman (1993) suggests that the researcher engaged in narrative methodology travels through three stages during the research process: telling, transcribing, and analyzing. In-depth narrative interviews were used to collect stories from teachers involved in the looping program. The narrative interviews focused on the central phenomenon of building effective classroom environments. As the researcher of the study serves as the school's principal, a surrogate interviewer and observer was used to help ensure that interviewees provided stories that were accurate and truthful and that field observations provided accurate glimpses of teacher behavior and practices. The researcher's role as school principal could inadvertently shape or color the responses of teachers during narrative interviews. Teachers might also be more likely to change behavior when a supervisor is in their room. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) assert, it is crucial in narrative inquiry that "the practitioner, who has long been silenced in the research relationship, is given the time and space to tell her or his story so that it gains the authority and validity that the research story has long had" (p. 4) The surrogate interviewer/observer does not function in a supervisory role, but is a trusted colleague of the participants as a member of the freshman academy at the school. The existing relationships that the surrogate interviewer/observer has with the participants provides the interviewer entry into the contextual setting in which the participants' stories take place. The surrogate interviewer/observer is also familiar with the qualitative research methodologies and interview process, having been engaged in similar research studies to receive her doctorate in an educational field.

The teachers that participated in the narrative inquiry were advised of both the procedures and aims of the research study. The study participants volunteered to take part in both the looping program and the research study, and they were fully briefed on the process of data collection through interviews, classroom observations, and documents (Creswell, 2012).

The researcher collected the data from the interviewer/observer and carefully transcribed the interviews and field notes to construct the truest possible narratives of how teachers described their behaviors, strategies, and practices for creating effective classrooms in the looping program. The data collected was then coded and analyzed for emerging themes and patterns across the multiple stories. The interpretation and reconstruction of the narratives consisted of the combined interpretation of both the participants and the researcher. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

Population

This narrative study was focused on collecting the stories and experiences of teachers working in a high school looping program as they develop and reflect on their classroom environments. The population of the study consisted of a purposeful sample of four teachers that served in the yearlong 9th grade academy and then volunteered to loop with their respective students into their 10th grade year courses. The sample included all the teachers that taught in looping classrooms. A purposeful sample is appropriate for the research study because the selected sample most adequately addresses the primary research focus of the study (Creswell, 2007).

Sampling Method

Purposeful sampling was utilized for this study in order to provide a sample that would allow for a greater depth of description and lead to further discovery about the experiences of teachers. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to focus on subjects that are more likely to provide rich description, and in turn, provide more information about a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Criterion purposive strategy would be an appropriate sampling strategy because the research study focused upon subjects that shared the experience of teaching in a looped classroom. The sample included teachers that were available and willing to participate in a looping classrooms with students that they had taught previously in the yearlong freshman academy. The sample population participated in a looping classroom structure that extended one and a half school years, or three full semesters. The teachers involved in the looping classrooms volunteered to remain with their students for an additional course after working with them for the entirety of a school year through a freshman academy structure. The teachers in the looped classrooms functioned as the students' 9th grade English teacher and then transitioned with their students to sophomore English. The teachers that volunteered for the study did so willingly and believed that the classroom cultures and student-teacher relationships that they had created during 9th grade academy was such that the students would continue to experience academic, socialemotional, and behavioral growth if the relationship continued into sophomore courses.

Sources of Data

Much like phenomenological research, narrative research is a qualitative process that seeks to establish a depth of description that provides for a better understanding of individual life experiences (Patton, 2015). Crites (1986) and Peshkin (1985) noted that narrative research has an invitational quality that suggests to readers that the accounts gathered in narrative research

can be read, and then lived vicariously. Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest that narrative inquiry should restory participants' experiences in a thought-provoking manner that challenges readers to consider how the narrative might impact their own practices or considerations of a phenomenon.

The data collected during this study was collected to provide a narrative, textual description with adequate richness to help establish trustworthiness, authenticity, and plausibility (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Furthermore, the data sources must include a way of gathering information in the natural context of the phenomenon that is being studied to help provide insights that add depth and detail to the study. Multiple sources of data also allow for the triangulation of data and support the researcher's ability to test for consistency of emergent themes and create the narrative record (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2014). To achieve these purposes, the data for this research study was gathered primarily from a combination of unstructured, in-depth interviews with participants, field notes collected during observations in practical settings, and artifacts such as lesson plans, professional learning community notes, teacher personal philosophies, and teacher reflections.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was bound to teachers at high school in an Eastern, Tennessee school district. A purposeful sample of participants from looping classrooms most adequately provided data that helps to construct an understanding of how four teachers describe their work and experiences of building effective classroom environments in a looping classroom structure. Data was collected via three sources: conducting multiple face-to-face interviews with participants, conducting classroom (field) observations, and qualitative documents such as lesson plans and PLC documents. The personal interviews consisted of the researcher engaging the

teacher in a discussion aimed at establishing rich details and descriptions of each participants' experiences of developing the classroom environment in a high school looping program. Interviewing was an essential form of data collection for this study because interviews are means of having participants share their experience in lived-through terms and provide the most comprehensive account of the central phenomenon (Patton, 2015).

Field observations were also conducted to note the nature of teacher-student interactions, teacher responsiveness, and organizational structure in the looping classroom environment. Observations, via a surrogate observer, allowed the primary researcher to gather contextual information and experiences from the looped classrooms. The Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) observation tool was used to identify characteristics of "highly effective" classroom environments. In particular, the observer collected notes that focused upon teacher-student interactions, student to student interactions, and observed the overall climate of the classroom. The TEAM observation tool provided a guide for later assessing the classroom environment and addressed these practices in several indicators including the following: motivating students, academic feedback, respectful culture, teacher knowledge of students, managing student behavior, environment, and expectations. These indicators provide descriptors and characteristics of teacher-student interactions that underscore instructional and relational practices that support student learning. The identified areas of the TEAM rubric are also very much aligned to the study's definition of effective classroom environments. The observation tool provides a measure for assessing the relational involvement of teachers and students. The TEAM evaluation tool was used as a protocol to help organize the observer's field notes. Furthermore, the TEAM observational protocol also requires that teachers perform a self-reflection. Teacher self-reflections and notes are a valuable source of additional data for ensuring

accuracy in sharing the narrative experiences of teachers in a looping classroom (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative documents such as teacher reflections on observations, PLC meetings notes, and teacher personal philosophies provided useful data to accompany the data gathered from interviews and observations. These qualitative artifacts provided more data and evidence to deepen the narratives of teacher experiences of developing effective classroom environments in a looping classroom. Artifacts such as meeting notes and lesson agendas are also an unobtrusive way of gathering information from participants (Creswell, 2014).

Data collection alignment to the study's research questions is highlighted in Table 1:

Table 1

Data Collection Alignment and Research Questions

Research Question	**Interview**	**Observation**	**Artifacts**
RQ 1. How do teachers describe their experiences of developing the classroom environment in a looping structure?	X		
RQ 2. What are teachers' perceptions of their own relational involvement with students in a looped high school classroom?	X	X	X
RQ 3. How do teachers in a looped classroom provide responsive emotional, social, and academic supports for students?	X	X	X
RQ 4. What are teachers' perceptions about the role of looping in helping to establish clear organizational and behavioral expectations for students in the classroom environment?	X		

Data Analysis

The aim of this narrative inquiry is to provide a depth of understanding of the participant's experiences of teaching in a looped classroom. Specifically, the study seeks to share the stories of how these teachers work to develop classroom environments that are responsive to the multi-faceted needs of high school learners. To this end, the data that is collected from interviews, observations, and artifacts must be initially formatted, organized, and sorted. Data explication began with an examination of carefully transcribed and organized data and then progressed to an analysis of the data for significant statements, emerging themes, and units of meaning that provided a basis for effectively capturing participant's experiences and reconstructing their individual stories in such a manner that they accurately portrayed the lived experiences (Creswell, 2014).

The rendering of the teacher accounts and data sought to provide specific stories of authentic teacher-student relationships and how the teachers strived to meet the needs of diverse students. The stories were analyzed so that a narrative could be constructed that invites readers into the narrative and challenges them to examine their own practices in light of the practice stories that were collected in the study (Rosen, 1988; Tannen, 1988).

Analysis of the data, following the hermeneutic tradition, included interpretation of the data from the researcher as well as the participant. As Kafle (2013) asserts, "the researcher is a signpost pointing towards essential understanding of the research approach as well as essential understandings of the particular phenomenon of interest" (p. 189). The researcher, as well as the reader, in narrative inquiry innately applies their own experiences and perspectives to the stories that are gathered during research, which is what makes narrative research a legitimate means of education. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest that simply listening to or recording the

stories of others is unsatisfying as a form of inquiry. The researcher instead inevitably intertwines his or her own experiences with those of the participants to create "collaborative stories" in the final narrative (p. 12). Collaboration between the researcher and participants included member checks to confirm that the presented narratives were faithfully written (Merriam, 2002).

Measuring the Quality of Narrative Inquiry

Quality narratives are measured based upon their truthfulness and plausibility. If the narrative research presents falsehoods or accounts that inadequately represent the lived experiences of the participants, then the inquiry has no value. Much like the artistic elements of fictional writing, narrative inquiry must construct stories that are believable enough that the inquiry possesses the ability to be invitational, descriptive, or explanatory to the reader (Polkinhorne, 1988). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), "a plausible account is one that tends to ring true. It is an account of which one might say, 'I can see that happening'" (p. 8). Similarly, Riessman (1993) and Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) agreed that narrative studies are validated if the views and conclusions contained there within are reasonable "in the eyes of a community of researchers and interested, informed individuals" (p. 173)

Bruner (1987) delineates the nature of lived experiences versus told experiences in narrative research. The lived experience is what has actually happened and encapsulates all of the emotions, thoughts, desires, and sentiments known only to the individual that has lived the experience. The told experience can only be an individual's representation of real life. Inevitably, gaps will exist between reality and what is reported (Moen, 2006). The written text then is a representation of the collaborative retelling of the remembered events and is produced by the storyteller and the researcher. A truthful narrative, though always short of complete accuracy, is

faithful to the participant's belief about what occurred and how it was experienced (Denzin, 1989). Consequently, a quality narrative presents a story that is both believable to the reader and believed by the researcher and participant (Moen, 2006). Likewise, Polkinghorne (1988) argued that narrative research was purposeful if, "the offered description accurately represents the operating stories that people or groups use to understand the temporal connections between the events they have experiences and to account for their own and others' motives, reasons, expectations, and memories" (p. 170).

Assuring the quality of the narrative research of this study was of paramount concern. Triangulation of data from interviews, observations, teacher reflections, and other qualitative documents was used to help ensure that the written text adequately restoried the experiences of the teachers working in the high school looping program. The study's primary source of data from interviews was appropriately supported with supplemental forms of data to increase the plausibility and truthfulness of the narratives (Creswell, 2014). The multiple sources of data were also used to corroborate shared stories and perspectives of teachers to reach the collaborative narratives contained in the study. Reliability of the study was increased by ensuring that the progression of the raw data through analysis and interpretation maintained the closest possible representation of the original expression gathered in data collection. The researcher also solicited the participants' views with regards to the accuracy of narratives, analyses, and interpretations via member checks to further establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A surrogate observer and interviewer was used to increase the authenticity of interview responses and teacher behaviors during classroom visits. Additionally, the surrogate observer/interviewer had an existing relationship with the teachers that had volunteered for the

study. The positive, pre-existing relationship between surrogate interviewer/observer and participant ensured a level of trust and submersion within the existing culture that might have been difficult to obtain for the researcher due to his supervisory role. The use of the surrogate interviewer/observer mitigated potential obstacles in gathering the most authentic expressions of the teachers' experiences of creating classroom environments in a high school looping program.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study was voluntary and participants were informed of the intended purpose and audience of the study (McMillan & Schmacher, 2014). Participants were fully disclosed of the data collection processes of the research study and why they were necessitated (Merriam, 1998). The teachers volunteered to participate in the high school looping program and volunteered to share their stories, reflections, and experiences on developing effective classroom environments in the looping program largely due to their own interest in assessing the effectiveness of program at supporting positive classroom cultures. Participants were provided with an informed consent agreement prior to data collection. The researcher requested and received permission to conduct interviews from the Institution Review Board (IRB).

As narrative inquiry requires the sharing of an individual's lived experiences, emotions, and reflections, it is important to establish trust in both the data collection and interpretation processes. Gaining access to personal insights requires researchers to be mindful of the responsibilities inherent to sharing stories that are not completely our own. The narrative process requires collaboration and a closeness of relationship that involves the sharing of stories (Cladinin & Connelly, 1988). The researcher's written report must provide equal voice to the participant of the study or there is a risk of exploitation and inequality (Hogan, 1988). For the purpose of this study, a surrogate interviewer/observer was utilized to support the feeling of

collaboration and community that enable participants to tell their stories (Noddings, 1986). Additionally, pseudonyms were used in the written text as a means of protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of the teachers that participated in the study.

Finally, the faithfulness of data analysis and subsequent interpretation was assessed utilizing member checks. Participants were given opportunity to examine the truthfulness of their representative narratives to help ensure credibility. Participants were also free to ask that any portions of the interviews or observations be stricken from the written report or analysis.

Summary

Harwell (2011) asserts a primary goal of educational inquiry is a continuous search for "promising ideas" to add to the existing knowledge and understanding of questions, problems, or potential solutions. The primary goal of this research study was to construct a rich description of how teachers experience developing effective classroom environments in a looped classroom. Particularly, the study hopes to illuminate teacher perceptions and reflections of how the structure, organization, and teacher-student interactions within a looping classroom impact the educational environment and might ultimately impact student outcomes. A narrative methodology is appropriately aligned to the goals of the study because narrative research allows us to glean a rich, contextual understandings of how participants interpreted their lived experiences of developing classroom environments. Narratives are accessible and can be informative and relevant to educators.

Narrative research is an important avenue for continuing to develop the profession and practice of teaching (Carter, 1993). Analyzing testing or achievement data would fail to lend a voice to the practitioner. Narrative research allows us to consider what teachers feel are the

methods for and outcomes of creating effective classroom environments. Sharing teacher stories and reflections provides an invitation to readers to continue discussions and dialogues about how educators can develop effective classrooms that support students academically, socially, and emotionally.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to capture the experiences of four high school teachers that participated in looped classrooms. The teachers in the study remained with student groups for the duration of freshman year and then looped with the students into the fall semester of their sophomore year. The primary question of the qualitative study, was research question one: How do teachers describe their experiences of developing the classroom environment in a looping structure? This question was addressed through interviewing the four teachers near the end of the third full semester with their student groups. The guiding question of the study was supported by research questions focused upon three key aspects of effective classroom environments: student-teacher relatedness, responsive teaching, and clear expectations (Pianta et al., 2012).

The qualitative data for this research study was gathered through narrative inquiry. One-to-one interviews were conducted to provide each teacher the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of teaching in a looped classroom. Teachers were specifically asked to reflect upon how they would characterize the classroom environment and teacher-student relationships. Teachers were probed during interviews to provide examples and stories of how teaching in a looped classroom influenced the provision of responsive teaching to support student emotional, social, and academic needs. Interviewees were also asked to consider how the looped classroom structure might influence the establishment of classroom organizational and behavioral expectations. Interviewing was an essential form of data collection for this study because

interviews are means of having participants share their experience in lived-through terms and provide the most comprehensive account of the central phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Field observations and the analysis of qualitative documents such as lesson plans and PLC meeting notes were also conducted to deepen the exploration of the classroom environments of looped classrooms. The field observations consisted of both observer and teacher reflections of the learning environment. Analysis of the findings from the data collection are presented in Chapter 4.

Triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and qualitative documents was used to help ensure that the written text adequately captured the experiences of the study participants. The primary source of data from interviews was appropriately supported with supplemental forms of data to increase the plausibility and truthfulness of the narratives (Creswell, 2014). Reliability of the study was increased by ensuring that the analysis and interpretation of the collected data maintained the closest possible representation of the original expression gathered during data collection. Member checks further established credibility of the findings by allowing the researcher to solicit the participant views with regard to the accuracy of narratives, analyses, and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The authenticity of interview responses and teacher behaviors during classroom observations was supported by the use of a surrogate observer/interviewer for the study. The surrogate had a pre-existing relationship with the participants that helped establish trust and a level of submersion into the context of the study that might have been difficult to obtain for the primary researcher due to a supervisory relationship dynamic. The use of the surrogate interviewer/observer mitigated potential obstacles in gathering the most authentic expressions of the participants' experiences in looped classrooms.

Study participants were given a copy of their interview transcript and were asked to examine the transcription of their responses for accuracy to increase the reliability of the study. Participants were additionally asked to perform member checking of the primary investigator's interpretation of their interview responses and the formation of themes during analysis.

Standards established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of East Tennessee State University (ETSU) provided guidance for the consideration of ethical concerns. Study participants provided a signed informed consent prior to participation (see Appendix B). Each participant was provided with advisement of the interview process and understood that participation in the research study was voluntary. Participants were also aware that they were free to discontinue their involvement in the research study at any time. The teacher participants were given pseudonyms and are referred to as Katharine, Sophia, Aubrey, and Jack in the analysis.

Data Collection Process

Data collected from the four face-to-face interviews occurred during December 2016. The protocol used for interviews is provided in Appendix C of the study. Field observations in participant classrooms were conducted between October 2016 and November 2016. Data collection from both interviews and field observations was performed by the surrogate interviewer/observer. Transcriptions of all interviews was performed by the primary investigator after collection of the interview data. Field notes and observational forms were reviewed in tandem with the surrogate observer to ensure a clear understanding of observer ratings and notes. Qualitative documents were provided by teacher participants through email and other electronic delivery methods. Data from the multiple sources was combined and reviewed for emergent themes after the collection of data.

Data Analysis

Data explication began with a cursory review of carefully transcribed and organized data following collection. Examination of notes from observations, PLC meeting notes, and interview transcripts progressed to deeper analysis of data to identify significant statements and emerging themes (Creswell, 2014). Consistency of themes, instructional strategies, and shared perceptions or patterns were highlighted in order to effectively capture participant's experiences of teaching in a looped classroom. The ultimate goal of data analysis was to provide a rendering of the teacher's stories that would truthfully portray their experience. The researcher specifically sought to provide an analysis that underscored teacher perceptions of the impact of looping on teacher-student relationships, responsive teaching, and classroom expectations. Collaboration between the researcher and participants included member checks to confirm that the presented narratives were faithfully written (Merriam, 2002).

Participant Profiles

The four participants in the study were certified teachers working for an Eastern, Tennessee school district during the 2016-2017 school year. All participants in the study have earned at least a master's degree and their length of teaching experience ranges from eight to 11 years. The sample population consisted of three females and one male.

All four study participants worked at high school in an Eastern, Tennessee school district during the time of the study. All four participants in the study are also members of the school's freshman academy. Teachers in the freshman academy teach year-long courses during 1st and 2nd block in order to provide year-long Algebra I and English I to freshman students. Each teacher in the study has been a member of the freshman academy for over 5 years and are accustomed to teaching student groups beyond the traditional one semester course. During the 2016-2017

school year, the participants volunteered to loop with their student groups into their sophomore year. Looping allowed the participants to remain with the same student groups for 3 consecutive semesters.

Sophia currently serves as the chair of the English department. She is in her 11th year of teaching English. Sophia teaches the Greek mythology course electives in addition to her English course load. Sophia has taught at the school for 10 of her 11 years in education. She has been a member of the freshman academy team for each year she has been teaching at the school. Sophia's students consistently score at or above expectations on the state end-of-course exams. Sophia is also the freshman English PLC team leader.

Katharine is in her eighth year of teaching and she has been at the study site for the length of her teaching career. She is a certified English teacher and has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. Katharine teaches English courses as well as creative writing each semester. Like Sophia, Katharine has been a member of the freshman academy for the duration of her career. Katharine's students have performed fairly well on the state end-of-course assessments. Her TVAAS scores have been at expectations or slightly above expectations. She is a member of the school leadership team and has worked this year to help develop common formative assessments in 9th grade through senior English. Katharine has worked with the other high school in the district in hopes that the common formative assessments might be used at both schools to monitor student progress.

Aubrey is in her ninth year of teaching. Aubrey earned a bachelor's in English and master's in curriculum and instruction. She has also earned an educational specialist degree in educational administration and supervision. She has considered moving into school administration but has currently chosen to remain a classroom teacher. Aubrey has spent seven

years of her teaching experience in the freshman academy. She traditionally teaches the lowest academic level of freshman within academy structure. She also teaches the highest percentage of special education students in the freshman academy and has a special education co-teacher in her 1st block class. Her students have had strong success on the state end-of-course assessments and she has been rated a level 5 teacher for the past four years. Aubrey has been frequently identified as an effective teacher at both the school level and district level, and she helps provide professional development courses for the system's new teachers each school year.

Jack has been teaching for nine years. He is a second-career teacher and spent several years operating his own business. Jack graduated from a local high school and then earned his bachelor's in English literature at university. He has also earned his master's degree in curriculum and instruction. Jack has experience teaching yearlong courses. In the past, he has helped teach year-long combined studies courses. He frequently collaborates with the history department to plan for cross-curricular activities in his English courses. His students have consistently scored at or above expectations according to TVAAS.

Researcher Notes and Memos

The researcher worked in conjunction with a surrogate interviewer and observer, Dr. J. Beavers, to collect interview data and field notes. The surrogate interviewer conducted face-to-face interviews with study participants during the month of December 2016. The interviews were conducted near the end of each teacher's third full semester with their student group to allow for fuller reflection of the entirety of the looped experience. The data transcribed from interviews was organized according to the appropriate research question and then coded to identify significant themes, perceptions, and experiences. Notes from the interviews quickly revealed that all four participants shared largely positive attitudes about their experience of looping with their

freshman group into sophomore courses. The four participants responded to interview protocol with stories, reflections, and shared perceptions that were highly correlated to the pervasive themes that were discovered through the review of literature with regard to developing effective classroom environments. The participants consistently cited a belief that the looped classroom was conducive to greater teacher-student relatedness. The participants then expressed a shared belief that better teacher-student relationships were critical to environmental aspects of teaching and learning such as classroom management, responsive teaching, student engagement, and establishing high expectations. The researcher did note that all four participants also expressed concerns over consistently managing student behavior and discipline in a looped classroom environment. The length of time that allowed teachers and students to form closer relational bonds also seemed to cause the teachers to be more reluctant to always administer discipline for fear of damaging the relationship.

Classroom observations (found in Appendix D) were performed by the surrogate observer between October and December 2016. The classroom observation notes were used to assess teacher instruction and classroom environment according to the TEAM evaluation rubric. Observation notes provided accounts of the looped classroom environments independent of the interview protocol and within the context of the actual classroom environment. The observation notes were collected and reviewed before providing teachers with an effectiveness score. Additionally, the observations consisted of both an observer score and a teacher self-score, which provided further data about participant perceptions about their classroom environment.

Observational data found that all four study participants scored above expectations in indicators related to the learning environment: expectations, managing student behavior, environment, and respectful culture. No participant scored below a four on the indicator of

respectful culture. This indicator was found to be a strength of the classroom observation data. The observer notes frequently cited the friendly nature of the classroom environments, positive student-teacher interactions, and positive peer interactions. The notes from Jack's observation highlighted a comfortable learning environment characterized by positive exchanges and the teacher's attempt at respectfully connecting instructional goals to student interests and abilities:

> The teacher and student interactions were friendly and relaxed. Jack was well-prepared with handouts of current events and articles that fostered good discussion and ideas for writing. It was evident that the articles had been thoughtfully selected to try and maximize student interest in writing. Prior to releasing the students to perform the writing task, the teacher practiced close reading strategies and modeled writing that is supported by strong textual evidence. This lesson was in preparation for the TN Ready Writing Assessment and definitely a lesson that could have been much less inviting to students. Jack does a good job making the writing relevant and meaningful. He was very intentional in not allowing the lesson to feel like test prep.

The average self-score for the participants was closely calibrated with the overall findings of the classroom observations. No participant submitted a self-score below a four, which suggests that the participants had a strong sense of self-efficacy within the learning environments of their looped classrooms. The observations revealed that both the teacher and students felt comfortable in the looped classroom environment.

In noting instructional practices, the observer found that each teacher was particularly strong in the area of motivating students and teacher knowledge of students, which are closely aligned to student engagement in learning and teacher responsiveness to student need. Two of

the four participants, Sophia and Aubrey, were given the highest rating possible in teacher knowledge of students. During Aubrey's observation, the observer noted:

> It is evident from teacher-student interactions that the classroom is comfortable and conducive to student learning. The teacher establishes high and demanding learning and behavioral expectations for students. The classroom is well-structured and organized to maximize student success. Yet, the lesson activities and student-teacher interactions suggest a high level of concern for student interest and student motivation. The teacher consistently uses a variety of learning strategies and activities to try and meet students where they are. Consequently, the atmosphere in the classroom is welcoming and accepting of all students. The class almost manages itself and students exhibit very little off-task behaviors.

The observer noted a similar display of teacher responsiveness to increase student motivation in the observation of Sophia:

> Sophia knows her students. Her questioning throughout the lesson, and the times in which she offers more direct support, provides a clear indication that she knows her students' learning difficulties, and that she knows with what part of the lesson they will need more help. In this lesson, she incorporated social media into the writing component. It wasn't necessary but it was obvious that she did it to incorporate her students' interests.

The observations and subsequent notes found commonalities in the respectful nature of each classroom environment. The observer provided notes and findings from the classroom observations that revealed that teachers in the looped classrooms displayed a responsiveness to

student needs in both instructional practices and the learning environment. Teachers displayed an awareness of student learning needs and interests in their planning and delivery of instruction.

The researcher also collected data from the examination of PLC meeting notes from the participant's freshman academy PLC. Preceding looping with their student groups into their sophomore year, all four participants in the study contributed in weekly freshman academy meetings in which they reviewed lessons, discussed learning objectives, and monitored student progress and behavior. The PLC document provided in Appendix E specifically demonstrates the level at which extended time with students provided the participants with information and feedback concerning student academic, social, or behavioral needs. The meeting notes highlight the consistent discussion of student behaviors, responses to management techniques, and further underscore the process by which the participants developed relationships with their student groups. These weekly meetings served as a precursor to the participants looping with their student groups and provided additional qualitative data concerning how each teacher established a more responsive classroom environment. For example, early in the year Katharine noted that one of her students did not seem comfortable in class asking for help:

> I.L. is super quiet. He is not participatory in math class, even with hand gestures like thumbs up, thumbs down, or sideways. He seems to struggle with approaching his teachers regarding problems.

Similarly, Jack noted the following about one of his students:

> S.G. says mom is in jail and is waiting on a diagnosis regarding breast cancer. Her behavior plan indicated past trouble with fighting, but she seems to be doing well now.

She responds well to individual attention and is very capable academically if she can successfully navigate social issues.

The collection and review of the meeting notes provided the researcher with additional qualitative data that helped to develop a deeper understanding of the participants' process of developing their respective classroom environments. The teacher reflections and memos contained in the PLC meeting notes gave the researcher background information about the progression of the teacher-student relationships in the looped classroom. The data from meeting notes correlated with the emergent themes identified in the data gathered throughout both the face-to-face interviews and classroom observations. The collected data from the PLCs supported teacher perceptions that were expressed in the interviews during which all four participants described their classrooms as being comfortable. The participants also expressed a belief that the extended time that had been spent with students resulted in a classroom environment characterized by close relationships and a deepened awareness of student need.

Interview Findings

The findings of this narrative study are organized and discussed according to the shared themes that emerged in the data resultant from the research questions of the study. Participant interviews were critical sources of data in the retelling of the experience of teaching in a looped classroom. Portions of the transcriptions from participant interviews and relevant quotes are provided in the following section of Chapter 4. Participant quotes and responses are highlighted to underscore the persistent themes that were identified by the researcher correlating to each research question. Further summarization, analysis of findings, additional conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 5.

Research Question #1

How do teachers describe their experiences of developing the classroom environment in a looping structure?

Comfortable and Simplified. When the participants were asked to describe the development of the classroom environment in their looped classroom, each of the four participants indicated that the familiarity that they had with their student groups was highly beneficial. The participants expressed a belief that the extended time that they had spent with their student groups helped to shorten the process of establishing classroom expectations, norms, and routines. Additionally, the heightened awareness of student personalities and learning abilities that had been gained from remaining with the student groups allowed teachers to simplify and shorten their traditional beginning of the year procedures for getting to know their students. Sophia's response in describing the classroom environment of her looped classroom are representative of the sentiments of the four participants:

> So, my freshman academy classes looped with me from my ninth grade English class into sophomore English. I had these kids their entire freshman year and they didn't get a break from me at all because they were right back with me in the fall of their sophomore year. Ha. But, I actually liked it because you knew them from day one. I didn't have to get to know them again. We spend some time in the freshman academy at the beginning of each year, um, trying to learn the kids and what they can do. You know what I mean? We're going to be together for the whole year so we slow down a little in the beginning and try to really get to know the kids. These kids were right back with me and we didn't have to worry with that. We didn't waste time and we wrote an essay on day one. Ha. They were expected to write like they were last year. I knew what they were capable of. I enjoyed it.

When asked to elaborate on how developing the environment in the looped classroom might compare to other courses, Sophia continued:

> Comfortable. The kids walked in and they were comfortable. They knew me. They knew each other. They understood the process of how we do things. I knew all of them so I knew what to expect. Yeah, we were just comfortable with each other. You don't have to waste time on the little stuff or all the housekeeping stuff. We could start on the first day and I'm looking at the kids like, "I don't even have get to know you because I've had you all for a year already." Ha. I already knew a lot about them. So, that's what has been really different about developing the classroom environment in looped class compared to other courses. It's almost like you don't really have to develop as much. The environments are there and you pick up where you left off really fast because the kids are already ready to get moving. You know that the kids give me a hard time and I gave them a hard time too. It was just a more laid back atmosphere and you didn't have to work to earn their trust because you had it from day one.

Aubrey also shared that remaining with her student group in a looped classroom established a noticeable level of comfort that influenced her instruction and student interactions:

> I feel as though looping helped my classroom environment. For example, I knew my students' levels for the most part and knew their academic strengths and areas to strengthen in English. It was also helpful knowing the personal backgrounds and personalities of my students. I feel as though I was able to do more things like Socratic seminars and whole group discussions from the start because my students already knew my expectations and felt comfortable speaking in front of each other since we did that quite often the year before. Whole and small group discussions were more meaningful

> because the relationships were already built. I honestly felt a little more comfortable on day one of teaching in the looped classroom. Perhaps it gave me a little more confidence too earlier on in the semester because I was naturally able to open up and call on students I already knew well. It just seemed to feel very natural from the start and I think that helped me and the kids settle in.

Katharine suggested that students felt comfortable because they already understood expectations:

> I think the students become more comfortable. I think that since they know what's expected that it helps them. Like, they know as far as turning in assignments, what's expected of them and what's going to be acceptable work. They've had more time to understand exactly what I want from them

Jack similarly stated that developing the classroom environment felt relaxed compared to other courses:

> I think with the looped students it gets a lot more laid back. I think it's a lot more laid back and more comfortable in terms of the kids know what to expect. You already know what to expect, and I guess the environment is more laid back because we've already been coexisting with each other. In a looped classroom, I think there's more opportunities for correcting behavior with maybe a simple word or simple look. Um. Or, you know? Or, even just maybe a body expression so to speak. It's not like when you're trying to feel each other out for the first time. They get what I want and we've already established that and vice versa. I get them too. The other courses that I teach... I mean before you know it the semester is coming to an end. Then you've got state testing coming up. So, in a semester class, its a couple months together. I think that creates more and more tense environment , and so I think it is more about business, which maybe academically is a

> good thing, but in terms of you know developing relationships, and creating more of maybe a workplace type environment it's maybe a bad thing. I just think it's tense. It's more hurry and learn. More like "we got to get this done like today" versus in a looped classroom we have time together that we can use to get better, and I've got time to figure out what's going to work for my students. So, I think it becomes just more of a comfortable and more of a realistic environment in terms of how you might interact with people that you've known for longer than a couple months. Does that make sense? I just feel like it's a little more realistic of how relationships function in the real-world. Like in the work place or something.

Relationally Focused. A relational focus was cited by all four participants as a key component of describing their experience of developing the classroom environment in a looped classroom. Each participant asserted that the pre-existing, positive relationships with students benefited the classroom environment. Katharine's response provided a representative expression of the participants' perceptions of how existing teacher-student relationships manifested in the looped classroom environment:

> In comparing to my other classrooms, I feel like the students are more comfortable and for many reasons. I think because they made more of a relationship with me and that I get to know them a little better that they feel relaxed and cared for. Also, as far as the structure of the classroom, they know what is expected. They remember the routine. Like, sometimes I just walk in at the beginning of class and can say, "It's Monday. What are you guys supposed to be working on? Let's get going." Ha. They know how we start class on a daily basis and know what to expect. So, that's nice. I think in my other classes, that are just a semester-long classes, you start with the building of the relationships. It all

> starts with building good relationships with the students. If you fail to do that then you're not going to accomplish much in that class. More time equals more opportunities for relationships building. So, for the students that I only teach for half a year or a semester course, it's just that there is less time to make those personal connections. There's been more time to do that in the looped classroom and I feel like it helps.

Sophia agreed that pre-existing relationships are a big contributor to an environment conducive to learning, and that having relationships with students was key to a productive classroom environment:

> I mean I just feel like relationships are the foundation. In other classes it might take half the semester to get where you want. Like, my junior class this year. They probably didn't start getting comfortable until probably a little after fall break. So, it took about... a long time to kind of get them comfortable. Then, by that time it turns into testing and you don't have time anymore. If you don't have the time to sit and just kind of say to a student, "Okay. You're having trouble with this because of this other thing so let's fix it" and you don't know that about your kids then it makes things difficult. You need to have that time to learn with kids and learn about kids. In the looped class, I feel like you can do that because you've already spent over a year with them. You've already built a base with them and then you're just developing more steps to help them. Let's call that layers. I guess that it's easier to get the layers once you've broken through the first barrier of building the relationship.

Jack added that the extended time in a looped classroom allowed him to adjust pacing to focus more on relationships:

> Teaching in a looped classroom allows you to develop a little more personal relationship with the students in that you get to know them. You get to know their personalities and other nuances that can sometimes help you understand them a little bit better. There's a difference between that relationship and the relationships that I'd be able to have with another student that walks into my classroom and is there for a couple of months and they're out of my classroom. The exception is if you've had a student before in another class or maybe if you know them through sports or other activities. Obviously, if you have a student for three months for only one semester it's just not the same. You barely know them by the time the class is over. I mean we have 25 to 30 kids in each class and we have a ton to do. There's just a significant difference in getting to know kids that you loop with. I don't think that you waste time or anything in a looped class, but I do think your pacing opens up. The pacing allows you more time for getting to know students in a looped classroom.

Aubrey also conceded that the looped classroom environment allowed for a relational focus:

> I am most definitely a relationship-driven person, so I wholeheartedly appreciated getting the chance to deepen those relationships with my looped students. I feel as though I had good relationships with my looped students and that it paid dividends in terms of student behavior and just the overall classroom environment. It's an odd feeling because many of us become teachers because we care about kids and we want to make a difference. But, um, many of the students that we have in our school I might just work with for one semester and then our relationship is over. I might not see that student again until graduation day or something. I feel like there is a significant difference in my relationships with my looped students. The relationships that I've built with the students

> is really the lynch pin to everything we do. Um, at least I feel that way about it. I hope that it comes across in the way that we communicate with each other and the way that we respect one another. Like I said earlier, those relationships enrich class discussions and they help pave the way for a lot of what we try to do together as a whole class. The difference is definitely a positive one because I do not have to waste time getting to know them personally and academically since I already know that information from the previous year. I just keep building it and trying to use that to my advantage.

Research Question #2

What are teacher perceptions of their own relational involvement with students in a looped high school classroom?

Close and Meaningful. When asked to share their perceptions about the level of relational involvement with their student groups, all four participants characterized their relationships with students as relationally close. The participants collectively expressed a belief that the period of time in which they had worked with and, subsequently gotten to know, their students had helped them develop deeper and more meaningful relationships with them. Each of the participants also discussed experiencing feelings that the closer relationships with students in the looped classroom produced a more authentic relational discourse in those classes. Jack and Sophia provided specific examples of times in which the depth of their relationships with students gave them a greater sense of efficacy and positively impacting a student's life. Jack's response captured the group's sentiment that they felt a close and meaningful connection to the students in the looped classrooms when contrasted with other students:

> Teaching in the looped classroom helps you develop a more personal relationships with the students. Um, it allows you develop a little different in your communication with

> students. I'm not sure if this will make sense, but it's like they can understand sometimes what I mean better than other students. And, I feel like I can do that too. Like, I work with these kids each day for a year and a half and when they're sharing things with me I can really, I mean really, get what they're telling me. Even if it is implied. I would miss those things without that close relationship. As a teacher you can understand what their issues really are and you know them well enough that you can predict reactions better. You can really take another step in terms of being able to allow the student to know that you really do care about them as a person. That their life is important to you. The looped classroom experience has been mostly positive for me in terms of the structure has allowed me to be like "I you know in my mind." "I really get you." I feel like it has allowed to make a bigger impact on students.

Jack continued that he felt that the relationship that he'd developed with students was authentic:

> I think one thing that happens is a lot of students also begin to see you as more of a human being. It's just like what you see with your students. They see you when you're up and when you're down as a human being. Ok? I think that's okay. They see your own ups and downs in life and you see their ups and downs too. Sometimes you can begin to read, you know, when you're having a good time or when you're having a bad day and things like that. So, I think it allows them to see that you're more of a human being and it helps them understand that this whole thing is a bunch of humans working together. You know? I think we all learn that we're just coexisting together to try to accomplish something and grow from it. You can get to know more about them long-term. You see kids change a lot over a year or so. You watch them change their habits and patterns...and maybe you get to help with that a little. But, you definitely have a better understanding of

> them as people. I just think that you have more of a personal relationship in terms of that the student understands that you really see value in them and I believe that it changes the way that they evaluate you as a teacher.

Sophia shared how the depth of her relationship with a struggling student in her looped classroom provided her with a rewarding feeling:

> So, I have a girl in my class and I‘ve had her in three straight semester now. I know that early on during her freshman year she struggled with her sexuality. She tried a lot of different things in terms of how she expressed herself with her clothing and it was obvious that she was having a difficult time. As we worked together as a class and in small groups, I think it helped support her. She got to where she felt more comfortable just being herself in my class. So, she struggles with her sexuality during her freshman year and then at the beginning of her sophomore year one of her friends committed suicide and obviously that was a huge deal. We have all of this relationship that we’ve established and so, I try to help by being consistent for her in class. I know that she’s had a difficult time and I know what to expect from her. Like, I know when she's really down that I can go up and say “Hey, are we doing okay today? What do I need to do for you to help? Can I help you with this assignment? Or, do you want to work with a classmate?” She just struggled a lot last year and when that tragedy happened. But, there were some days that the only work she would do in any class was mine. She came to my class and I would be patient and sometimes just let her work on what she felt like doing that day. I think that approach made it to where she thought she could get through it. Some days she’d struggle and take a step back and she’d make it halfway through the class before getting emotional. So, I would remind her of what she was capable of and encourage her

> to let the work take her mind off other things. Now, a sense of normalcy has returned to her and she's finishing strong. So, I feel like you're able to know the kids and, in this case, I know that what she's capable of. If she gives me some subpar work during that time I understand that because I know what's behind it. I also know what she can do and now this year again she's actually producing the best work she has in her three semesters for me. It's great to see her kind of come out of all of this and it's rewarding to see. It makes you happy.

Katharine's perception of her relationship with her student group echoed the sentiments of the other participants:

> As far as the personal relationships go, I think it's all about the personal attention. I understand that one student thinks differently about things than this other student. I would just say over time you're just the beginning to know them more and more. We write in class and have discussions and they're more open with me. Ha. I've learned things about these students that I really didn't wish to ever know! We'll do an opener or journal entry and they'll share something that will make you just want to put your head down on the desk. Ha. But, I've also learned things about them that helps me understand where they come from. I'm able to explain why a student doesn't always turn in their assignments or maybe way a student wants to sleep in class sometimes. You can do those things in classes when you have students that you actually get to know. I feel like, especially with this group that I've had since they were freshman, that they get to know not only me but they get to know each other. So, there's a lot more openness for them.

Aubrey also characterized the relationship with her students as possessing a level of relational closeness that deepens the openness of the classroom environment:

> The looping class gave me a chance to just deepen the relationship that I'd already built with my students during their freshman year. Huh...I feel as though I have a really good relationship with my looped students. I feel comfortable with them and they feel that too. I know their strengths and weaknesses and I think that gives us all a little confidence. Does that make sense? Honestly, I treat them with respect, use humor and what's important in their world to connect with them in the curriculum. I try to personally connect with each one of them by talking individually to them and trying to get to know them. The best bosses I have ever had in my lifetime were ones that genuinely cared about me, which is why I worked a lot harder for them. I think students are much the same way in how they see their teachers. I've worked hard to get to know them. That pays off in what I get back from them in our classroom. I let them know that I'll do just about anything that need from me. I am always amazed at the students who open up with me.

Blurred Relational Boundaries. Though each participant expressed that the close relationships that existed in the looped classrooms resulted in largely positive outcomes, three of the four participants expressed that relational closeness with their student groups also offered some challenges. Specifically, Katharine, Sophia, and Jack discussed that the familiar relationships with students presented a challenge in maintaining the teacher-student dynamic when describing their relationships with students. Some of the participants experienced that students would "push the limits" as they became increasingly comfortable in their relationships with the teacher. The teachers felt that some students became too relaxed as the teachers shifted more and more from a dominant classroom structure to a cooperative one. Sophia shared that the

close relationship that she had worked to build with her students sometimes resulted in students feeling “too comfortable”:

> They’re precious. They are. But there were definitely days when they drove me crazy because they were comfortable. They were almost to the point of being too comfortable because I think they knew where that line was. They didn’t have to figure it out anymore and sometimes they’d push you right to the line. And, then you can’t move the line once the line is established. You can’t go back and become stricter once you’ve relinquished some of that control as time has gone on. You always start the year more controlling and rigid with students and then over time you begin to let up when you build trust and get to know them. Once you let up then you can’t really go back. Sometimes I felt like the students took advantage of me because we knew each other well. So, yeah, there were times that they’d already annoyed me 20 minutes into class.

When asked by the interviewer if she believed that her relationship with students impacted student behavior, Katharine conceded that the depth of relationships in the looped classroom caused her to remind students that she was the teacher:

> Yes, I would say both negatively and positively. I do feel like the more comfortable that a student gets with the teacher can be a good thing in many ways. But, it can also be a negative thing if they get too comfortable. There are times that they get too relaxed and too open. Maybe they would just blurt things out in class. Or, maybe because they feel so comfortable in your class they start to talk when you’re speaking or things like that. Nothing big. It’s just small stuff. Like etiquette stuff. So then you have to get on to them or pull them aside and remind that that, “Hey, I'm not your buddy you know. I’m your teacher.”

Similarly, Jack felt that his attempts to show students that he cared resulted in students testing classroom expectations and norms:

> There have been some instances where kids have gotten too comfortable with me. Um, we’ve spent so much time together that they sometimes relax too much. We’re still in school. We still have things to do. But, they get so comfortable with just being themselves that maybe they feel like they have more leniency to misbehave. Or, maybe they feel like they have a little more leniency to not to get work turned in on time because if they come to me and talk to me maybe, I'll like... I'll let them out of a deadline, or give them a second chance, or give him an extension and things like that. So there's been certainly been some instances like that. And, it does make it difficult but you have to maintain that line. Ultimately, I’m still the boss.

Research Question #3

How do teachers in a looped classroom provide responsive emotional, social, and academic supports for students?

Increased Knowledge of Students Improves Responsiveness. As noted in the memos section, each of the four participants scored above expectations with regard to their demonstration of their knowledge of students. Participants’ instructional activities, method of delivery, and teaching strategies were cited by the observer as evidence that the participants understood their students’ academic needs and adjusted accordingly. Each of the four participants also rated their own observations at above expectations in the same indicator. The teachers’ interview responses also revealed a high sense of efficacy when asked about their ability to provide responsive teaching in a looped classroom. All four participants asserted that their responsiveness to student needs was improved by an increased knowledge of the students in

their class. When asked if the looping classroom structure had influenced her ability to offer responsive teaching, Aubrey's response capture the dominant theme:

> I strongly believe students feel more comfortable in a looped classroom where they know the teacher; this helps them perform better academically and socially. Coming into the semester I already knew my students. I knew their personalities and their behavioral challenges, which we had largely worked out the previous year together. Because I'd had them for their entire freshman year, I had an academic history on them. I understood their strengths and weaknesses immediately and didn't have to re-establish baseline data. I knew what kind of person they were and I also knew what kind of student they were. That's what it takes to really be able to meet the needs of each kid.

Aubrey elaborated that she used individual conferences with students to deepen her understanding of students and improve her own responsive teaching:

> I like to hold individual conferences with students each four and a half weeks or so. I got in the habit of doing that because we do progress reports at that time with all of our students in the freshman academy. So, I had done that with this group all of last year and just continued the tradition this semester. Each midterm I sit down with each student and we look at grades, go over missing assignments, and talk about strengths and areas that need to be strengthened. That can be academic or behavior-wise. It's a progression of getting to know the students and working with them individually to help them improve in each area. Of course, you can't do that until you spend time getting to know them. I think those conferences were a lot more meaningful in this third semester than they were way back when I was first getting to know the students at the beginning of ninth grade.

Sophia stated that her prior knowledge of the students made it much easier to offer responsive teaching in her looped classroom:

> You have to get to know them. Once you get that and you learn about the kids then that helps. It's easy for me. Once you learn the past then learn what questions to ask people, whether it's about family life or anything like that, you figure them out. If you get to know them then they will tell you what they need…if they trust you. I think looping just makes it easier. A lot easier because you know the kid. So, I can respond with what each kid needs.

Jack responded that knowing his students on a more personal level helped him adjust his own behavior and instructional planning:

> You can see those patterns of what happens when a student is maybe having a bad month or a rough time. So you watch for those things and you can see patterns. You become more understanding of them. Maybe you have kids who have...you know, have a bad month at home and then a good month and then a bad month and then a good month and so on. If you have them in a looping classroom you can kind of see those patterns and it can it help you as a teacher because you can say, "Oh ok. I know something's going on right now." So, then maybe I approached that student differently then I might when I don't really know them as well. I think when you're in a class where you know the kids better then you can go deeper in everything. I can push my questioning deeper on texts that we read or something like that because I trust that they're not going to give me a canned response. I also know more what matters to them. Everything I try to do, I try to make it relevant to the student. I really try to check myself on that because the moment it's not relevant they tune out. I try to make it relevant to this time in their life. I want

> things to apply to them. So, we in our current unit we're really working on theme and I'll choose texts that will resonate with them and touch on topics like relationships, poverty, loyalty, and other things that are immediate to them.

Katharine mentioned that the extended time that she had spent with the students in her looped classroom helped made her feel better suited to meet their needs:

> I think I mentioned this already, but just having more of an understanding as to why students do what they do is important. You can be more helpful to students if you have a better grasp on exactly what you need to do for them. Like, understanding "why does this student always turn in assignments late?" Or, "Why won't this student read aloud in class or participate in group discussions?" If you know what's happening with those students then you know better what tools to use for them. Maybe one student doesn't feel comfortable sharing his opinion in front of the whole class when he's put on the spot, but he's perfectly fine sharing what he just wrote for his journal response. Or, maybe you figure out the student that won't read aloud in class will actually read if they have time to read the passage previously and they're not doing a cold read. Those closer relationships and knowing the student better... it's just kind of it an obvious step to take in being able to meet them where they need to be met. Like I said before, having more time with the students allows me to get to know them better and I'm able to give him or her what they need.

Research Question #4

What are teacher perceptions about the role of looping in helping to establish clear organizational and behavioral expectations for students in the classroom environment?

Clear Expectations, Accountability, and Consistency. Each of the study participants perceived that the looping structure helped to establish clear expectations for student behavior and academic performance. The pre-existing teacher-student group had previously established routines and norms and the consistency of an existent classroom environment prevented teachers from having to re-establish classroom organization or expectations. When asked to describe how she communicated her behavioral and academic expectations to students, Sophia responded in a manner consistent with the other three participants:

> It's very clear. I go through what I want and say "here's what I expect." If they break the rules then they know consequences will happen. I just tell them how it is upfront and they know where the line is. They know what will annoy me, and it's really that simple. Trouble comes when you annoy me.

Sophia continued that the familiar classroom environment quickened the pace of establishing classroom expectations. She also described how her previous relationship with her students enabled her to create an environment with increased accountability:

> Something else that was really great about this experience was that expectations were higher for the class in general. They couldn't get away with saying we didn't learn this last year because I could just respond, "Yea, you did. You learned it with me and you can do it." I never heard a single student try to say something like that in class. That was a different experience. And, we could move so much faster than we did the year before. I didn't have to reteach things or go back over something like how to do proper citations. We literally just got right to it. I didn't have to train them or program them. Ha. I think we probably did more in this sophomore class than probably any other course that I've

> had. It was awesome because we would just move through units. I didn′t have to build those relationships again and setup my classroom from ground zero. They knew what I wanted. They knew each other. So, we just got going right out of the gate and covered a unit and then just kept on going to the next unit. I didn′t have reteach the simple stuff and they knew what was acceptable.

Both Jack and Katharine explained how student familiarity with his classroom routines and expectations limited student misbehavior. Jack shared:

> I believe the looping structure impacts our organization and behavior. Like, I feel that by this point you can just reach out to kids on a personal level. Expectations are more individualized. So, you can say "Hey, I really need you to start getting your homework in on time." They know that I'm really worried about them and whether they're successful. I think that means something to them as opposed to just some random teacher that they're just getting to know. I think it makes a difference in that if you ask them to do something they generally respond quickly. Um, like "you need to stop cussing. You know we don't talk like that in my room." Or, "I really need to stay off your cell phone in class. You know that's disrespectful to me and your classmates." You have a better chance of the kids feeling that obligation to you. A personal obligation to you. I think they take things to heart. Once you get to know kids you stand a much better chance of changing distracting behavior and it's not so much a confrontation but an agreement about how we operate in class.

Jack further described how consistency in his classroom organization kept students on-task:

> I think that the one thing that I do is that I always start each class the same with an opener. I also always begin the week by giving them a weekly schedule and just discussing it and asking if there's any questions. That way they know what I want them to accomplish right at the beginning of the week. You know? I think that the routine is really good for them. And then at the beginning of each day I remind them what we're doing the rest of the week. The kids get used to that and adapt. They don't come in the class thinking, "What are we doing today?" Or having no idea what's in store. They know what to do when they walk in the class and they also know the direction that we're heading for the entire week. The kids are used to my routine and it keeps them from having to guess. I've had all of this time to really dig into expectations with kids. Once you've laid that foundation you don't lose as much time in class handling little annoyances or taking away from the class to correct behaviors. The kids know what I want and they usually get there.

Katharine's responses reiterated that routines and the teacher-student relationship produced a higher level of accountably for students to meet classroom expectations:

> I found that I had to certainly organize my other classrooms differently than I did for my looped classroom. It's almost like there wasn't much that I couldn't try. Even the physical classroom was organized differently because there was already an understanding about what the expectations were. I didn't have to continually remind students or stay really rigid with them to start the semester. Um, it's like a working environment. You have a job. You know what that job is…so, let's get it done. They know exactly what I'm expecting of them for that day and even for a given week. It's a good thing because understanding my expectations help everything run so much more smoothly. When

> you've got to develop that it's takes time. It's so much better when I was able to walk into my 4th block class and they know what to do without me really saying it. Ha. That was quite a bit different when they were in their first semester of their freshman year. They get it because my routine is not different in English II than it was in English I. We always have something that we start with because everyone should come in knowing exactly what we're doing. So every day we do that. There's no need to lay the groundwork with my looped group and it wasn't difficult to remind them to hold onto those expectations.

Katharine added that peers were also more apt to hold one another accountable in her looped class:

> Again, I think with the longer period that I've had these students they just get used to things. We've got that group mentality that we're all in this together. So, you even have students correct each other rather than me having to do that. They know what the class is going to look like and feel like tomorrow and it's like those expectations just get stuck in there (pointing to head). It's a really good thing.

Aubrey agreed with the consensus of the study participants and responded that her students adjusted well to pre-established norms and routines:

> I mean, the kids came right back in and sat in their old seating chart. It was kind of funny, but we had found something that worked and we just kept right on going. You're always going to have to work out the occasional behavioral issues with students but I was able to do that much more personally than I would have been able to do with a new group of students. Students were definitely more likely to behave better for me than maybe some of their other classes because they know that I know them. I didn't have to start over. So

they couldn't either. I also feel like that helped students continue to improve socially and academically in my class. We didn't have to relearn the classroom expectations. So, we could continue to try and working on building better relationships and improving academically.

Summary of Analysis

This research study explored the central question of research question one: How would teachers describe their experience of developing the classroom environment in a looped classroom? The study addressed the overarching question by examining specific elements of an effective classroom environment that have been associated with increased student motivation and engagement: teacher-student relationships, responsive teaching, and clear expectations (Pianta et al., 2012). The researcher and a surrogate observer/interviewer collected data for the study from qualitative documents, classroom observations, and one-to-one interviews with the study participants to provide a holistic examination of each classroom environment. The preliminary analysis of the collected data included an organization of data into dominant themes and shared experiences that allowed the researcher to most accurately render a purposeful account of each participants experience of developing a the classroom environment in a high school looped classroom. The analysis and interpretation of the data was performed by the primary researcher and the researcher also performed the transcriptions of all subject interviews.

The research design relied heavily on the study participants interview responses to help create a truthful narrative that accurately characterized each experience (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Analysis and presentation of data in narrative inquiry attempts to provide access to a person's thinking and perceiving (Elbow, 1986; Riessman, 2008). Each study participant shared stories and experiences in the interview process that provided the researcher with data for

documenting their respective experiences. Bochner (2001) asserts that narratives can also be useful for identifying the larger patterns that occur in life experiences. Consequently, the researcher analyzed the data from the interview responses, coupled with classroom observations and PLC documents, to examine the commonalties in behaviors and experiences of participants working in a looped classroom context. This helped the researcher formulate a narrative analysis of the data that, as O'Reilly (2013) suggests, presents practice stories that reveal personal feelings, emotions, and experiences while also being mindful of the context in which a person operates.

The research findings of the study revealed that all four participants perceived that looping with their student groups helped to facilitate the development of effective classroom environments that were relationally focused and comfortable for teachers and students. Interview responses, as well as observational data and PLC documents, indicated that the classroom culture in the looped classroom was characterized by a close teacher-student relatedness. Each participant perceived that time spent in the looped classroom helped them to foster deeper, more meaningful relationships with students, which manifested in an environment that benefited students academically, socioemotionally, and behaviorally. However, three of four participants expressed concern that some students became overly comfortable and would act or behave as if the teacher was a friend rather than a superior. The participants depth of knowledge concerning their students was consistently cited as having a positive impact on each teacher's sense of efficacy with regards to offering responsive teaching. The participants felt better equipped to meet student social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs because they already had a deep knowledge of student personalities and capabilities. All four participants expressed a strong belief that the pre-existing relationships created in the looped classroom expedited the

establishment of classroom routines, norms, and procedures. The participants also believed that the consistency of routine and familiarity with their student groups helped to support both academic and behavioral expectations.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research study sought to capture teacher experiences and perceptions concerning the classroom environments of four high school teachers teaching in a looped classroom structure. The first three chapters of the study highlighted the researcher's purpose in exploring the topic of study, provide a research base for examining the four primary research questions, and describe the qualitative methodology and processes of the study. Data collected from interviews, classroom observations, and qualitative artifacts were coded, analyzed, interpreted, and framed within emergent themes relating to each research question. The significant themes and interpretations that were identified in participant narratives, and other qualitative data, were presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of the research study and offers final conclusions, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

The findings of this study underscore much of the research on the influence of personal relationships and positive student-teacher interactions in the development of effective learning environments. The participants in this study characterized their classroom environments as being relationally close and comfortable for both students and teachers. The teachers associated their own level comfort within the classroom environment with a deeper sense of understanding of student needs. In turn, the teachers associated their knowledge of students with an improvement in their responsiveness to student need and expressed a confidence in motivating and managing students. The data that was produced in the study from interviews and classroom observations

supports existent research findings suggesting that teachers who are able to create deep, meaningful relationships are more equipped to respond to student needs. The teachers in this study overwhelmingly believed that the relationships formed with their looped student groups was a foundational element necessary for creating positive academic, behavioral, and socioemotional outcomes for students. The four participants in this study consistently correlated their ability to establish classroom expectations, manage student behavior, and respond to student needs with their level of relational involvement with their student groups. The depth of knowledge that the teachers gained from extended time with their students provided valuable information that resulted in greater feelings of teacher efficacy in meeting the individual needs of students and development of an effective classroom environment.

The participants perceptions of improved responsiveness consistently affirmed research on the potential benefits of developing trusting and supportive teacher-student relationships. Students demonstrate improved motivation to reach teacher expectations in classrooms in which they feel that the teacher will support their learning (Fulmer & Turner, 2014). The participant narratives aligned consistently with research asserting that the extended contact that occurs in looping classrooms provides teachers with the opportunity to increase their understanding of students' learning styles, personalities, and developmental needs (Wasley, 2002). Observational notes and scores collected during the study also provided additional evidence that each participant adjusted instructional delivery and planning based upon their identification or anticipation of student needs. The observational data reaffirmed the interview responses given by the participants, highlighting the participant's perceived correlation between classroom relationships and teacher responsiveness. Furthermore, the teachers in this study expressed the belief that their experience of building an effective classroom environment was assisted by the

relationships that they could build in a looped classroom structure. This belief suggests that looping at the high school level may provide a structure for facilitating deeper teacher-student relationships that allow teachers to better individualize the classroom environment to meet the needs of learners (Baran, 2010; Johnston, 2000; Swanson, 1999).

Qualitative inquiry of the study was guided by four key research questions. The primary researcher analyzed data from participant interview responses, classroom observation scores and notes, and qualitative documents to create themes representative of the experience of building effective classroom environments in a looped high school classroom. Conclusions relating to each of the four primary research questions are outlined in the subsequent section.

Research Question #1: How do teachers describe their experiences of developing the classroom environment in a looping structure?

Each of the study participants described their experiences of developing the classroom environment in a looping classroom in a largely favorable light. When asked to describe the classroom environment in their looped classroom, the participants' interview responses consistently revealed a perception that developing the classroom environment in the looped classroom was comfortable, or even simplified. The study participants frequently stated that the pre-existent comfort level and relationships that occurred in their looped classrooms created advantages in terms of both student academic and behavioral outcomes when compared to their non-looped classrooms. The teachers in the study believed that their existent level of knowledge concerning student personalities, interests, learning styles, and academic needs abbreviated the amount of time normally allotted at the beginning of the semester to gathering such information. The teachers professed that a significant portion of each semester is spent in attempting to build a rudimentary knowledge of student groups in order to effectively develop a positive classroom

culture and establish instructional goals. These experiences were consistent with research that suggests it takes several months of each school year before teachers adequately understand student ability and learning styles (Krogmann & Van Sant, 2000).

The participants in the study also expressed a high level of comfort in their knowledge of their student groups due to the relational focus of their classrooms. Participants shared that the looped classroom environment provided them the opportunity to expedite the delivery of classroom routines, procedures, and expectations. Additionally, the teachers described their ability to parlay their pre-existent relationship with, and knowledge of, students into improved lesson pacing and instructional planning. The participants frequently stated that they believed the looping structure made establishing a productive classroom environment easier. Baran′s (2010) study on teacher and student perceptions about looping found similar results. Similarly, the participants in Baran′s study cited that a looping structure created improved student-teacher relationships that helped create more positive and responsive classrooms (Baran, 2010; Harding, 2015).

Consistent with the research reviewed in Chapter 3, the teachers involved in the study firmly asserted that the nature of their relationships with students helped build classroom environments that they associated with positive impacts on student behavior, classroom instruction, and the quality of the overall classroom environment. Each participant held that the looped classroom environment allowed for classrooms that were more relationally focused. The participants in the study heavily emphasized the depth of the interpersonal relationships that they had established in the three semesters spent with their student groups.

Participants also suggested that the looping structure allowed them to continue to reap the benefits of those close relationships that they had previously established with students. The

participants shared that they perceived their classroom environments as being relationally close and supportive of student need. The increased amount of time spent with student groups was credited for providing teachers the chance to develop a classroom environment that they often described as more personal and attentive to student interests and learning outcomes. Self-determination theorizes that the classroom teacher and educational setting are key components of improving student internal motivation (Maulana & Opdenakker, 2014). All four participants in the study believed that they had successfully established relationships and classroom environments that enabled them to express concern for students while simultaneously offering support for continued student academic growth. These perceptions align with research that suggest that such environments are necessary for increasing student self-determination and combating student disengagement (Lapointe et al., 2005; Maulana & Opdenakker, 2014; Wentzel, 2010).

Research Question #2: What are teacher perceptions of their own relational involvement with students in looped high school classrooms?

Analysis of interview responses and observational notes, indicate that teacher perceptions of having close and meaningful relationships aligned with data from classroom observations. Each of the four participants perceived their relationships with the students as relationally close and expressed that they experienced a greater sense of satisfaction from teaching in their looped classrooms. The participants consistently asserted that they believed that students were more open in class and more participatory because of their relationship with both the classroom teacher and the familiar peer group. The observational data for each participant noted the respectful nature of each classroom environment. Thus, the researcher concluded that teacher perceptions gathered in the interview process were validated in the field visits.

Both teacher perceptions and the teacher-student interactions exhibited during classroom observations indicated a close relational dynamic. Pianta et al.'s (2003) research identified markers of close teacher-student relationships as positive contextual interactions. The research found that closeness in teacher-student relationships were evidenced in warm, caring classroom environments that could involve emotional, academic, and behavioral exchanges. Each participant in the study remarked on the open and honest nature of their relationship with the respective student groups. The participants firmly believed that they had established a close relationship with the student groups that benefited both the teacher and students. The effectiveness of the classroom climates were noted as being above expectations with regard to the nature of the interactions that took place in the classroom environment. Additionally, the observer rated the participants above expectations in the teacher knowledge of students category because the evidence of responsiveness in lesson planning and instructional delivery. The evidence from observations coupled with the narratives gathered during data collection suggest that the looping classroom environments were relationally close.

The participants also correlated the depth of relationships in the looped classroom to student outcomes that the researcher finds consistent with literature on attachment theory and the impact of interpersonal relationships on student behavior. All four participants believed that the relational closeness of the classroom environment promoted more positive student attitudes and engagement. Each participant expressed that the positive relationships in the classroom environment improved the communication in the room (Birch & Ladd, 1997).

Teachers also shared that their relational involvement with students was more meaningful because they could support students beyond the traditional academic focus of a classroom setting. In particular, two participants gave specific examples of opportunities to help students

deal with personal challenges that were not related to academic goals. The data gathered supports research suggesting that close teacher-student relationships provide a resource for helping students address socioemotional and behavioral concerns (Buyse et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2003; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004;).

Attachment theory and social motivational theory research underscores the necessity for adult responsiveness and sensitivity to form secure and supportive relationships (Roorda et al. 2011). The research findings in this study revealed that the teachers in the looped classroom perceived a reciprocal relationship between relational closeness and responsiveness to student needs. Each participant felt that their connection with students created a learning environment that made students feel supported and safe. As a result, the teachers believed that students were more comfortable and participatory in class. Research affirms that closeness of the teacher-student relationship in linked to reducing anxiety in students and building student self-esteem (Orth et al., 2012). Attachment theorists further assert that such a climate is needed to produce healthy emotional, social, and cognitive development for students (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969). Similarly, research on motivational theory has found that students are more likely to be involved in school and pursue academic success if they feel a close connection to their classroom teacher. (Bandura, 1997; Fan & Williams, 2010; Hughes & Cavell, 1999; Wentzel, 2003).

Three of the four participants in the study did express concerns over the challenge of balancing a close relationship with students while maintaining a clear authoritative position in the classroom. Participants shared that the level of intimacy that they had achieved with their students, at times, resulted in students pushing boundaries or being too open about their personal life. One participant stated that her attachment with students in her looped classroom caused her to discipline students differently than she would in a non-looped classroom. Participant responses

demonstrated that they had determined that development of close relationships was worth relinquishing some of their own control in the classroom. Furrer and Skinner (2003) found that relinquishing classroom control could help build more autonomy in student learners. Students are more engaged and motivated to learn in classrooms in which they feel a sense of partnership (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Based upon participant responses, the benefits of having created a comfortable, trusting classroom atmosphere clearly outweighed the occasional breach of etiquette from students. However, two of the participants shared that the relational proximity with students resulted in the occasional need to reassert their position as teacher rather than friend.

Research Question #3: How do teachers in a looped classroom provide responsive emotional, social, and academic supports for students?

Review of literature on theoretical frameworks for addressing motivation and engagement, underscores the link between student-teacher relationships and improved teacher responsiveness. Teachers that develop close relationships with students are better at identifying and meeting student needs. Teachers that have a more personal knowledge of their students' needs, personalities, interests, and learning styles are also more adept at connecting the curriculum to student interests and anticipating learning difficulties (Mashburn et al., 2008).

The findings of this study were consistent with those of found in Baran's (2010) study. Baran's (2010) study of looped middle school classrooms found that both teachers and students perceived that deepened student-teacher relationships creates more supportive and responsive classrooms. Students that genuinely feel supported in classrooms experience reduced anxiety and demonstrate higher levels of motivation in meeting teacher expectations (Harding, 2015; Johnston, 2000).

All four participants in the study credited the extended time spent with their student groups as a means of deepening their relationships with students. The participants cited deepened relationships with students as a critical factor in their ability to better understand student socioemotional and academic needs. Relational closeness resulted in an increased knowledge of student need and an increased sense of efficacy in terms of responding to those needs.

The participants in the study were intentional in building relationships with students and closely monitored student needs in the PLC meetings. The participants undoubtedly believed that the relationships that had been built over time with their students influenced their instructional planning, the delivery of content, and their ability to anticipate and support behavioral or academic challenges. Each participant noted that they felt an increased ability to incorporate student interests within the curriculum of their looped classroom. These perceptions are consistent with research findings that demonstrate teacher-student relatedness influences teacher ability to incorporate student interests in instructional planning (Mashburn et al., 2008).

The teachers frequently stated that their level of understanding of students was greatly improved by the opportunity to loop with their student groups. The familiarity that resulted from the looped structure provided the participants with a confidence that they could successfully meet each child's needs. Conversely, the participants stated that they were not as effective at delivering responsive teaching in their non-looped classrooms. The participants were sensitive to both the differences in teacher responsiveness and overall classroom environment when comparing their looped and non-looped classes. Overall, the teachers perceived higher levels of responsiveness and student motivation in their looped classrooms. The participants sense of comparison is supported in stage-environment fit theory, which asserts that student motivation is improved in classrooms when educators adjust practices to fit student needs (Kiefer et al., 2014).

The teachers believed that students in their looped classrooms were more active in their learning because they trusted that the teacher would meet their needs. The teachers utilized their knowledge of students to adjust lesson activities and instructional practices accordingly, which would result in increased motivation and engagement for those students. Research is clear that students are more engaged in classrooms that are student-centered rather than teacher-centric (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993).

Research Question #4: What are teacher perceptions about the role of looping in helping to establish clear organizational and behavioral expectations for students in the classroom environment?

The researcher identified themes of clear expectations, accountability, and consistency in the participants' responses on the impact of looping on classroom organization and expectations. Students that perceive teacher responsiveness and support are more motivated to meet teacher expectations (Fulmer & Turner, 2014). Again, the participants in the study believed that the looping structure allowed the time for developing better relationships with students, which resulted in an improved classroom environment. Each participant expressed a belief that the consistency of the classroom environment resulted in improved student behavior and motivation. The teachers believed that the looped classroom prevented the traditional learning curve associated with establishing classroom expectations, procedures, and routines. The students were already familiar with the expectations of the classroom environment and generally responded appropriately. The participants expressed feelings of improved accountability for students because of the consistency of the environment and the trusting, respectful nature of the classroom culture. The teachers frequently commented on the reciprocal relationship between their responsiveness to students and student behaviors.

Skinner and Belmont (1993) found that teachers can increase student engagement if teacher behaviors demonstrate relational involvement, autonomy support, and realistic expectations. Students respond to teacher expectations when they are realistically aligned to student needs (Kiefer et al., 2014). The teachers in the study asserted that the relationship that they had built with the students in their looped classroom created a sense of communal responsibility by both parties. The students trusted that the teacher would respond appropriately to their needs. In turn, the students were compliant and accepting of classroom expectations and routines. Similarly, the participants perceived that the students felt more accountable to the maintenance of a positive classroom environment because of the relational closeness and familiarity. The teachers believed that the students in their looped classrooms behaved accordingly to support the continuation of a comfortable classroom environment. These assertions may be affirmed in the research on goal theory. The participants attributed student behavioral and academic outcomes to the pre-established group expectations and close relationships characteristic of the looped classroom. Goal theory asserts that students will seek to achieve academic and social goals to gain approval or to comply with accepted group behavior (Dowson & McInerney, 2001, 2003; Elliot, 1999; Middleton & Midgley, 1997). Likewise, student goals are heavily influenced by the quality of the relationships within the classroom (Creasey et al., 1997; Martin et al., 2007).

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this narrative study provide stories about the development of effective classroom environments at the high school level. The collected stories offer truthful experiences that can be used to continue discussions of how develop educational environments that

successfully engage students and reduce dropouts. Each of the participants in the study expressed insights and reflections that underscore the immense value of positive teacher-student relationships in creating effective classroom environments. The participants held perceptions that strongly correlated their own relational closeness with students to the overall effectiveness of the classroom environment. The teachers believed that their relational involvement with students was pivotal to their own ability to offer responsive teaching and to effectively establish expectations for behavior and academic performance. Additionally, the participants overwhelmingly expressed a positive view of the role of looping in the development of their respective classroom environments. Each participant held that the extended time that was spent with their student groups resulted in positive academic, socioemotional, and behavioral outcomes for students. In light of the research findings from interviews, observations, and qualitative documents, the researcher would make the following recommendations for improving high school learning environments:

- Looping programs should be more widely explored as a means of improving teacher-student relationships and teacher responsiveness at the secondary level.
- Looping in core subjects such as English and mathematics should be considered beyond the popular freshman academy model.
- Schools that employ a semester-based calendar may consider moving to a full-year course schedule to allow more time for teachers to develop an understanding of students prior to required assessments.
- Student choice should play a more integral part of course scheduling in order to provide more opportunities for student-teacher relatedness.

- Teacher professional learning communities should attend to student emotional and behavioral needs in addition to academic needs.
- Pre-service teacher training should pay greater attention to how teachers can foster developmentally appropriate social contexts that maximize student engagement and mitigate risk factors.

The findings of this study and existent research on engagement, motivation, and effective classroom environments emphasize the importance of the teacher-student relationship with regard to improving student outcomes. Consequently, the recommendations for practice resultant from this study focus primarily on means of supporting teacher-student relatedness. Structural or organizational changes that are more conducive to benefiting teacher-student relationships should receive more consideration in school improvement planning and reform. Changes to course scheduling that provide more time for teachers to assess and adapt to the needs of students could be made at the local or school level with minimal restrictions or necessitating additional resources. School and district leaders should also recognize that the teacher-student relationship is a foundational component for creating classroom environments that both increase student motivation, raise student expectations, and keep students engaged in school.

Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher's analysis of findings identified common experiences and perceptions of the impact of a looping structure on the development classroom environments. The research findings of this study closely aligned with previous research on the correlations between teacher-student relational involvement and other aspects of the classroom environment. This study primarily considered how a looping structure might help to increase teacher-student relational involvement, and consequently influence responsive teaching and the establishment of classroom

organization and expectations. The researcher would recommend that future studies consider the following:

- This study was limited to teacher perceptions of the classroom environment. Future studies need to include student perceptions of looped classroom environments. Such research would be significant in fully assessing the value of looping at the high school level because previous research demonstrates that teachers and students do not always share perceptions of relational involvement (Pianta et al., 2003, Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002). Also, relational attachments do not have to be reciprocal (Bowlby, 1969). This study does not provide a voice for the student perspective. Thus, it succeeds in only telling half of the narrative of the four looped classrooms. Future research that includes student perspectives on their educational experiences in looped classrooms should be conducted to provide a well-rounded view of the classroom environment and its related outcomes.
- The researcher would also recommend more studies on the impact of looping at the high school level on student academic and behavioral outcomes. Research studies could be conducted to examine academic performance and behavioral data for students in looped classrooms. Comparative studies could be performed to examine any significant differences between the behavior and performance of students in looped classrooms versus students in traditional semester courses. Looping is not frequently used at the high school level and such research is not readily available.

Summary

The primary goal of this qualitative inquiry was to collect and analyze the narratives of four teachers working in a high school looping program. The researcher utilized data from

qualitative documents, field observations, and in-depth interviews to help create a truthful representation of the teachers' experiences of creating the classroom environment in a looped classroom. The interviews coupled with observational notes enabled the researcher to identify persistent themes highlighting the shared perceptions, reflections, and experiences of the participants. The emergent themes that resulted from the analysis of the data were consistent with prior research that was presented in Chapter 2. The literature review contained in Chapter 2 highlighted theoretical frameworks for examining the correlations between student behavior, engagement, and elements of the classroom environment. Most notably, the findings in this study aligned with research on the influence of teacher-student relationships on the development of effective classroom environments. The research consistently links student outcomes to student-teacher relatedness, teacher responsiveness, and teacher expectations. The bulk of the literature review suggests that the quality of the teacher-student relationship is the capstone for supporting and facilitating other elements of the classroom environment. The findings of this study further support such assertions. Additionally, Chapter 2 provided research underscoring the necessity of the continual improvement of the effectiveness of high school classroom environments as a means for producing positive outcomes for students and reducing student dropout. Chapter 3 highlights the research methodology and details the research design while chapter 4 presented the analysis of the data and provided evidence for the researcher's construction of themes. Participant responses and perceptions were detailed and shared in chapter 4 to clarify the relationship between identified themes and the study's central research questions. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a summary of research findings and final conclusions drawn from the study. Chapter 5 also contains the researcher's final recommendations for future research and practical application. The results of this study are isolated to the experiences of the four

participants. Yet, the collective experiences of the participants emphasize the importance of exploring any method for supporting teachers in developing better relationships with students.

Each participant in the study shared stories and perceptions that only underscore the significance of the teacher-student relationship, and they unanimously linked any element of their classroom environment back to the student-teacher relationship. The fact that the participants volunteered to participate in looping classrooms could be associated with a predisposition to valuing relatedness. However, the results of the study suggest that a looping framework could be a viable strategy for allowing deeper connections between teachers and students. Ultimately, the narratives gathered in the study provide further evidence for the importance of closely examining techniques and practices for maximizing teacher-student relatedness. Student engagement and motivation are significantly correlated to responsive teaching and appropriately aligned teacher expectations, which are byproducts classroom environments characterized by meaningful interpersonal relationships (Higgins, 2014).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

EAST TENNESSEE STATE
UNIVERSITY

Office for the Protection of Human Research Subjects • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-1707
Phone: (423) 439-6053 Fax: (423) 439-6060

IRB APPROVAL – Initial Expedited Review

October 27, 2016

Caleb Tipton

Re: Developing Effective Classroom Environments in a High School Looping Program: A Narrative Research Study
IRB#: c1016.16
ORSPA #:

The following items were reviewed and approved by an expedited process:

- new protocol submission xform, CV of PI, Informed Consent (version 10/6/16), initial contact email, interview questions, TEAM General Education Rubric

On October 27, 2016, a final approval was granted for a period not to exceed 12 months and will expire on October 26, 2017. The expedited approval of the study will be reported to the convened board on the next agenda.

The following **enclosed stamped, approved Informed Consent Documents** have been stamped with the approval and expiration date and these documents must be copied and provided to each participant prior to participant enrollment:

- Informed Consent Document ()

Federal regulations require that a copy is given to the subject at the time of consent.

Projects involving Mountain States Health Alliance must also be approved by MSHA following IRB approval prior to initiating the study.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others must be reported to the IRB (and VA R&D if applicable) within 10 working days.

Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs, Inc.
Full AAHRPP Accreditation

Accredited Since December 2005

Proposed changes in approved research cannot be initiated without IRB review and approval. The only exception to this rule is that a change can be made prior to IRB approval when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the research subjects [21 CFR 56.108 (a)(4)]. In such a case, the IRB must be promptly informed of the change following its implementation (within 10 working days) on Form 109 (www.etsu.edu/irb). The IRB will review the change to determine that it is consistent with ensuring the subject's continued welfare.

Sincerely,
Stacey Williams, Chair
ETSU Campus IRB

cc: William Flora

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Document

Title of Research Study: Developing Effective Classroom Environments in a High School Looping Program:
A Narrative Research Study

Principal Investigator: Caleb C. Tipton

Principal Investigator's Contact Information: Phone: 865.304.7583 Email: tiptoncc@etsu.edu
Organization of Principal Investigator: East Tennessee State University

INFORMED CONSENT

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to voluntarily participate.

A. Purpose: The purpose of this narrative study is to explore how teachers develop effective classroom environments in a high school looping program at Clinton High School in the Anderson County school district. The study will collect teachers' reflections and experiences of developing effective classroom environments as they teach in a looped classroom. Your participation will include responding to face to face interview questions, classroom observations, and the collection of PLC meeting notes that address classroom management, student procedures, and instructional strategies.

A. Duration: The duration of this study will be comprised of an expected 1 to 3 contact hours over the course of four to six weeks. Each participant will be asked to meet with the interviewer once for a face to face interview. Each participant will also be asked to consent to one classroom observation. The collection of PLC notes will be conducted electronically and will not require any additional contact time.

B. Procedures: The procedures, which as a participant in this research will involve you, include participation in semi-structured face to face interviews and classroom observations with Dr. Jennifer Beavers. Interviews will be conducted in a private one-to-one setting and will be recorded to assist with the accuracy of data collection. Classroom observations will not be recorded. Other procedures which could involve the research participants would include the voluntary submission of PLC notes that address the development of classroom environments in a looped classroom. Prior to the conclusion of the study, participants will be provided with a manuscript of their interviews and will have to opportunity to perform a member check to review the researcher's descriptions of interviews. Participants will have the right to remove or amend any transcriptions that they believe is erroneous or jeopardizes privacy or confidentiality. There are no anticipated circumstances which would result in a participant's participation being terminated by the investigator without regard to the participant's consent.

C. Possible Risks/Discomforts: There are no known possible risks and/or discomforts that would occur as a result of your participation in this research study other than the minimal risk of loss of confidentiality due to the recording of participant interviews. The information gathered from classroom observations and interviews will be coded and the presentation of data will not include any identifiable information in order to protect the identity of the teachers participating in the study. Similarly, participation in the study will be voluntary and there will be no penalty for declining to participate in the study. Participants that opt not to participate in the study will incur no penalty or loss of benefits

Approved by ETSU Campus IRB ~ Approval Date: October 27, 2016 ~ Expiration Date: October 26, 2017

to which they would otherwise be entitled. Furthermore, voluntary participants may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are entitled.

D. Possible Benefits: There are no known possible benefits to you that would result from your participation in this research study. While this research does seek to contribute to the body of educational research and knowledge, you will receive no direct benefit for participation in this study.

E. Financial Costs: There are no financial costs to you as a participant in this research study.

F. Compensation in the Form of Payments to Participant: There is no compensation for your participation in this research study.

G. Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this research experiment is voluntary. *You may choose not to participate.* If you decide to participate in this research study, you can change your mind and quit at any time. If you choose not to participate, or change your mind and quit, you will not be penalized in any way. You may quit by calling Mr. C. Tipton, at phone number 865.304.7583.

H. Contact for Questions: If you have any questions, problems, or research-related problems at any time, you may call Mr. Caleb C. Tipton at 865.304.7583 or alternatively at 865.457.2611 ext. 404. You may also call the Chairperson of the ETSU Institutional Review Board at 423.439.6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423.439.6055 or 423.439.6002.

I. **Confidentiality: Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential.** The information gathered from classroom observations and interviews will be coded and the presentation of data will not include any identifiable information in order to protect the identity of the teachers participating in the study. **Prior to the conclusion of the study, you will be asked to perform a member check in order to review the researcher's textual description of your interview participation. As a participant you will have the right to request that any transcribed information be amended or removed based upon your review of the researcher's transcription. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in East Tennessee State University's Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis department for at least 6 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, theETSU IRB and study staff, which includes Mr. Caleb C. Tipton, Dr. William Flora, and Dr.**

Approved by ETSU Campus IRB / Approval Date: October 27, 2016 / Expiration Date: October 26, 2017

Title of Research Study: Developing Effective Classroom Environments in a High School Looping Program:
A Narrative Research Study

Principal Investigator: Caleb C. Tipton

Jennifer Beavers, will have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as described in this form.

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understand this Informed Consent Document and that I had the opportunity to have them explained to me verbally. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that all my questions have been answered. I acknowledge that my agreement to this consent grants the researcher the permission to conduct audio recordings of my interview responses. By signing below, I confirm that I freely and voluntarily choose to take part in this research study.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol and Alignment

Interview Questions and Alignment

Research Questions:

5. How do teachers describe their experiences of developing the classroom environment in a looping structure?

6. What are teacher perceptions of their own relational involvement with students in a looped high school classroom?

7. How do teachers in a looped classroom provide responsive emotional, social, and academic supports for students?

8. What are teacher perceptions about the role of looping in helping to establish clear organizational and behavioral expectations for students in the classroom environment?

Face to Face Interview Protocol:

1. Describe your experience of teaching in a looped classroom. (RQ1)

    a. How would you describe the classroom environment in your looped classroom? (probe)

    b. What has been different about developing the classroom environment in a looped classroom compared to your other courses? (probe)

2. Describe your relationship with the students in your looped classroom. (RQ 2)

    a. What practices or strategies do you use foster relationships with students? (probe)

    b. Do you feel that there is a difference in the relationships that you have with students in a looped classroom as opposed to students you teach in a traditional ½ year course? (probe)

3. How do you provide responsive teaching for meeting student academic and socio-emotional needs in you classroom? (RQ 3)

    a. Has the looping structure influenced your ability to offer responsive teaching? (probe)

    b. Has the looping structure influenced student academic, social, or behavioral outcomes in any way? (probe)

4. Do you feel that the looping structure had any impact on the organizational or behavioral structure of the class? (RQ 4)

    a. Describe how you organize your classroom and communicate behavioral and academic expectations for students. (probe)

APPENDIX D

Classroom Observation Rubrics

TEAM Educator Observation Form

Observer: Dr. J. Beavers Announced [ ] Unannounced [X]

Teacher Observed: Jack Formal (lesson length) [X] Informal (15 mins.) [ ]

School Name: [redacted] Observation Number: 2- Instruction & Environment

License Number: [redacted] Date: 11/10/2015 Time: 11:15-1:10

Planning	Observer Score	Self Score
Instructional Plans (IP)		
Student Work (SW)		
Assessment (AS)		
Environment	**Observer Score**	**Self Score**
Expectations (EX)	4	4
Managing Student Behavior (MSB)	5	4
Environment (ENV)	4	4
Respectful Culture (RC)	4	5
Instruction	**Observer Score**	**Self Score**
Standards and Objectives (SO)	4	4
Motivating Students (MS)	3	3
Presenting Instructional Content (PIC)	4	4
Lesson Structure and Pacing (LS)	3	3
Activities and Materials (ACT)	4	4
Questioning (QU)	3	3
Academic Feedback (FEED)	4	3
Grouping Students (GRP)	3	3
Teacher Content Knowledge (TCK)	4	4
Knowledge of Students(TKS)	4	4
Thinking (TH)	3	4
Problem Solving (PS)	3	5

Reinforcement Objective:

Indicator: Presenting Instructional Content

Notes: The teacher and student interactions were friendly and relaxed. Mr. [redacted] was well-prepared with handouts of current events and articles that fostered good discussion and ideas for writing. It was evident that the articles had been thoughtfully selected to try and maximize student interest in writing. Prior to releasing the students to perform the writing task, the teacher practiced close reading strategies and modeled writing that is supported by strong textual evidence. This lesson was in preparation for the TN Ready Writing Assessment and definitely a lesson that could have been much less inviting to students. Mr. [redacted] does a good job making the writing relevant and meaningful. He was very intentional in not allowing the lesson to feel like test prep.

Refinement Objective:

Indicator: Lesson Structure and Pacing

Notes: Mr. [redacted] feedback was frequent and oral. The class discussion and thinking was very good. However, more time could have been allowed for the students to actually write which was the objective of the lesson. Too much time was spent on discussion and oral feedback. Even though modeling is an excellent teaching tool, it is good to make sure there is enough time for student to practice the objective for assessment. More time should have been given for the students to write.

TEAM Educator Observation Form

Observer: Dr. J. Beavers Announced [ ] Unannounced [x]

Teacher Observed: Aubrey Formal (lesson length) [x] Informal (15 mins.) [ ]

School Name: [redacted] Observation Number: Instruction & Environment

License Number: [redacted] Date: 11/8/2016 Time: 1st (8:35-10:00)

Planning	Observer Score	Self Score
Instructional Plans (IP)		
Student Work (SW)		
Assessment (AS)		
Environment	**Observer Score**	**Self Score**
Expectations (EX)	4	3
Managing Student Behavior (MSB)	4	4
Environment (ENV)	5	5
Respectful Culture (RC)	5	5
Instruction	**Observer Score**	**Self Score**
Standards and Objectives (SO)	4	4
Motivating Students (MS)	4	4
Presenting Instructional Content (PIC)	4	3
Lesson Structure and Pacing (LS)	3	3
Activities and Materials (ACT)	5	5
Questioning (QU)	3	3
Academic Feedback (FEED)	4	4
Grouping Students (GRP)	3	3
Teacher Content Knowledge (TCK)	5	4
Teacher Knowledge of Students(TKS)	4	4
Thinking (TH)	3	3
Problem Solving (PS)	3	3

Reinforcement Objective:

Indicator: Respectful Culture

Notes: The teacher planned a lesson that required students to interpret, analyze, and organize information. The teacher used popular music (i.e. Taylor Swift's song "Red") to engage students in a lesson focused on the identification and understanding of figurative language in texts. It is evident from teacher-student interactions that the classroom is comfortable and conducive to student learning. The teacher establishes high and demanding learning and behavioral expectations for students. The classroom is well-structured and organized to maximize student success. Yet, the lesson activities and student-teacher interactions suggest a high level of concern for student interest and student motivation. The teacher consistently uses a variety of learning strategies and activities to try and meet students where they are. Consequently, the atmosphere in the classroom is welcoming and accepting of all students. The class almost manages itself and students exhibit very little off-task behaviors.

Refinement Objective:

Indicator: Questioning

Notes: The teacher effectively used questioning during the lesson to check for student understanding and to help students connect learning to prior knowledge, other texts, real-life, etc. The teacher asked a moderate frequency of questions primarily at the knowledge, comprehension, and analysis level (e.g. "Do you guys think this stuff really goes on in prison?" "Why do authors or poets use alliteration?"). The teacher also sequenced her questioning to support instructional goals. If future lessons, the teacher call on a balance of volunteers and nonvolunteers when posing questions to ensure student engagement and provide informal checks for mastery. Additionally, the teacher could use 3-level study guides in future lessons to help guide student reading of texts from comprehension type thinking to higher levels of analysis, evaluation, etc.

TEAM Educator Observation Form

Observer: Dr. J. Beavers Announced [ ] Unannounced [x]

Teacher Observed: Sophia Formal (lesson length) [x] Informal (15 mins.) [ ]

School Name: [redacted] Observation Number: Instruction & Environment

License Number: [redacted] Date: 12/5/2016 Time: E.B. (7:05-8:10)

Planning	Observer Score	Self Score
Instructional Plans (IP)		
Student Work (SW)		
Assessment (AS)		
Environment	**Observer Score**	**Self Score**
Expectations (EX)	3	3
Managing Student Behavior (MSB)	4	4
Environment (ENV)	4	5
Respectful Culture (RC)	5	4
Instruction	**Observer Score**	**Self Sco4re**
Standards and Objectives (SO)	3	3
Motivating Students (MS)	4	4
Presenting Instructional Content (PIC)	4	3
Lesson Structure and Pacing (LS)	3	3
Activities and Materials (ACT)	4	3
Questioning (QU)	3	3
Academic Feedback (FEED)	4	4
Grouping Students (GRP)	4	4
Teacher Content Knowledge (TCK)	5	4
Teacher Knowledge of Students(TKS)	5	5
Thinking (TH)	4	4
Problem Solving (PS)	4	4

Reinforcement Objective:

Indicator: Presenting Instructional Content

Notes: The teacher planned a lesson that required students to interpret and analyze information from poetry. The teacher provided students with a graphic organizer to scaffold student learning during the lesson as they focused on the analysis and comparison of Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd." Students were asked to examine each poem stanza by stanza, highlighting key vocabulary and summarizing themes. The student's used the evidence gathered in the graphic organizer to discuss universal themes present in the poems' language, imagery, etc. The teacher helped guide and frame later discussion with an opener that asked students to share their thoughts on love/relationships. Ms. [redacted] knows her students. Her questioning throughout the lesson, and the times in which she offers more direct support, provides a clear indication that she knows her students' learning difficulties, and that she knows with what part of the lesson they will need more help. In this lesson, she incorporated social media into the writing component. It wasn't necessary but it was obvious that she did it to incorporate her students' interests.

Refinement Objective:

Indicator: Standards & Objectives

Notes: The teacher planned a lesson in which the goals and activities were aligned to the state standards. (Standards 3005.8.1 Understand Poetry and 3005.8.14 Analyze works of literature as reflections of the culture in which they were written) The teacher effectively used a lesson opener, content strategies, and questioning to support student learning, check for mastery, and connect the activities to the learning goals. In future lessons, the teacher will consider communicating learning expectations from state standards in "student-friendly" learning targets. For example, the standards in this lesson could be restated as "I can analyze and interpret "The Passionate Shepherd" and "The Nymph's Reply" in order to recognize universal themes in the poems." This would help students better understand the connection between the state standards, lesson activities, and performance expectations.

TEAM Educator Observation Form

Observer: Dr. J. Beavers Announced [ ] Unannounced [x]

Teacher Observed: Katharine Formal (lesson length) [x] Informal (15 mins.) [ ]

School Name: Observation Number:

License Number: [redacted] Date: 12/11/2016 Time: 1st (8:35-10:00)

Planning	Observer Score	Self Score
Instructional Plans (IP)		
Student Work (SW)		
Assessment (AS)		
Environment	**Observer Score**	**Self Score**
Expectations (EX)	4	4
Managing Student Behavior (MSB)	4	4
Environment (ENV)	4	4
Respectful Culture (RC)	5	5
Instruction	**Observer Score**	**Self Score**
Standards and Objectives (SO)	4	4
Motivating Students (MS)	4	4
Presenting Instructional Content (PIC)	4	4
Lesson Structure and Pacing (LS)	3	3
Activities and Materials (ACT)	3	3
Questioning (QU)	4	4
Academic Feedback (FEED)	3	3
Grouping Students (GRP)	3	4
Teacher Content Knowledge (TCK)	4	5
Teacher Knowledge of Students(TKS)	4	4
Thinking (TH)	3	3
Problem Solving (PS)	4	4

Reinforcement Objective:

Indicator: Questioning

Notes: The teacher focused the lesson on two explicit learning targets: "I can select the correct pronoun in a sentence" and "I can select correct pronoun antecedent agreement when using collective nouns or indefinite pronouns." In order to help the students achieve the objective the teacher incorporated multiple types of questioning to help the students acquire new learning. While working in their groups to examine direct/indirect characterization in The Contender, the students were required to analyze and interpret the text for meaning. They also synthesized information about their assigned characters by using characterization found in the text to compare/contrast characters and to create visual representations. The teacher also helped the students connect their daily learning to previous knowledge and life outside of school by asking that they draw connect their assigned character to another person from film, literature, or their personal life.

Refinement Objective:

Indicator: Grouping

Notes: The measurement criteria for student performance were clear and explicit in the lesson (e.g. "I can find and distinguish between direct and indirect characterization in The Contender"). Student performance was also measured in multiple ways via the poster board project, presentation, and short answer responses. In future lessons, the teacher will work to implement individual accountability measures when using group assignments as a measure of student performance. This will help ensure full student participation and provide a clearer evaluation of student mastery of learning targets

APPENDIX E

Sample 9th Grade Academy PLC Document

3rd Block Plan				
8/23/2015	C.S.	Very aggressive. Lots of drama and talk of fighting, specifically encouraging her boyfriend to fight. Was at CRCS previously. Very intelligent, just needs to work on social interactions.	J.E.	Jack
8/24/2015	B.R.	Very lengthy 504. Struggling. Possible need for parent conference to discuss 504.	J.B.	Sophia
8/25/2015	K.G.	She wrote that she would really like it if someone checked in on her every now and again in class to make sure she is understanding what's going on.	J.E.	Katharine
8/26/2015	I.L.	Super quiet. Not participatory in math class, even with hand gestures like thumbs up, down, sideways. Seems to struggle with approaching her teachers regarding problems.	L.A.	Katharine
8/27/2015	S.G.	Says mom is in jail and is waiting on a diagnosis regarding breast cancer. Her behavior plan indicated past trouble with fighting, but she seems to be doing well now. She responds well to individual attention and is very capable academically if she can successfully navigate social issues	J.B.	Jack
4th Block Plan				
8/23/2015	N.P.	Very low grade in math. Hurt his hand. Surgery tomorrow.	E.H.	Aubrey
8/24/2015	D.S	D. did much better when A. P. and A. G. are not there.	J.E.	Aubrey
8/25/2015	J.F.	Very low grade in English. Hasn't responded to Stroud talking to him. Recently suspended.	C.B	Aubrey
8/26/2015	K.S.	Failing math and doesn't seem very concerned.	A.C	R.C.
8/27/2015	A.C	Oldest brother passed away six years ago yesterday.	E.H.	D.G.
3rd Block Plan				
8/30/2015	C.C.	Behavior is fine in English, behind from being absent. Lacks a sense of urgency. Isn't super motivated.	J.B.	Sophia
8/31/2015	C.G.	Very afraid of standing up in front of class. She either has really good days or really bad days.	L.A.	Jack
9/1/2015	C.H.	Not a behavior problem, just isn't doing his work. F.L. sent work to Mr. G's office and some of it did come back done.	E.H.	Jack

VITA

CALEB CHRISTOPHER TIPTON

VITA

Education:	East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN Ed.D. Educational Leadership, May 2017
	Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, TN Ed.S. Educational Administration and Supervision, July 2012
	University Of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR District Literacy Coach Degree, May 2011
	Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, TN M.E. Curriculum and Instruction, December, 2009
	University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN B.A. English Literature, May 2004
Professional Experience:	Principal: July 2016 to Present, Clinton High School, Anderson County Schools, TN
	Assistant Principal and Evaluation Coach: 2011 – 2016, Clinton High School, Anderson County Schools, TN
	District English Language Arts Coordinator: 2010 – 2011, Anderson County Schools, TN
	Academic and Curriculum Coach: 2009 – 2010, Clinton Middle School, Anderson County Schools, TN
	7-8 Literature Teacher: 2005 – 2009, Clinton Middle School, Anderson County Schools, TN
Honors and Awards:	Anderson County Schools Middle Grade Teacher of the Year, 2009 Clinton Middle School Teacher of the Year, 2009
Professional Licensure:	Professional Administrator School Leadership, TN 7-12 English, TN
Professional Organizations:	Anderson County Education Association Tennessee Education Association Leadership Anderson County