To my amazing family
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This dissertation is the product of a lot of love, support and encouragement from my doctoral committee members, my family, and my friends.

_The job of an educator is to teach students to see the vitality in themselves._ - Joseph Campbell

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_Family...a group experience of love and support._ – Marianne Williamson

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A friend is someone who understands your past, believes in your future, and accepts you just the way you are. –Unknown

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To reduce the underachievement and psychological distress of low-income, African American students, teachers have implemented culturally responsive educational practices. Although researchers have reported positive outcomes resulting from these practices the methods by which these teachers develop and use their relationships to facilitate students’ learning has not been studied. The purpose of this study was to develop a theory describing the relational processes that characterize how master teachers develop and use their relationships with their low-income, African American students. By gaining a greater understanding of these relational processes, school counselors can more effectively consult with teachers about implementing such practices in their classrooms.

To address this need the interactions of two master teachers with their low-income, African American students were examined in this study. Using grounded theory methodology, seven videotapes, ranging in length from 40 to 60 minutes, were analyzed. From this analysis a theory emerged describing three dimensions of teacher-student: emotional connectedness, facilitation of conditions for relationship development, and students’ affective responses. Emotional connectedness included teacher-student connections, teacher-whole class connections, and
teacher transparency. Facilitative conditions reflected the teachers’ efforts to create a sense of safety that was conducive to relationship development. Emotional connectedness and the facilitative conditions appeared to be related to students’ positive affective responses of joy, interest, contentment, self-love, and seeking teacher connection.

The theory that emerged from this study provides a more comprehensive model of relationship development between culturally responsive teachers and their students. Specifically, it emphasizes the significance of teacher interactions with their class as a whole and teacher transparency in relationship development. Additionally, the findings suggest implications for school counselor and teacher practice and preparation and future research. First, there is a need for stronger partnerships between counselor preparation and teacher preparation programs. Second, school counselors need to create professional development initiatives that facilitate teachers’ implementation of culturally responsive practices. Third, there is a need for continued research exploring how other culturally responsive teachers develop and use their relationships with students and the psychological outcomes of such culturally responsive practices.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

All good teachers want their students to feel that school is a place where they feel safe, valued, and successful as learners. Unfortunately, far too many low-income students from culturally diverse backgrounds experience neither academic success nor psychological safety in school (Diaz-Greenberg, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Planty et al., 2008). In fact, the findings of several research studies reveal that not only do these students underperform compared to their more privileged White peers, but appear to be negatively impacted by the very experience of schooling (Choi, Meininger, & Roberts, 2006; Romero, Carvajal, Valle, & Orduna, 2007; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). For example, researchers report that culturally diverse students often experience more psychological distress in school than their White peers (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000), report more depressive symptoms (Brody et al., 2006; Romero et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2003), and lower levels of self-esteem (Choi et al., 2006).

Literature on the disparities in achievement has frequently focused either on culturally diverse students or on low-income students. Native American, Asian American, Latino American and African American students as well as some students who ascribe to more than one culture or ethnic group are often classified as culturally diverse (Paniagua, 2005). The K-12 students most affected by the discrepancies in achievement are Native Americans, some Asian American subgroups (specifically, Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders), Latinos, and African Americans. Most of the research emphasizes African Americans and Latino Americans as both groups are strongly represented in the United States, while research on Native American, Vietnamese, and Pacific Islander students is not as extensive (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Students are classified as low-income according to their family’s ability to qualify for the free or reduced meals through the national school lunch program and the school breakfast program (Planty et al.,
Yet, according to Frankenberg, Lee and Orfield, (2003), nearly half of the students in schools attended by the average African American or Latino American student are impoverished. Thus, for the majority of culturally diverse students, the intersection of poverty and racial/cultural dynamics can influence the quality of their schooling experiences.

More recently a growing number of educators have begun to modify their educational practices by implementing culturally responsive instructional methods and developing student-teacher relationships that recognize and affirm the cultural identities of their low-income, culturally diverse students. Undergirding these more culturally responsive educational practices is a dramatic change in thinking about low-income, culturally diverse students. Rather than viewing these students and their families as deficient, educators are viewing these students’ socio-cultural backgrounds as important resources to be utilized in the teaching and learning process (Cummins, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2004a, 2004b).

Regrettably, many teachers are resistant either to using these practices and/or are unsure how to implement them (Bergeron, 2008; Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Jenks, Lee, & Kanpol, 2001; King, 2004; Ladson Billings, 1994; Marbly, Bonner, McKisick, Henfield, & Watts, 2007; Nieto, 2004a). Many school counselors, who are often called upon to consult with teachers when they experience difficulty in managing low-income, culturally diverse students, may also be unaware of these new educational practices (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). To address this lack of awareness, teachers and counselors need to understand how culturally responsive teaching practices are enacted in the classroom and how they impact low-income, culturally diverse students.

The methods by which two culturally responsive teachers developed and used their relationships with their low-income, African American students to facilitate learning were
examined. This analysis was used to develop a theory describing how teachers might interact with their culturally diverse students.

**Scope of the Problem**

Approximately 43% of the students enrolled in U.S. public schools are racially and culturally diverse. In comparison with their White peers, some of these students underachieve in mathematics, reading, and writing (Planty et al., 2008). Specifically, in 2007 disparities in 4th grade reading scores between African American students and their White peers averaged 27 points, while disparities in mathematics scores between 4th grade White students and African American students averaged 26 points (Planty et al., 2008). On the 8th grade writing test, White students averaged 23 points higher than African American students (Planty et al., 2008). Alarmingly, in 2006, one in ten African American students dropped out of school, while the dropout rate for White students was approximately one in twenty (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). African American students are also more likely than White students to be enrolled in high poverty schools as one third of African American students attend high poverty schools, whereas only 4% of White students attend such schools (Planty et al., 2008). High poverty schools typically have fewer resources than low poverty schools and are more likely to employ teachers with less experience and less preparation (Peske & Haycock, 2006).

In addition to the differences in achievement, low-income, African American students are disproportionately referred for special education programs (Blair & Scott, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008). Once identified, African American students are at higher risk for being segregated from their non-disabled peers in the classroom, often receiving substandard instruction in separate settings (The Civil Rights Project, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Moreover, inequities exist regarding the overrepresentation of low-income, African American students in disciplinary referral rates, suspensions, and instances of corporal punishment (Cartledge,
African American students are also expelled from school more frequently than their White peers and are often referred to the office for less serious issues and for more subjectively interpreted behaviors (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Skiba et al., 2002).

Deficit Theory

The persistence of the discrepancies in achievement has long concerned educators, school counselors, and policy makers. However, many have viewed the problem through the lens of deficit theory and thus most of the previous attempts to address these differences in achievement level have been deficit focused (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Valencia, 1997a). Deficit theory conceptualizes the achievement discrepancies between low-income, culturally diverse students and their more privileged White peers as a result of genetic deficiencies, the influence of the culture of poverty, and/or cultural deficits (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Perry, 2003; Valencia & Solorazano, 1997). Deficits are viewed as intrinsic to low-income, culturally diverse students and their families and thus interventions are aimed toward remediating these students or their families (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Valencia, 1997a).

Compensatory education programs, such as Head Start, Title I, and summer school programs, are the typical educational approaches based on this perspective. Unfortunately, these approaches have met with limited success (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000; Currie & Thomas, 1995; Vinovskis, 1999). For example, Borman and D’Agostino (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of the Title I program and found considerable variation in effect sizes of studies evaluating Title I programs. Although low-income students participating in Title I programs in early elementary grades were found to outperform their low-income peers who did not participate in a Title I program in middle and high school, their academic gains did not allow them to achieve at the level of their more advantaged peers. Research examining the efficacy of
summer school programs found that these programs more positively benefitted White, middle class students than low-income, culturally diverse students (Cooper et al., 2000).

Traditionally, school counselors have also unknowingly conceptualized the academic and behavioral struggles of low-income, culturally diverse students from a deficit orientation. Consequently, many school counselors often take these students out of their classes and work with them on an individual basis in an effort to “fix” or remediate the “difficult” students. Most of the research assessing the impact of school counselors’ provision of ancillary services with low-income, culturally diverse students has not resulted in consistent academic improvements among its participants (Bemak, Chi-Ying, & Siroskey-Sabado, 2005; Cook & Kaffenberger, 2003; Legum & Hoare, 2004). For example, Bemak and colleagues (2005) implemented an empowerment small group aimed at improving the academic achievement of 10th grade African American girls. While the participants reported attending more closely to schoolwork, increased attendance, and improved attitudes as a result of the group experience, the authors did not report that results were substantiated with data from student records. Legum and Hoare’s (2004) conducted a study evaluating a career based intervention for underachieving, culturally diverse students and found that the grades of students participating in the intervention did not improve significantly as compared to those students in a control group.

In addition to the inability to significantly impact student achievement levels, educators’ deficit thinking practices may negatively impact the psychological well-being of low-income, culturally diverse students. Smokowski and Bacallao (2007) for example, found that Latino American adolescents’ perceptions of discrimination were positively related to their internalization of problems and lower self-esteem. In a study conducted with African American, Latino American, Asian American and European American students, Fisher and colleagues
(2000) found that racial discrimination was a pervasive stressor in the lives of minority students
in the U.S. Furthermore, these students reported significantly more discriminatory stress in
institutional and educational contexts than did White adolescents. Additionally, lower levels of
self-esteem were associated with higher levels of discriminatory distress in educational contexts
by culturally diverse students who reported feeling discouraged from joining advanced level
classes and/or being wrongly disciplined (Fisher et al., 2000). With regard to African American
students in particular, Wong and his colleagues (2003) found that African American adolescents’
perceived discrimination was negatively related to their self-competency beliefs, psychological
resiliency and self esteem and positively associated with depressive symptoms and problem
behaviors.

**Ecological Theory**

Such deficit-based conceptualizations give little credence to the sociocultural and
sociopolitical factors that may impact the problem of low-income, culturally diverse students’
underachievement. Therefore, in viewing the problem through the lens of ecological theory one
looks beyond the individual student and family and describes how other aspects of a students’
life, including the school and the community and other institutional forces, may play a part in the
problem of underachievement (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007a; Bronfenbrenner, 1979;
Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). More specifically, ecological theory takes into account the
school, classroom, teacher, and pedagogical related contexts as well as the student’s home
context that may be contributing to the academic under-performance of low-income, culturally
diverse students (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Johnson, 1994).

Some educators have asserted that there is a Eurocentric bias in traditional education
practices and, as a result, low-income, culturally diverse students experience cultural
discontinuity because the cultures of their home and school do not align (Boykin, 2001; Gay,
Researchers have documented that the stress resulting from students’ navigation of the two cultures of home and school is associated with increased depression and decreased self-esteem (Brody et al., 2006; Choi et al., 2006; Romero et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2003). Choi and his colleagues (2006) found that African American, Latino American, and Asian American middle school students reported experiencing more social stress and having lower self-esteem than the European American students. Furthermore, Latino American and African American students reported significantly elevated levels of social stress, depression, somatic symptoms, and suicidal ideation than their European American peers. Both Romero and Roberts (2003) and Romero and colleagues (2007) found that culturally diverse adolescents’ experiences of bicultural stress were associated with more depressive symptoms.

These symptoms of psychological distress resulting from bicultural stress or perceived discrimination (Brody et al., 2006; Fisher et al., 2000; Wong et al., 2003) have the potential to impact students’ academic outcomes. Suldo and Shaffer’s (2008) found that youth suffering from depression, anxiety and/or conduct disorders have significantly lower mean achievement scores than their peers without such symptoms and are at risk for inferior academic functioning in terms of state testing and grade point averages. In particular, several researchers have reported that depressed adolescents and adolescents struggling with conduct problems are at a significantly increased risk for educational underachievement (Fergusson & Woodward, 2002; Hinshaw, 1992). Social withdrawal, which is often a symptom of depression in students, has also been associated with lower graduation rates (Risi, Gerhardstein, & Kistner, 2003). In a study of African American students, Saunders, Davis, Williams and Williams (2002) found that self
esteem, academic-self efficacy and the personal importance of school completion were significantly correlated with and predictive of students’ intentions to complete the school year.

Culturally Responsive Education

Features of Culturally Responsive Education

As knowledge about the relationship between cultural discontinuity and psychological distress increased, some educators attempted to develop more culturally responsive educational practices. These practices were designed to bridge the existing cultural disconnection between the education system and the home culture of different groups of low-income, culturally diverse students. Culturally responsive education practices combine culturally based pedagogical and instructional methods (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; King, 2005; Nieto, 2004a) with culturally responsive classroom management and teacher-student interactions (Brown, 2003, 2004; Bondy, et al., 2007; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Bergeron (2008) eloquently describes culturally responsive educational practices:

A culturally responsive classroom is one in which all individuals are valued for who they are and for the unique experiences that each brings to the learning community. Cultural responsiveness is a celebration of possibilities and of individual potential. This potential includes the significance of language, and the value of multi-literacies. Cultural responsiveness is not averted by differences, but instead uses diversity as a way to foster children’s vision of their world and, more important, of themselves. p. 25

Culturally-based pedagogical and instructional methods take into account the cultural identity and background of students. More specifically, these methods acknowledge the influence of culture in students’ ways of knowing, speaking, and interacting and thus culturally responsive teachers incorporate this knowledge into their teaching methods, curriculum and content (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Nieto, 2004a). In essence, the teacher tries to construct the class in such a way that he/she does not dismiss the students’ cultural
background, but instead values and builds upon the students’ homes and community learning (Howard, 2001; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). For example, if a student’s family culture is more communal, the student may approach learning in a cooperative manner that centers on the group and thus the teacher may need to design lesson plans that incorporate more communal activities (Espinosa, 2005).

Another example of culturally responsive teaching is that of a lesson created and implemented by Sharon Maher who worked on a Zuni reservation (Maher, Epaloose, & Tharp, 2001). Sharon was conducting a writing unit focusing on the writing strategy of “compare and contrast”. She wanted to do so by tapping into the knowledge and experience of her Zuni students. To do this, she asked her students to compare and contrast their culture with what they saw of the Jewish culture depicted in the film Fiddler on the Roof (Jewison, 1971). While her instructional goals might have been similar to that of other teachers, her methods of infusing her Zuni students’ culture into the instructional process made her instruction more culturally responsive.

While the culturally responsive instructional methods are necessary, they are not sufficient. Researchers have also highlighted the importance of the teacher-student relationship in improving students’ academic achievement, pro-social behavior, and positive experience of school for decades (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Noddings, 1992; Wubbels, Brekelmans, & Hooymayers, 1991). The relationship can be particularly important between the teachers and their culturally diverse students because the relationship can help facilitate the connection between culturally diverse students’ home culture and the school’s culture (Nieto, 2004a; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). According to Brown (2003, 2004) culturally responsive classroom management and teacher-student interactions focus on creating a caring
relationship with students, holding high expectations, asserting authority, and recognizing and adapting to the communicational norms of low-income, culturally diverse students. For example, culturally congruent communication may involve the recognition that certain cultural and income groups respond better to direct communication strategies versus the indirect strategies used by many White middle class teachers (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983). Therefore, in recognition of this discrepancy, a culturally responsive teacher would adapt his or her communication style to better meet the needs of his/her students.

It is important to note that culturally responsive educational practices will differ depending on students’ cultural affiliations. Additionally, one must also recognize the differences within a culturally diverse group (Sue & Sue, 2003). Consequently, it is suggested that teachers educate themselves about their students’ cultures and spend time getting to know the families and communities of their students in order to gain cultural knowledge and understanding about the student population with which they are working (King, 2005; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Nieto, 2004a). For example, within the current study the student population is African American and thus the teachers used African-centered educational practices. These practices are characterized by three significant themes within African American cultural heritage: communalism, the epistemological belief that learning is socially constructed, and the high stimulation and energetic action of the culture, also called verve (Boykin, 1986, 2001; Foster, 1995; Hale, 2001; King, 2005; Murrell, 2002). Specific methods that may incorporate these major themes may include oral performance, call and response, use of movement and kinesthetic learning, and cooperative learning opportunities (Boykin, 1986, 2001; Hale, 2001; King, 2005; Murrell, 2002).
Benefits of Culturally Responsive Education

Researchers have reported significant academic gains by teachers who implemented effective, culturally responsive practices with low-income, culturally diverse students (Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2003, 2005; Foster, 1997; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993). For example, Pransky and Bailey (2002) reported that English as Second Language (ESL) students in a culturally responsive teacher’s classroom passed their state’s comprehensive assessment test at a 30% higher rate than the state’s average ESL student passing rate. Similarly, Foster and her colleagues (2003, 2005) reported that African American students under the instruction of a culturally responsive teacher in an afterschool program improved their standardized test scores in mathematics and showed increased positive behaviors in the classroom.

In addition to cognitive and academic improvements, several researchers have noted that the culturally responsive practices of teachers positively impacted the psychological well-being of their low-income, culturally diverse students (Cummins, 1996; Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Cummins (1996), for example, reported that when students’ cultural identities were affirmed by their teachers they became more academically motivated and more engaged in the classroom. In her qualitative study of Latino/a high school students, Diaz-Greenberg (2001) reported that, when students felt their voices were respected and their culture validated, they felt more positive about themselves, more connected to their learning experiences, and safer in the academic environment. Similarly, Ladson-Billings’ (1994) qualitative study revealed that the culturally responsive teachers she studied increased African American students’ feelings of self-worth and self concept, and affirmed students’ sense of humanity and dignity. Howard (2001) interviewed African American elementary school students
of culturally responsive teachers, and reported that the students felt more motivated, engaged, cared for, and held to high expectations.

**Role of the School Counselor in Culturally Responsive Education**

The American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) National Model (ASCA, 2003) has stated that it is the responsibility of the school counselor to be involved in the academic mission of the school. School counselors are being encouraged by ASCA to serve as leaders, advocates and consultants within their schools to promote students academic achievement and social development (ASCA, 2003). Bemak (2000) defines a school counselor as a leader who promotes educational reform and helps to create a healthy and safe school environment. Other researchers have echoed Bemak’s call, emphasizing that these school counselor roles are particularly important in schools with large populations of low-income, culturally diverse students (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007b; Brown & Trusty, 2005; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Lee, 2005). Specifically, Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007b) stress the school counselors’ role as a consultant in high poverty schools with the school counselor (a) acting as “cultural broker” for students, families, and school personnel; (b) consulting with teachers to develop culturally responsive educational practices; and (c) creating a more family focused school environment.

Much of the school counselor training and research literature emphasizes the powerful role of psychological well-being and positive mental health in learning (Edwards & Mullis, 2003; Sciarra & Seirup, 2008). Consequently, school counselors need to take the lead in helping teachers to create school and classroom climates that enhance student academic performance and facilitate psychological well-being (ASCA, 2003; Hernandez & Seem, 2004; Wittmer & Clark, 2002). Welsh (2000) defined school climate as the “unwritten beliefs, values, and attitudes that become the style of interaction between students, teachers, and administrators. School climate
sets the parameters of acceptable behavior among all school actors, and it assigns individual and institutional responsibility for school safety" (p. 89). The climate of a school and even a classroom can influence students’ feelings of school satisfaction and feelings of belonging, which have been associated with school engagement, school completion, academic motivation and achievement (Goodenow & Grady, 1992; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Sanchez, Colon, & Esperanza, 2005). School counselors have acknowledged the relationship between students’ self beliefs and their academic choices and have designed interventions to enhance students’ feelings of confidence, value and motivation (Falco, Crethar, & Bauman, 2008; Scheel & Gonzalez, 2007).

The main components of school and classroom climate are the relationships between teachers and students (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Positive teacher student-relationships have been shown to positively impact students’ academic achievement as well as students’ behavior (Baker, 1999; Birch & Ladd, 1997, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005). For example, in their study of five and six year olds, Hamre and Pianta (2005) found that among students who displayed behavioral, attentional, social and/or academic problems early in school, academic success was greatest for those students in classrooms with teachers who provided high emotional support. Moreover, Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, and Howes (2002) found that the closeness between teacher and student was positively associated with increases in children’s vocabulary and reading skills from preschool to second grade. Positive teacher student relationships, as rated by the teacher, have also been linked to decreases in students’ aggressive behaviors (Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003). Furthermore, in a study of eighth grade students conducted by Ryan and Patrick (2001), students’ perceptions of their teachers as supportive were predictive of decreased disruptive behavior.
School counselors are aware of the association between teacher-student relationships and positive outcomes because relationships are often seen as the foundation of the counseling profession (Miller, 1986b; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Saggese, 2005; Sexton & Whiston, 1994; Wampold, 2001). Therefore, the basis of school counselor training rests in the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to relationship development (CACREP, 2001). Specifically, school counselors gain training in interpersonal communication and relationship building. Additionally, school counselors receive extensive multicultural training as well as training regarding human development, group facilitation, and working with children and adolescents (CACREP, 2001). Consequently, school counselors are uniquely trained in the intricacies of the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships at both an individual and group level (ASCA, 2003; Helker, Schottelkorb, & Ray, 2007). School counselors have utilized these skills in order to enhance the school and classroom climate by working directly with students through small group and large group counseling, as well as consulting with teachers regarding their classroom management and teaching practices (Clemens, 2007; Martin & Baldwin, 1996; Rice & Smith, 1993; Stewart & McKay, 1995).

As indicated previously, low-income, culturally diverse students’ experiences of cultural discontinuity have been associated with psychological distress and have the potential to negatively impact these students’ views of school (Choi et al., 2006; Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Fisher et al., 2001; Romero et al., 2007). Recent school counseling literature has emphasized the significance of examining low-income, culturally diverse students’ psychological orientation to education and to the school setting particularly in terms of their sense of school belonging, academic self efficacy, and educational aspirations (Chinwe, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). Consequently, the research indicating the potential of culturally responsive practices to impact
the academic achievement and psychological well-being of low-income, culturally diverse students is of significant importance to school counselors.

School counselors are often called upon to consult with teachers and to work with students having academic, social or behavioral difficulties (ASCA, 2003; Hoskins, Astramovich, & Smith, 2007). Therefore it would be beneficial for school counselors to gain a better understanding of how master teachers develop relationships with their low-income, culturally diverse students. School counselors can then serve as advocates and leaders within their schools promoting the development and implementation of such practices within their schools. Additionally, using their relational training school counselors can work alongside teachers to help them create teacher-student relationships and a classroom climate that facilitates social and academic success of low-income, culturally diverse students. By taking on these roles of leader, advocate, and consultant within their schools, school counselors can act in a proactive manner, using their relational and multicultural training, to prevent these students’ experiences of cultural discontinuity and the resulting psychological distress.

**Need for the Study**

Educational research has continually documented the importance of the teacher-student relationship in facilitating student learning (Brophy & Good, 1974; Ladson Billings, 1994; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Noddings, 1992). The negotiation of both the task-focused instructional component and the teacher-student relational component has been found to be crucial to the facilitation of student learning (Lowman, 1984, 1994). The majority of previous quantitative and qualitative research studies have focused predominantly on the teacher and his or her instructional methods and relational behaviors that were associated with positive student academic performance outcomes (Brophy & Good, 1986; Gettinger & Koehler, 2006). Most of
these studies presumed that the teaching behaviors and instructional methods were applicable to all students regardless of income level or cultural background.

Only recently have researchers begun to examine the impact of teaching methods and relational behaviors on specific groups of students and the culturally responsive practices of master teachers teaching culturally diverse students (Brown, 2004; Bondy et al., 2007; Foster, 1997; Foster et al., 2003, 2005; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pransky & Bailey, 2002). At the current time, there is limited research available describing the relational behaviors of master teachers of low-income, African American students and the responses of these students to the teachers’ behaviors. Foster and her colleagues (2003) noted that despite a growing body of literature justifying culturally responsive educational practices, it is often difficult to conceptualize what culturally responsive teachers are doing in the classroom. Thus, she and her colleagues assert that there is a need to further examine and understand how culturally responsive teachers teach.

Researchers, such as Brown (2003, 2004) and Bondy and colleagues (2007) have begun to examine how teachers implement culturally responsive classroom management practices and create environments for success with urban populations. However, Brown’s research was based solely upon interview data and did not include observations, thus limiting the ability to conceptualize “how” the teachers related to their culturally diverse students. While Bondy and colleagues did utilize observations in their study of effective urban teachers, they focused predominantly on the teachers’ actions and provided only limited information regarding the students’ responses. Moreover, their study focused on the first two hours of the school day and included only novice teachers. As a result, given the reported impact of such practices on the psychological well-being and academic achievement of these students (Cummins, 1996; Diaz-
Greenberg, 2001; Foster, 2003, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Peterek & Adams, in press; Pransky & Bailey, 2002) it is particularly important that the relationship development process between culturally responsive master teachers and their low-income, African American students be further explored and described. With this knowledge, school counselors can more effectively consult with teachers to enhance the academic achievement and psychological health of low-income, African American students.

**Theoretical Perspective**

Three theories were examined for their applicability in describing how master teachers develop and use their relationships with their low-income, culturally diverse students to facilitate student learning: Relational Cultural theory, Flanders’ interaction analysis categories, and Sociocultural theory.

**Relational Cultural Theory**

Relational Cultural theory (RCT) emerged out of Jean Baker Miller’s (1986a) *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, as well as the contributions of several other women including Alexandra Kaplan, Judith Jordan, Irene Stiver, and Janet Surrey. RCT was conceived as a theory of both counseling and development that addressed the experiences of marginalized groups (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2001; Jordan & Hartling, 2002). The theory moves away from the more traditional, western-based theories of counseling and development which focus on individualism, meritocracy and self-sufficiency, and instead emphasizes relational experiences and the central role of relationships in producing healing (Comstock et al., 2008; Miller, 1986a, 1986b; Miller & Stiver, 1997). RCT was developed by therapists and was originally intended to influence counseling processes and relationships, but it has now been applied to areas beyond therapy (Jordan, 2001). Given that good relationships between caring adults and children and adolescents have been associated with youth’s psychological health and well-being (Cotterell,
Due to its focus on the experiences of women and culturally diverse populations, RCT places great importance on the social and cultural context in which groups and individuals live and develop (Hartling, 2008; Jordan & Hartling, 2002). In particular, RCT acknowledges the roles that racism, sexism, and classism play in preventing individuals from engaging and partaking in growth fostering relationships (Jordan & Hartling, 2002), as well as noting how relationships can be negatively impacted by poverty and institutional discrimination (Hartling, 2008). RCT is founded on the supposition that human suffering is based in experiences of relational violations such as isolation, shame, oppression, marginalization and micro-aggressions (Birrell & Freyd, 2006; Miller & Striver, 1997). If an individual experiences frequent relational disconnections such as these, the experiences can be associated with feelings of shame, fear, frustration, self-blame, and other manifestations of emotional and psychological difficulties (Comstock et al., 2008). According to Miller & Striver (1997) periods of disconnection which cannot be transformed, such as power differentials, racism and chronic cultural disconnections can be a source of disempowerment, distress, and psychological problems. RCT further examines the experience of non-majority, marginalized groups and the role of sociopolitical factors that can serve as a basis for disconnections (Comstock et al., 2008).

RCT recognizes the Eurocentric cultural bias within society and institutions that encourages independence, autonomy, and self sufficiency and separation, and notes how culturally diverse individuals may have to limit the parts of themselves, including thoughts and
feelings, that they bring into relationships (Chin, De, Cancela, & Jenkins, 1993; Jordan, 2001). This parallels the research findings reported previously concerning culturally diverse students’ experience of acculturative stress and cultural discontinuity in their relationships and within educational contexts (Choi et al., 2006; Romero et al., 2007; Romero & Roberts, 2003). Moreover, Comstock et al. (2008) suggests that when feeling disconnected, individuals experience a decreased sense of energy, a decreased sense of self-efficacy, decreased self-esteem, and disengagement, all of which were exemplified in the experiences of low-income, culturally diverse students described previously (Fisher et al., 2000; Wong et al., 2003).

Relational Cultural theory aims to minimize the negative impact of marginalization or cultural oppression through growth-fostering relationships (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2001; Miller & Stiver, 1997). RCT is based upon the understanding that people yearn for connection and thus the cultivation and maintenance of relationships is viewed as a crucial and complex aspect of development (Jordan, 2001; Miller, 1986b). Miller (1986b) identified “five good things” that are common outcomes of participating in growth fostering relationships: (a) increased zest and vitality, (b) feeling more capable and willing to act in the world, feeling empowered, (c) increased clarity and developing a more accurate picture of oneself, (d) having a greater sense of self worth, and (e) feelings of connection and seeking more relationships. Within these relationships growth, learning, expansion and meaning-making occur (Jordan, 2001). Moreover, relational environments foster the rebuilding and reclaiming of individuals’ sense of competence (Hartling, 2008).

The key relational processes of healing, growth fostering relationships identified by RCT theorists include movement toward mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and authenticity (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2001; Miller & Stiver, 1997). While much of the research
surrounds the growth fostering relationships between adults in therapy, Spencer and her colleagues (2004) conducted an exploratory focus group study to examine diverse youth’s descriptions of their relationships with important adults in their lives. Similar to the key processes identified by RCT theorists, the researchers’ thematic analysis of the data revealed themes of mutuality and respect and authenticity. Consequently, it appears that these same processes may be equally as relevant to the growth fostering relationships between adults and children. Moreover, as stated by Spencer and her colleagues, these relationships create psychological safety and opportunities for growth and learning.

**Mutual empathy**

Judith Jordan, an RCT theorist, quotes Kohut (1978) in an effort to encompass the significance of empathy: He writes “empathy is a fundamental mode of human relatedness,” “the recognition of the self in the other,” “it is the accepting, confirming and understanding of human echo,” the resonance of essential human alikeness,” “a psychological nutriment without which human life as we know and cherish it could not be sustained” (as cited in Jordan, Surrey & Kaplan, 1991, p. 34). Empathy has been described by various theorists in a multitude of ways. However, RCT conceptualizes empathy as a complex, interactive process involving both affective and cognitive functioning (Jordan et al., 1991). Empathy begins with an individual’s desire for human relatedness which allows him or her to take in the verbal, nonverbal, and affective cues of another and then allows oneself to feel that affective arousal in oneself (Jordan et al., 1991). The emotional state of the other is captured and transferred to the individual’s own experience. The individual does not lose his or her identity, but allows flexibility in his or her self boundary and once the affect subsides, uses their cognitive functioning to regain his or her sense of self (Jordan et al., 1991).
Jordan (1991a) refers to empathy as the “trying out quality to the experience, whereby one places one’s self in the other’s shoes or looks through the other’s eyes” (p. 69). If a disconnection occurs within a relationship, the injured (particularly the less powerful person) is given the opportunity to express their feelings, while the other person empathically responds, thus creating an opportunity for a strengthened relationship and individual’s increased feeling of relational competence (Jordan & Hartling, 2002).

A key concept within RCT regarding empathy is that it does not go in one direction, but is experienced as mutual empathy. Mutual empathy can be conceptualized as occurring “when two people relate to the other in a context of interest in the other, emotional availability and responsiveness, cognitive appreciation of the wholeness of the other; the intent is to understand” (Jordan, 1991b, p. 89). There is recognition of the sameness in one another, while simultaneously acknowledging the differences and the uniqueness in each person. The impact of experiencing mutual empathy strengthens an individual’s “sense of relatedness, connection, and a feeling of being directly, emotionally understood” (Jordan et al., 1991, p. 34)

Paralleling the key process of mutual empathy are the themes of mutuality and respect identified by Spencer and her colleagues (2004) study of children and adolescents. Youth participating in the study emphasized feeling cared for by an adult regardless of whether the youth was achieving or behaving in a certain way. Valued relationships were those in which the youth felt that their wants, needs, desires and strengths were not only welcomed, but also helped shape the nature of the relationship. One of the barriers to mutuality included when adults viewed the youth as less than and not as equal human beings. The youth acknowledged the differentials in knowledge, experience, and authority, but that they still desired full engagement from adults. As pointed out by Spencer et al. (2004), this echoes RCT’s focus on the need to
actively listen and note the mutual impact that one can have on the other, regardless of age (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

**Authenticity**

Authenticity is often disrupted in relationships where the power is not equally shared as in the case with power differences based on age, gender, race, and class. The person with less power is often expected to obey the rules and expectations of the more powerful person (Spencer et al., 2004). Consequently, one may become inauthentic and keep parts of his or herself hidden and thus not bring their full selves into relationship with the other, suppressing authenticity (Jordan, 2001; Jordan & Hartling, 2002). However, authenticity is a key relational process in RCT. It includes bringing more of oneself into the relationship with the other while simultaneously maintaining awareness regarding one’s possible impact on the other person (Jordan & Hartling, 2002). This does not mean that one is reactive or self-discloses haphazardly without boundaries, but in being authentic one takes responsibility for clearly stating one’s own limits and describing the circumstances in which one can connect with another in a relationship.

Given the power differential in relationships between adults and children, Spencer and her colleagues (2004) state that “in caring relationships of temporarily unequal power (e.g. adult and child, caretaker and child, teacher and student) however, the more powerful person will actually be encouraging the growth of authenticity and full voice in the less powerful person” (p. 358). Fourth grade youth in their study spoke of their ability to differentiate when adults were authentically engaging with them and their desire for such engagement as it made the relationship more enjoyable. Spencer and her colleagues cite a young boy that summarizes this point:

A boy then chimed in with the response he would like to give when an adult talks to him in one of those [inauthentic] voices saying, “I am not a baby, and you don’t have to use the sweet voice.” He went on to say that an adult he feels has a good relationship with does
Another aspect of authentic engagement includes adults actively listening to what the youth had to say. Some examples of how good listening was demonstrated included turning off the TV, asking questions, and removing distractions to focus on the conversation at hand. The youth noted that they could tell when adults only pretended to be listening. It was when adults are authentically engaged with the youth that the youth felt like they have the chance to impact the relationship because the adult was open to being impacted by what the youth was saying. The youth participating in the study also shared that authenticity was demonstrated when the adult tried to relate to the youth’s difficulties by recalling the similarities in their own experiences and validated what the youth said. This is quite different than when the adult is highly reactive to what the student says thus limiting the youth’s willingness to share with adults and in turn bring less of themselves into the relationship, thus less authenticity (Spencer et al., 2004).

**Mutual empowerment**

The final process, mutual empowerment, did not emerge in the youth’s discussion of their growth-fostering relationships with adults. However, RCT emphasizes the importance of mutual empowerment throughout their literature and research (Jordan 2001; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Surrey, 1991a, 1991b). Psychological empowerment has been defined by Surrey (1991a) as “the motivation, freedom, and capacity to act purposefully, with mobilization of the energies, resources, strengths, or powers of each person through a mutual relational process” (p. 64). While most theories conceptualize power in terms of “power over” or “power for oneself”, RCT conceptualizes processes of interaction termed “power with” or “power together”. Therefore, one is empowered by the “capacity to ‘see’ and ‘respond to’ the other and to engage in interaction that leaves both people feeling more aware of self and other” (Surrey, 1991b, p. 167)
Mutual empowerment evolves as both individuals are responsive to the affective states of the other and feel heard, responded to and validated by the other (Surrey, 1991a, 1991b). As a result, both individuals feel more energized to take action. Mutual empowerment between an adult and a child is conceptualized as nurturing, but in a bi-directional sense so that the adult does not remove oneself and focus solely on the child’s needs, but acts to maintain and deepen connections that mutually empower (Surrey, 1991b). Adults aid in the empowerment of children by giving them the opportunity to feel successful in understanding and supportive based on the appropriate developmental level of the child. Therefore, the child feels more effective and competent, which can then be transferred to more relationships and their own sense of their ability to act as a relational being (Surrey, 1991a). One is disempowered when one is struggling to create and maintain a healthy relational context.

**Relational cultural theory and Flanders’ interaction analysis categories**

Flanders’ Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) emerged out of the various work of Ned Flanders and his colleagues (Flanders, 1970). Flanders was interested in the study of teacher-student interaction and he defines classroom interaction as “the chain of events which occur one after the other, each only occupying a small segment of time” (p. 3). He promoted interactional analysis, and defined interaction analysis as “a label that refers to any technique for studying the chains of classroom events in such a fashion that each event is taken into consideration” (Flanders, 1970, p. 5). A particular system of interaction analysis typically includes (a) a set of clearly defined categories, (b) procedure for observation along with a set of ground rules that frame the coding process, (c) steps for counting and tabulating the data, and (d) suggestions. The purpose of such analysis is to keep track of certain events that occur in classroom behavior, to help teachers develop and control teaching behaviors, and to identify relationships between teaching behavior and student outcomes.
Flanders and some colleagues at the University of Minnesota created a category system that focuses on the verbal communication that takes place between teachers and students. The FIAC consists of ten category system, of which there are three conditions, teacher talk, student talk, and silence/confusion. The teacher talk categories and the student talk categories are broken into two sub categories, initiative and response. Within FIAC, to initiate means to make the first contact, to begin, and to introduce a concept first. To respond means “to take action after an initiation, to counter, to amplify or react to ideas which have already been expressed, to conform or even to comply to the will expressed by others” (Flanders, 1970, p. 35). For specific definitions of each category, see Table 1-1 and Table 1-2, adaptation of tables depicted in Flanders (1970, p. 34).

Though Relational Cultural theory and Flanders’ Interaction Analysis Categories were created for differing purposes, there appears to be some overlap in their content. Many of the teacher talk response categories identified in the FIAC can loosely fit into one or more of the three key processes of RCT. For example, the first FIAC category, accepts feelings, can be assumed under the RCT process of empathy. The teacher’s willingness to accept the students’ feelings echoes the Spencer and colleagues study (2004), when the students acknowledged that they valued relationships with adults in which youth felt their wants, needs, desires and strengths were accepted and allowed to shape the relationship. “Accepts feelings” could also fall into the RCT process of empowerment. Surrey (1991a, 1991b), an RCT theorist, states that empowerment develops as individuals are responsive to the emotional states of the other and feel heard, responded to and validated by the other. Lastly, “accepting feelings” could also fall into the RCT process of authenticity because the students do not have to be inauthentic and hide aspects of themselves (Jordan, 2001; Jordan & Hartling, 2002). As Spencer and colleagues
(2004) note, an adult has the ability to encourage students’ authenticity by giving the student the opportunity to be fully themselves, which would include their emotions.

Table 1-1. Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories: Teacher talk

| Response | 1. Accepts feelings. Names and accepts students’ positive and negative attitudes or feelings.  
2. Praises and encourages. Praises and encourages student behaviors. Makes jokes, but not at the expense of others. Uses encouragers like nodding, saying “uh huh” or “go on”.  
3. Uses students’ ideas. Clarifies and builds upon students’ ideas.  
4. Asks questions. Asks a question about class content and rules.  
5. Lecturing. Providing facts, contents or procedures; giving explanations, their own opinion, or citing an authority.  
6. Giving directions. Directs or orders students with the expectation that the student will comply.  
7. Criticizing or justifying authority. Statements directed toward changing student behavior; explaining why the teacher is doing what he/she is doing; referring to self. |
| Teacher Talk | As the teacher brings more of their ideas in, move to category five. |

Table 1-2. Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories: Student talk and silence

| Student Talk | 8. Student talk-response. Student talk in response to the teacher when the teacher initiates the contact or asks for students’ statements.  
9. Student talk—initiation. Student initiated talk in which students’ express own ideas, initiates a new topic, develop opinions and thoughts.  
10. Silence or confusion. Pauses, periods of silence, and periods of confusion where communication cannot be understood. |

The second FIAC category, “praises or encourages”, loosely falls into the RCT process of empowerment. As discussed previously, within RCT, adults are viewed as capable of enhancing the empowerment of children by giving them the opportunity to feel successful in understanding and supportive in a relationship. The child then feels more competent and effective as well as seeing themselves as competent relational being (Surrey, 1991a). While RCT is specifically
talking about understanding and supporting another individual in a relationship, one could assume that the same could be applied to their ability to understand specific academic content or concepts and express this knowledge in a relational context. “Praises or encourages” could also be seen as loosely fitting into the RCT process of authenticity. In his definition of “praises and encourages” Flanders, describes teachers telling jokes, which may allow the teacher bring more of his or herself into the student teacher relationship.

The third FIAS category, “accepts or uses ideas of student”, can be conceptualized as falling under the RCT processes of empowerment and authenticity. By acknowledging the student’s ideas and making an effort to build off what the student has said, the teacher is communicating to the student that he or she has “power with” the teacher, and “power with” is highly emphasized in RCT. The student gets to experience feeling heard and responded to by the teacher and may feel empowered as a result (Surrey, 1991a, 1991b). The student begins to see themselves as more authentic, and the teacher as more authentic because as Spencer and colleagues (2004) found, children feel that adults are authentically engaged with them when the child feels like he or she can impact the relationship and the adult is open to what the child has to say.

Relational cultural theory and sociocultural theory

Sociocultural theory emerged from the contributions of L. S. Vygotsky (1978). The theory is based in the conceptualization that knowledge is co-created through social interaction as people communicate and interact with one another. Learning rests in language and in the interrelation among historical, cultural, institutional, and communicative processes (Lim & Renshaw, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, an individual’s learning cannot be understood solely within the individual, but through the interactional processes and in the participation in activities with others (Vygotsky, 1978. These activities are the basic unit of analysis (Tharp &
According to Lim and Renshaw (2001) it is within these activities that:

Individuals gain or appropriate sociocultural knowledge and practices such as ways of speaking and behaving, conventions for representing ideas, procedures for communicating, modes of inquiry and verifying knowledge claims, and values and beliefs, which constitute the explicit as well as implicit features of the community culture. (p.14)

Consequently, there is an understanding of each individual as a being influenced by his or her culture and previous experiences. Thus, accessing aspects of individual students’ culture or life experience in learning tasks enhances their knowledge acquisition. An understanding of how students conceptualize the world can facilitate a teacher’s ability to incorporate the students’ schemas and network of experiences in the learning process (Jarmilla, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978).

A key concept in individual’s acquisition of knowledge is the zone of proximal development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky identified two levels of ZPD, the actual development level and the level of potential development. The actual development level is the level of a child’s mental functioning as determined by their already completed developmental cycles, often measured by tests and their ability to independently problem solve. The level of potential is the level at which the child can problem solve with the help of an adult or more capable peers. The distance between these two levels is the child’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky, “learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment” (p. 90). Teachers stimulate this zone when they introduce their students to ideas that are just beyond their current knowledge and skill level, and teachers encourage students to attain the new skills through joint learning activities with the teacher or peers (Jarmilla, 1996).
Given its view of learners as social beings living in cultural contexts, sociocultural theory has been used as a foundation in which some culturally responsive educators have developed standards for effective pedagogy for culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse students (Dalton, 1998; Tharp et al., 2000). Tharp and his colleagues from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) developed the Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy (Dalton, 1998; Tharp et al., 2000). These five standards are particularly crucial for diverse students, but Tharp and colleagues suggest that they are beneficial to all students across all subjects. In their examination of the educational research, Tharp and his colleagues found consensus based agreement on the premises behind each of the Five Standards of Effective Pedagogy (Bower, 1997; Carpenter, Fennema, & Franke, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Newman, 1996).

Tharp and his colleagues (2000) and Hillberg, Doherty, Epaloose, and Tharp (2004) describe the five standards in detail. The five standards include: (a) “joint product activity” among the students and the teacher, (b) language and literacy across the curriculum, (c) connecting school to students’ lives, (d) facilitating students’ critical thinking, and (d) teaching through dialogue. Three of the standards are particularly relevant to understanding how master teachers develop relationships and interact with their low-income, culturally diverse students and overlap with some of the components of RCT: joint product activity, connecting school to students’ lives and teaching through dialogue.

“Joint productive activity” relates to Sociocultural theory’s emphasis of activities involving interaction among individuals with varying levels of skills and expertise, including the teacher. During this joint process the participants interact, exchange information, and share their ideas, rationales or thinking strategies. The teacher does not take a hierarchical role but shares in
the experience and participates with the students (Tharp et al., 2000). This collaborative process relates to RCT’s mutual empowerment, where within a relationship there is not “power over” but instead “power with” as individuals respond to and engage one another (Surrey, 1991b). The student may feel more empowered by being given the opportunity to feel successful. Moreover, the student can feel more mutual empathy as their thoughts are welcomed and more authentic in that they are given more of a voice and are legitimately listened to and allowed impact those around him or her, including the teacher (Spencer et al., 2004).

The standards of connecting school and academics to students’ lives and engaging in dialogue can also reflect the key relational processes emphasized in RCT. By connecting academics to students’ lives, the teacher affirms and uses the student’s previous knowledge, skills, and experience as a foundation on which to introduce new concepts and material (Tharp et al., 2000). Additionally, teachers use learning activities that incorporate the students’ and family’s interests and culture (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). Similarly, the standard of intentional dialogue is also related to giving students’ a voice and allowing their ideas to shape the learning context and the development of the teacher-student relationship. Through dialogue, the teacher seeks to expand students’ conversations on their academic, personal, social and cultural experiences as they relate to an academic topic or subject as well as create a community of learners (Tharp et al., 2000).

By engaging in both of these standards, teachers are affirming their students’ sense of self, as well as their cultural identities and experiences. This allows students to act and relate with what RCT calls authenticity, in that they no longer have to keep aspects of their selves and their cultures hidden, but can bring their full selves into the classroom and their learning (Jordan, 2001). Also, as teachers make the effort to find out more about the lives and experiences of their
students, they are demonstrating empathy, respect and care for the students as students feel understood and valued (Jordan et al., 1991). Teachers show their students that they also impact not only the relationship, but the educational practices by integrating such information into the curriculum, instructional methods and relational context, thus reflect both RCT’s empathy and empowerment. Thus students and their experiences are acknowledged, responded to and validated (Surrey, 1991a, 1991b).

**Limitations of theories**

While RCT, Flanders’ interaction categories, and Sociocultural theory are each relevant to describing and conceptualizing how master teachers develop relationships with their low-income, culturally diverse students, they have their limitations and thus do not seem to fully encompass what is occurring in the classrooms of these teachers. As noted, RCT has been used to describe effective therapeutic relationships and adult interpersonal relationships (Miller, 1986a, 1986b; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Jordan, 2001). Much of this literature has focused primarily on the outcomes of such growth fostering relationships (i.e. increased zest, empowerment, self-worth, clarity, and connection). Although, RCT’s key relational processes - mutual empathy, authenticity, and mutual empowerment - have been described, it is still difficult to conceptualize how these relational processes are implemented in the teacher-student relationship. Literature regarding RCT and adult child relationships has not been extensive and has focused primarily on parent-child relationships (Spencer et al., 2004; Surrey, 1991a, 1991b). Though the teacher-student relationship may have some parallels to the parent-child relationship, the organizational, structured context of the classroom and the school day, as well as the academically focused nature of the relationship make it unique.

Flanders’ interaction categories are helpful in that they break down the verbal communication that occurs in a classroom into discrete categories (Flanders, 1970). However,
these categories do not include nonverbal communication which plays a crucial role in social interaction (Mehrabian, 2007; Ivey & Ivey, 2008). Sociocultural theory and the “Five Standards of Effective Pedagogy” clearly focus on instructional methods and do not focus explicitly on relationship development. The overlap between RCT with Flanders’ categories and with the Five Standards broadens the scope of RCT by focusing on the classroom context but does not appear sufficient enough to provide an extensive theoretical framework for examining master teachers’ interactions with their low-income, culturally diverse students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to use grounded theory methodology to develop a theory about the relational processes used by culturally responsive master teachers to develop and use their relationships with their low-income, African American students to facilitate learning. Master teachers working with low-income, African American students were chosen for this study because of the statistics regarding these students’ underachievement, their overrepresentation in special education programs and discipline referrals (Blair & Scott, 2002; Planty et al., 2008; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Townsend, 2000) and because of the researcher’s own work with this population. Therefore, the findings will generally be most applicable to African American student populations.

The term “master teacher” has been applied to teachers who use culturally responsive practices like those described above and who are able to positively impact their low-income, culturally diverse students’ academic achievement and social development (Foster et al., 2003, 2005). However, there are no agreed upon criteria to define a “master teacher” (White, 1991). Some researchers use the criteria of having been named state teacher of the year (Pollard & Tomlin, 1995) while others use a criteria of educational preparation and years of teaching experience (Doyle, 1985). For the purposes of this study, a master teacher is defined as a teacher
who is recognized by their peers for creating a classroom environment and relationships with her students in ways in which low-income, culturally diverse are documented to achieve academically and socially (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Foster et al. 2003, 2004; Gay, 2000; Karunagan, 2002; Ladson Billings, 1994; Phungstog, 1999; Pransky & Bailey, 2002).

Using grounded theory’s method of open coding, axial coding and selective coding, seven, one hour-long videotapes were analyzed to describe how master teachers developed and used their relationships with their students in the learning process. These videotapes depicted the interactions between the master teachers and their students during the first week of an afterschool program and the first week of the school year.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to guide the examination of the videotaped data:

1. How do the teachers develop relationships with their low-income, African American students? How do the students respond?

2. How do the teachers utilize their relationships in the teaching/learning process with low-income, African American students? How do the students respond?

**Definition of Terms**

**Academic Achievement.** Within this research study this term refers to students performing at or above grade level as indexed by school achievement tests, grade point averages, and staying on or above grade level in math and reading.

**Culturally Diverse Students.** K-12 students most affected by the achievement gap including Native Americans, some Asian American subgroups (specifically, Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders), Latino Americans, and African Americans. Most of the research emphasizes African Americans and Latino Americans as both groups are strongly represented in the United States, while research on Native American, Vietnamese, and Pacific Islander students is not as extensive (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008)

**Culturally Responsive Educational Practices.** This refers to combination of culturally responsive instructional methods and culturally responsive teacher-student relations and
culturally responsive classroom management and teacher-student relations (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2004a; Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2003, 2004). Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive instructional methods as the use of “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 29). Brown (2003, 2004) identifies the following as key components of culturally responsive classroom management: creating caring relationships, holding high expectations, asserting authority, and culturally congruent communication.

HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS. Schools where over 75% of the students are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch (Planty et al., 2008).

LOW-INCOME. Students who qualify for the free or reduced meals through the national school lunch program and the school breakfast program, whose eligibility requirements are based on the Federal income poverty guidelines (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2008).

MASTER TEACHERS. Although master teachers have not been uniformly defined (Foster et al., 2003, 2005; Pollard & Tomlin, 1995; White, 1991), for this study a master teacher is defined as a culturally responsive teacher who positively impacts her students’ academic achievement, as well as their behavioral, social, and emotional development.

RELATIONSHIP. of this study is conceptualized as series of interactions or interdependence between social partners in which the individuals go beyond role prescriptions and become more personal (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997; Bierhoff & Schmohr, 2003).

TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS. The reciprocal behaviors that are engaged in by the teacher and the students in the classroom which may take the form of both verbal and nonverbal communication.

A review of the relevant research literature will be presented in Chapter 2 to provide background to the current study. Chapter 3 will outline the methodology of the study including the setting, the participants, data collection and data analysis. The results and findings of the study will be presented in chapter 4 and chapter 5 will present the discussion of the findings, implications, and areas of future research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although more than 50 years have elapsed since the famous Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling, a glaring discrepancy in achievement levels still remains between many low-income, culturally diverse students and their more privileged White peers (Grigg, Donahue, & Dion, 2007; Lee, Grigg, & Dion, 2007; Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007; Planty et al., 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2006, 2007). Not only do low-income, culturally diverse students consistently underperform in mathematics and reading in 4th, 8th, and 12th grade as compared to their more affluent white peers (Grigg et al., 2007; Lee, Grigg, & Dion, 2007; Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007), but 20% of Latino and 10% of African American students drop out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Moreover, those low-income, culturally diverse students who remain in school have less access to advanced classes than do their White peers and are underrepresented in gifted programs (Ford & Harmon, 2001; Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000). Additionally, low-income, culturally diverse students are overrepresented in special education programs (Blair & Scott, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008).

In this chapter, various theoretical explanations for the problem of the achievement disparity between low-income, culturally diverse students and their more affluent White peers will be discussed. In addition, literature concerning the implications for educator and school counselor practice will be discussed.

Deficit Theory

The most prevailing and long standing theory that has been proposed to explain the underachievement of low-income, culturally diverse students is deficit theory (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Valencia, 1997a). Deficit theory asserts that students’ academic failures are a result of internal insufficiencies and characteristics of the student or some deficiency within the
student’s family or community (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Valencia, 1997a).

The origins of deficit thinking are tied to the racist discourse that arose in the early 1600s positing that racial minorities were physically, cognitively, and culturally inferior to Whites. This racist discourse provided the groundwork for the thinking that came about at the beginning of the twentieth century which posited that human behavior and character were best explained biologically (Menchaca, 1997). This thought was further supported by the development of intelligence tests, such as the Stanford Binet intelligence tests, which documented differences by race in intelligence and other genetically determined abilities and aptitudes (Menchaca, 1997).

By the early 1960s there was a shift in deficit thought, moving from a genetically based conceptualization of the underachievement of culturally diverse individuals, to one based in what Oscar Lewis (1965) posited as the “culture of poverty”. Lewis suggested that people living in poverty live a life characterized by inadequate morals, norms, and social practices that are transmitted generation to generation, thus perpetuating their economic condition. Consequently, the idea of a “culture of poverty” provided a more contextual explanation for the underachievement of low-income, culturally diverse individuals (Foley, 1997). An outgrowth of this culture of poverty perspective was the cultural deprivation argument which contended that the family unit (mother, father, home environment) was the source of deficiencies (Pearl, 1997). More specifically, there is a view that non-majority cultures devalue or oppose intellectual achievement and thus prevent members of these cultures from succeeding in school (Anderson, 2004; Pearl, 1997). It was also proposed that students’ development was negatively impacted by living in chaotic households during the critical years in a student’s life. It was thought that the cumulative environmental deficits, including inadequate sensory stimulation and inappropriate
home management, resulted in irreversible cognitive deficits (Pearl, 1997). Contemporary forms of deficit theory are based on these models: genetic deficiencies, culture of poverty, and cultural deficits (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Valencia & Solorazano, 1997).

**Deficit-Based Educational Interventions**

Educators conceptualizing the underachievement of low-income, culturally diverse students within a framework of deficit thinking have developed interventions aimed at “fixing” the students and their families (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Valencia, 1997a). Consequently, the classroom teacher is expected to counteract the student’s deficiencies by assisting them in meeting the standards of their White, middle and upper class peers. This idea is reflected in compensatory education programs that remediate students who have fallen behind by giving them additional academic support services. Some examples of compensatory education programs include Head Start, Title I initiatives, after-school programs, and summer school programs (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000; Halpern, 2000; Vinovskis, 1999).

Researchers evaluating the effectiveness of compensatory education programs have found that while many of the programs yield some academic improvements in low-income, culturally diverse students, the improvements are not sufficient enough to meet the academic level of their White peers. For example, a nationwide evaluation of Title I programs conducted in the late 1970’s found that while Title 1 recipients did better than non-Title I students, the most economically disadvantaged students did not benefit academically (Carter, 1984). Similarly, in their meta-analysis of seventeen Title I studies, Borman and D’Agostino, (1996), found that Title I elementary school participants’ performed better academically in middle and high school than their non-participating peers. However, although Title I programming had a modest positive impact on students’ academic achievement, Borman and D’Agostino noted that the discrepancies
between the academic levels of these students and their more privileged White peers continued to exist. With regard to summer school, a meta-analysis of summer school programs revealed that these programs have statistically significant more positive effects on the academic achievement of middle class students than on students from low-income backgrounds (Cooper et al., 2000). This may reflect the tendency to apply curricula that have been designed for historically successful students to low-income, culturally diverse students and families. Currie and Thomas (1995) examined the effectiveness of Head Start programs and found that though White students made statistically significant improvements academically and with regard to grade repetition, Head Start was not associated with enhanced academic performance among African American students. According to Garcia and Guerra (2004), these programs’ failed attempts to close the achievement gap may serve to further reinforce deficit thinking.

**Deficit-Based Counseling Interventions**

School counselors have been trained to address the developmental needs of all students including students’ academic, personal, social, and career development needs (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2004). When schools operate under a framework of deficit theory, school counselors are expected to “fix” low-income, culturally diverse students who are underperforming academically and/or act out in the classroom by providing remedial support in the form of individual or small group counseling interventions (Hardesty & Dillard, 1994). Some of these interventions focus on resolving personal and interpersonal issues through an empowerment small group counseling as a means of improving academic achievement (Bemak, Chi-Ying, & Siroskey-Sabado, 2005), while others try to provide struggling students with more exposure to various career opportunities through large group guidance lessons (Legum & Hoare, 2004). Such interventions with low-income, culturally diverse youth have yielded inconsistent results. Although students from the empowerment group self reported academic improvement
these findings were not substantiated with school academic records (Bemak et al., 2005). Students in the career intervention developed by Legum and Hoare (2004) did not significantly improve their self esteem or GPA as compared to those students in a control group.

Another example of a student-focused remediation program is Cook and Kaffenberger’s (2003) Solution Shop, in which low-income, culturally diverse middle school students were referred by their teacher to participate in solution focused small group counseling in conjunction with study skills enhancement and tutoring. The authors reported that 68% of the 8th grade participants and 44% of the 7th grade participants showed increases in grade point averages. While the results sound promising, causality cannot be determined and the authors did not indicate if the increases were significant nor whether the increases were maintained.

Within the school’s deficit approach the school counselor is also expected to work with the parents of students by helping the parents understand what role the school expects the parents to play in their child’s education (Conroy & Meyer, 1994). In a study surveying elementary, middle and high school counselors, Ritchie and Partin (1994) found that elementary school counselors are significantly more likely to conduct parent education programs than middle or high school counselors. Additionally, 84% of the participants indicated a need for parent skills training for their students’ caregivers. Specifically, a program developed by Mitchell, Bush and Bush (2002) for culturally diverse students included a parent education component “designed to develop effective parenting skills and foster a home environment that supports the success of their children” (p. 144). While parent education programs can be well-intentioned, they may be framed in terms of the parental deficiencies that need to be addressed and remediated through classes and the provision of information, which can often be marginalizing to caregivers.
A consequence of counselors operating under a deficit view is that they can begin to see these students and their families solely in terms of their problems and what they are lacking (Amatea, Smith-Adcock, & Villares, 2006; Butler, 2003). Thus, within this mindset of seeing the problems rooted within the student and their family, the counselor led interventions and solutions look toward the child and the parents and rarely consider the school context or the cultural background of the students and their families.

**Consequences of Deficit Thinking**

The educational practices and ideologies based on deficit thinking have had negative consequences on the socio-emotional and psychological well-being of low-income and culturally diverse students (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002). Studies by Steele and Aronson (1995, 1997) revealed that the negative stereotypes regarding the academic capabilities of African Americans actually hinder these students’ performance on standardized tests. Naming the condition “stereotype threat” Steele and Aronson posited that the threat of being perceived under a negative stereotype or the fear of performing in a way that confirms the stereotype can influence culturally diverse student’s intellectual performance and academic identity.

One of the most harmful consequences of deficit thinking is the low-income, culturally diverse students’ experience of discrimination (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007). A growing number of researchers described how discrimination affects children’s psychological well-being and development (Caputo, 2003; Fisher, Fenton, & Wallace, 2000; Rambaut, 1994; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007; Szalacha et al., 2003). Researchers have found that culturally diverse students’ personal experiences of discrimination and expectations of discrimination are related to greater reports of depressive symptoms (Brody et al., 2006; Rambaut, 1994; Szalacha et al., 2003) and psychological distress (Fisher et al., 2000). In a longitudinal study conducted with
African American adolescents Brody and associates (2006) found that increases in perceived discrimination were also related to increased conduct problems and depressive symptoms. Steele and colleagues (1995, 1997) have found that consistent experiences of discrimination are related to negative self-evaluations in African American adolescents (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). In relation to the negative self evaluations, perceived discrimination has been found to be associated with lower self esteem, anxiety, higher levels of internalizing and externalizing problems, conduct problems, and differences in global self-worth in adolescents (Fisher et al., 2000; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Szalacha et al., 2003).

Culturally diverse students’ perceptions of discrimination in educational settings and their effects have also been documented. Fisher and his associates’ (2000) examined the impact of racial and ethnic discrimination on White, Latino, African American and Asian American youth. They reported that students from visible minority groups reported experienced more discrimination, lower levels of self-esteem and higher distress than White students. Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff (2003) conducted a study examining the discrimination and devaluation of African American adolescents in schools. They found that African American students’ perceived discrimination was negatively related to their self report of achievement motivation, self competency beliefs, psychological resiliency, and self-esteem. In addition, the study revealed that perceived discrimination in school was also related to African American students’ anger, depressive symptoms, and problem behaviors. These findings suggest that the negative experiences African American students may confront in school can impact their overall psychological development, self esteem, academic motivation, and mental health (Wong et al., 2003).
Deficit thinking can also impact a number of school practices which may directly impact low-income, African American students as well as other culturally diverse students. Skrla and Scheurich (2001) asserted that administrators’ and educators’ deficit oriented views of these students may impact the documented disproportionality of culturally diverse and low-income students placed into lower-level classes, identified for special education, and under-identified as gifted and talented (Blair & Scott, 2002; Ford et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2008). Additionally, deficit thinking can also influence educators to lower their expectations with regard to low-income, African American students’ academic capabilities (Ferguson, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). The effect of lowered expectation is often discussed in terms of Merton’s (1948) “self-fulfilling prophecy”, in which he asserted that students perform to their teacher’s expectations. The concept was further highlighted by the classic study by Rosenthal and Jacobs (1968), *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, which revealed that students who were randomly assigned by researchers as “intellectual bloomers” were treated as such by their teachers and met their teachers enhanced expectations.

Another consequence of deficit thinking is that educators often view of the low level of achievement of low-income, African American students and other culturally diverse students as inherent in the students, and thus the educators do not feel that it is in their power to change the students’ academic level (Butler, 2003; Ford et al., 2002; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). As a result educators may neglect to look for solutions within the educational system or in their own relational, pedagogical and instructional practices (Berman, Chambliss, & Geiser, 1999; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Instead they may focus their attention and interventions solely on remediating the students and their families (Nieto, 2004a).
Deconstructing Deficit Theory

According to Valencia (1997a) the deficit thinking model has been found to be overly simplistic, deficient in empirical verification, grounded in racism and classism, and counterproductive in its educational recommendations. Valencia (1997b) asserted that much of the research used to substantiate the genetic deficiency and cultural deprivation models is characterized by methodological flaws. For example, the intelligence tests that fueled the genetic deficiency model were based on a normal distribution curve, which has never been substantiated for use with intelligence tests (Valencia, 1997b) and both the National Intelligence Test and the Stanford Binet intelligence were normed without including culturally diverse students in the standardization sample (Chapman, 1988). Furthermore, the research used to demonstrate the notion of genetic racial differences in intelligence precludes the notion of confounding variables such as an individual’s English language abilities, number of school absences, differential educational experiences and environmental backgrounds (Anastasi, 1988; Bagley, 1922; Valencia, 1997b). Therefore, because these variables were not controlled for, one cannot discount that any of the above listed variables are not related to differences in intelligence tests.

The culture of poverty theory has been criticized as exaggerating the likelihood that one’s culture can produce consistent negative character, motivation, and value laden traits of individuals of particular cultures and as failing to note in-group variability (Foley, 1997; Leacock, 1971). Various studies conducted with poor White, African American and Latino American communities that illustrated the functioning communities with positive values and resiliency as well as successful parenting and social practices, thus opposing the notion that poor communities are disorganized, uninvolved and exemplify poor parenting (Rubin, 1976; Stack, 1974; Williams, 1981).
Ecological Theory

A number of alternative conceptualizations have emerged to explain the academic performance of low-income, culturally diverse students as a result of the negative impact of interventions based in deficit theory. Known as ecological theory, these conceptualizations take a broader look at the problem of the underachievement of low-income, culturally diverse students by examining the various systems and contexts in which a student is involved. Subsumed under a broad framework of ecological theory, are cultural discontinuity theory and Relational Cultural theory.

Because of its emphasis on sociocultural factors in assessing, conceptualizing, and interceding with culturally diverse individuals, ecological theory provides a valuable lens through which to examine the achievement discrepancy between low-income, culturally diverse students and their privileged White peers (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007a; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Johnson, 1994). Ecological theory takes into account the school, classroom, teacher, and pedagogical related contexts as well as the student’s home context that may be contributing to the academic under-performance of low-income, culturally diverse students (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Johnson, 1994).

The ecological approach is based in the ecological theory of human development created by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Bronfenbrenner conceptualized four levels which are nested within one another. The center most level, the microsystem, is the immediate setting containing the developing person, the student. The microsystem entails the activities, roles, and interpersonal interactions experienced by an individual in a particular setting containing certain physical and material features. Therefore, this includes the student’s home and school, among other settings. The next level, the mesosystem, encompasses the interrelations amid two or more settings in which the individual is an active member. For example, when considering a student, contact and
relations are made between the home and school settings. However, there are also settings in which the individual does not participate and yet the events occurring within these setting impact the individual’s microsystem. This is called the exosystem. An example of this would include the rules and policy implemented by the school board that might influence the school and thus the student. The final level, called the macrosystem, includes the cultural and social factors of a particular culture or subculture that affect the other systems. This level might include the general attitudes of ethnocentric monoculturalism that affect the lives of low-income, culturally diverse students.

An ecological lens provides a more expansive view of the factors that might influence low-income, culturally diverse students’ academic achievement by taking into consideration more than just the individual student and their families. Johnson (1994) has taken Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory and loosely applied it to child-environment interactions within the educational system. Specifically he created a four level, ecological paradigm of educational risks: microrisks, mesorisks, exorisks, and macrorisks. The microrisks are the classroom interactions between the student and the teacher, the student and other students, and the student and the physical environment. The student compositions of the classroom, as well as the influence of the teacher’s beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and interpretations shape the norms by which students are judged. As a result, some classroom contexts may be more suitable for some students than others (Johnson, 1994). The mesorisk, takes into account the child’s home interactions and how they relate with the classroom and the school, which can often be discordant, as the family has its own norms, expectancies, routines, requirements, etc. The next level of risk identified by Johnson is the exorisk which involves exploring the role that the community and its various institutions and social programs have on child development as they interact with the student, their home and the
school. Finally, the last level of risk is the macrorisk which incorporates the social and cultural forces which may affect students identified as at educational risk.

Using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory and Johnson’s (1994) theory of educational risk, one can view the problem of discrepancies in achievement beyond the individual student and his or her family, and recognize the various systems that impact their academic failure and underperformance. In particular, this study focused on mesosystem/mesorisk and macrosystem/macrorisk levels as they apply to the education system when examining the problem of the discrepancies in achievement levels. Within the mesosystem, one begins to see how the microsystem of the student’s school interacts with the microsystem of the student’s family. This can become problematic if the values and beliefs of the various microsystems do not coincide. Similarly, with regard to the macrosystem, there are certain social and cultural norms that are promoted by majority society which are usually exemplified in schools and classrooms. Consequently, those students who belong to subcultures other than the majority culture may be at risk of underperforming or failing in school (Johnson, 1994). The presence of such disconnections between children’s home environment and that of the school has been termed cultural discontinuity. It has been suggested that some of the differences in achievement between low-income, culturally diverse students and their more affluent White peers may be accounted for by the cultural discontinuity that is present within the educational system (Boykin, 2001; Gay, 2000; King, 2004; Nieto, 2004a, 2004b).

Cultural Discontinuity Theory

Scrutiny of our nation’s public education system exposes the ethnocentrism that permeates its organization, instructional methods, and curriculum. As Boykin (2001) noted, schooling encompasses more than just reading, writing, and arithmetic; it supports a particular worldview and way of interpreting reality. Cultural discontinuity theory emphasizes that
Eurocentrically based knowledge and values are reflected in teaching practices and influence teacher-student interactions (Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2003; Marri, 2005). Novick (1996) has compared the United States education system to a factory model of schooling, which “stamp[s] a uniform education on all students” (p. 61). Therefore, students whose backgrounds more closely coincide with Eurocentric norms are at an advantage while there is a cultural disconnection for those students who do not ascribe to such cultural norms and values (Jenks, Lee, & Kanpol, 2001; Perry, 2003; Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000).

Cultural discontinuity theory recognizes that each individual comes from a cultural background and history that influences the lens in which they see the world. The culturally-based skills and knowledge have been defined by Moll and Gonzalez (2004) as “funds of knowledge”. Unfortunately, educators often fail to acknowledge culturally diverse ways of learning, communicating, and relating, and thus invalidate students’ “funds of knowledge” based in their lived, cultural experiences (Foster et al. 2003; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Nieto, 2004a). In fact, in some cases low-income, culturally diverse students’ schooling is culturally contested and may be in conflict with their effort to maintain their cultural identity (Boykin, 2001; Howard, 2001; Karunungan, 2002). The failure of teachers to recognize and utilize students’ cultural background often holds true regardless of the teachers’ own cultural background as most teacher preparation programs are also Eurocentrically oriented (Ford et al., 2002). Consequently, it is the teacher’s pedagogical framework as opposed to skin color that upholds the Eurocentric educational norms (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Culturally-based differences in communication styles and language patterns between culturally diverse students and their Eurocentrically based teachers may be associated with educators’ misunderstandings regarding students’ behavior, intelligence, and academic ability.
(Coleman, 2000; Delpit, 2004; Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006). Some teachers are aware of cultural differences and make an effort to link students’ home lives and learning in school. Regrettably however, far too many teachers’ own outlooks toward cultural diversity often inhibit them from integrating children’s funds of knowledge into the teaching and learning environment (Foster, 1997; Gay, 2000; Jenks et al., 2001; King, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

In most of the nation’s schools there is an expectation that students will not speak or comment on other students’ responses unless called upon. However, this is an example of such a cultural discrepancy because this expectation is based on Eurocentric cultural language traditions (Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006). Some African Americans, Latino Americans, and Native Hawaiians use a communication style that is participatory-interactive. Within a participatory interactive style the audience members give support, respond verbally, and even move when they are speaking (Espinsoa, 2005; Gay, 2000; Lovelace & Wheeler; 2006). Teachers often misinterpret the students’ movement and calling out as a form of disrespect or hyperactivity resulting in the student’s subsequent punishment and removal from the classroom (Ford et al., 2002; Gay, 2000).

**Cultural discontinuity theory and psychological distress**

The process of trying to navigate through the disconnection between their home culture and the culture of the school and classroom for low-income, culturally diverse students may have harmful effects on students’ psychological and emotional well-being (Choi, Meininger, & Roberts, 2006; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Nieto, 2004a). DuBois (1903/1989) stated: “One ever feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings…in one dark body” (p.5). This quote is referring specifically to African Americans and is not specific to education, but it can reflect the experience of many low-income, culturally diverse students who must negotiate the shifts between their home culture and that of
the school. These students are both members of their culture of origin and the majority culture of the United States, and thus they are bicultural. The culturally diverse student is often expected to accept and incorporate the values, beliefs, and practices of the majority culture. At the same time many of these students are simultaneously trying to maintain their own cultural identity (Romero, Carvajal, Valle, & Oruduna, 2007; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Walker, 2007). This negotiation between two environments in which there are competing values, norms, and identities has been reported to negatively impact the psychological well-being of these individuals (Choi et al., 2006; LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Romero et al. 2007; Romero, Martinez, & Caravajal, 2007; Romero & Roberts, 2003).

While traditionally, one conceptualizes biculturalism and the phenomenon of acculturation as pertaining to those individuals who have recently immigrated to the United States it also includes ethnic groups that have resided in the United States for centuries (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997; Walker, 2007). For example, although African Americans may appear to have adopted the language, behavior patterns, and core values of the majority culture, Anderson (1991) in his theory of acculturative stress asserts that this assimilation may occur to different degrees for different individuals. Walker (2007) suggests that African American culture is often one of African origin but has been influenced by sociopolitical and economic isolation and thus may be different from majority “American” culture. Consequently, African American students may experience acculturation stress as a result of their educational experience in the same way as recently immigrated students (Walker, 2007).

Padilla, Wagatsuma, and Lindhorm (1985) and Chavez, Moran, Reid, and Lopez (1997) have emphasized the social stress experienced by culturally diverse individuals. Noting the complex nature of social stress in general and acculturative stress in particular, these researchers
posited that there were three types of social stress: general social stress, process oriented stress, and sociocultural stress. General stress is that stress which is normative to all adolescents as they develop into young adulthood regardless of their cultural background. Process-oriented stress is related to adjusting and interacting in another culture, which may be more relevant to culturally diverse adolescents who are acculturating to the dominant culture. Finally, sociocultural stressors encompass both process oriented stress and discrimination. Choi and colleagues (2006) investigated the differences in mental distress reported by culturally diverse adolescents experiencing social stress. These researchers defined mental distress as depression, somatic symptoms, and suicidal ideation. Using various validated and reliable instruments to assess depression, experiences of social stress, and self esteem, the researchers discovered that culturally diverse adolescents had significantly higher levels of social stress and lower levels of self-esteem than European Americans. Additionally, after controlling for age, gender, and socioeconomic status, African American adolescents reported significantly higher levels of social stress and mental distress than European American adolescents.

A comparable study conducted by Romero et al. (2007) investigated the relationship between bicultural stress and mental health status in Latino American, Asian American, and European American 8th grade students. The researchers defined bicultural stress as stress resulting from discrimination, prejudice, immigration, and acculturation. Statistical analysis of participants’ self report questionnaires revealed that Asian and Latino American students reported a higher frequency of stress than European Americans, often at two to three times the frequency. Moreover, the researchers found that the adolescents’ level of bicultural stress significantly predicted the extent of depressive symptoms. The findings from the Romero study and the Choi study are consistent with the findings from other studies which have found that
culturally diverse adolescents who report experiencing acculturative stress also report more mental health problems or depressive symptoms (Hovey, 1998; Roberts, Roberts, & Chen, 1997; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Romero et al., 2007; Yeh, 2003).

As a confounding factor, poverty can also impact psychological well-being (Corcoran, Danziger, & Tolman, 2004; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003); this is predominantly so for children living in poverty with limited access to health care services (Howell, 2004). The psychosocial adjustment and academic achievement of many impoverished children may be impacted by the numerous stressors these children face, including familial conflict, community violence, and high family mobility (Forehand, Biggar, & Kotchick, 1998; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Luster & McAdoo, 1994; Thompson & Massat, 2005). Additionally, children living in poverty are more likely to report increased levels of anxiety and depression than students from middle class backgrounds and have more behavioral troubles and decreased engagement in school (Black & Krishnakumar, 1998; Caughy, O’ Campo, & Muntaner, 2003; Samaan, 2000).

Cultural discontinuity theory and academic outcomes

The disconnection between the school culture and the home culture has also been shown to impact the educational experiences and outcomes of low-income, culturally diverse students (Coleman, 2000; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2004a). In particular, both low-income and culturally diverse students are disproportionately placed in special education categories (Blair & Scott, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008). Thirty percent of learning disability placement among boys and 39% of learning disability placements among girls may be attributed to low-socioeconomic status markers (Blair & Scott, 2002). Approximately 1.5 million culturally diverse children were identified as having an emotional disturbance, mental retardation, or a specific learning disability in 1998 (The Civil Rights Project, 2002). According to Parrish (2002), African American students have been the most overrepresented culturally
diverse group in special education programs in almost every state. Furthermore, in a 2006 Skiba and colleagues reported that in four out of five disability categories, African American students were more likely to be overrepresented in more restrictive educational settings than their peers with the same disability (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006).

In addition to the disproportional number of culturally diverse students, particularly African American students, in special education, these students are also overrepresented in discipline referrals, expulsions, suspensions, and corporal punishment (Cartledge, Tillman, & Johnson, 2001; Townsend, 2000; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). This is particularly true for African American students (Skiba et al., 2002). Skiba and colleagues report for example, that while only 17% of the total school population in their study was African American, African American students accounted for 32% of suspensions and 30% of expulsions (Skiba et al., 2002). Furthermore, 10.4% of African American students drop out of school, while only 6% of White students drop out (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Similarly, Laird, Debell, & Chapman (2006) found that students from low-income families (defined here as the lowest 20% of all family incomes) were four times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers from high income families (defined as the top 20% of all family incomes).

Within cultural discontinuity theory, the disproportionate placement and representation of low-income and culturally diverse students in special education programs, in receiving disciplinary action, or in dropping out of school may be partially explained by cultural disconnection between students’ home environments and school environment. According to Coleman (2000) and Bazron, Osher, and Fleischmann (2005), educators’ misunderstanding regarding the interactional patterns and culturally-based language differences of these students often results in students’ subsequent punishment and referral for special education placement.
For example, some cultural groups’ affective orientation may be misinterpreted as the students’ immaturity, irrationality, and lower cognitive ability or students’ communalism may be misinterpreted as social dependency (Ford et al., 2002; Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). In addition, students may unconsciously act out and display symptoms of psychological distress in response to such misunderstandings and experiences of cultural discontinuity (Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994).

As discussed, perceived discrimination and acculturative stress have been found to be a significant contributing factor to academic difficulties and academic motivation for culturally diverse students (Cummins, 1986; DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006; Phuntsog, 1999; Romero et al., 2007; Sanchez, Colon, & Esperanza, 2005; Wong et al., 2003). The stressful experience of navigating negative classroom climate has been shown to influence student’s school satisfaction and student’s psychological distress (Baker, 1998). Research has indicated that those students who do not feel that they belong to their schools are more likely to have low academic grades and more absences (Smerdon, 2002). Therefore, considering these research findings through the lens of cultural discontinuity theory, one could make the case that some low-income, culturally diverse students may feel as if they do not belong as result of their experiences of cultural disconnection in the classroom. These experiences can thus impact their psychological well being and academic achievement.

**Relational Cultural Theory**

Relational Cultural theory (RCT) is another theory that can be useful in examining the discrepancies in achievement levels that exists between low-income, culturally diverse students and their more wealthy white peers. Originating as both a counseling theory and a developmental theory to attend to the experiences of women and marginalized cultural groups, RCT stresses the importance of relationships in fostering growth and healing (Jordan, 2001; Miller, 1986b; West,
As a sub theory under ecological theory, RCT too places great importance on the social and cultural context in which groups and individuals live (Hartling, 2008; Jordan & Hartling, 2002) but also seeks to minimize the negative impact of marginalization or cultural oppression through relationships (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2001).

One of the crucial underpinnings of Relational Cultural theory is the belief that all people desire for connection and thus relationship creation and maintenance is conceptualized as a vital aspect of development (Jordan, 2001; Miller, 1986b; West, 2005). RCT proposes that much of suffering comes from feelings of isolation but that healing can occur through a growth fostering relationship (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Movement toward mutual empathy, authenticity, and mutual empowerment are the crucial aspects of such a relationship (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2001). The outcomes of being in a growth fostering relationship include increased vitality and zest, empowerment, clarity, sense of worth, and feelings of connection (Miller, 1986b). Additionally, growth fostering relationships can lead to increased feelings of competence, as well as the prospect for learning, transformation, growth, and meaning making (Hartling, 2008; Jordan, 2001; Jordan & Hartling, 2002).

Unfortunately, as a member of a marginalized group, one is at more of a risk to have their relationships disturbed by issues including poverty, institutional discrimination, and unequal access to resources (Comstock et al., 2008; Hartling, 2008) as can be the case with low-income, culturally diverse students. Within RCT, extended periods of disconnection that are not easily resolved such as power differentials, racism and chronic cultural disconnections are conceptualized as potential sources of disempowerment, distress, and psychological problems (Miller & Stiver, 1997). In particular, according to RCT repeated disaffirmation increases some
individual’s sense of self-doubt, shame, frustration, humiliation, and feelings of unworthiness in relationships (Comstock et al., 2008).

RCT recognizes the Eurocentric cultural bias within society and institutions that encourages independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency and separation, which may not be the values of some culturally diverse groups (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2001). Therefore, individuals from marginalized groups may begin to relate in inauthentic ways, feeling unable to bring into relationships the full aspects of themselves, thus disavowing parts of themselves, their cultures, and their life experiences (Chin, De, Cancela, & Jenkins, 1993; Jordan & Hartling, 2002; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Comstock et al. (2008) suggests that in disconnection individuals experience a decreased sense of energy, a decreased sense of self-efficacy, decreased self-esteem, and disengagement. As described previously, many of these same symptoms were reported by low-income, culturally diverse students when describing their experiences in school (Fisher et al., 2000; Wong et al., 2003). Consequently, RCT serves as a supplemental theory to ecological theory and cultural discontinuity theory in which to examine the discrepancies in academic achievement.

Culturally Responsive Educational Practices

Using ecological theory, cultural discontinuity theory and Relational Cultural theory (RCT) as a lens through which to view the problem of the achievement discrepancies and the behavioral difficulties of low-income, culturally diverse students, the teacher’s role becomes integral. In 1958, Dewey asserted that teachers are responsible for facilitating a sense of community to help students achieve positive outcomes. Mirroring the tenets of RCT, researchers note how an effective teacher can provide students with positive experiences with an adult who provides acceptance, care, and support and how this attachment experience encourages social emotional growth and facilitates low-income, culturally diverse student’s participation in
schooling (Baker, 1998; Sanchez et al., 2005). Moreover, the relationship between teaching quality and student learning highlights the significant role that teachers play in helping students learn (Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002; Odden, Borman, & Fermanich, 2004; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain; 2001). Thus, in looking beyond the student and their families, there is a role in which the educators must play in creating a classroom climate and environment which is conducive to the academic achievement of low-income, culturally diverse students (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Johnson, 1994; Nieto, 2004a; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

As years of focusing on the problem of the discrepancies in achievement have not significantly impacted the narrowing of the differences in academic achievement, the importance of examining instances where there are exceptions to the underperformance of low-income, culturally diverse students becomes increasingly important (Bempechat, 1999). The exploration of exceptions to the problem aligns with solution focused therapy, a prominent theoretical orientation in professional counseling (Berg, 1994; de Shazer, 1988). The goal of exploring the exceptions to the problem is to identify the key factors that precede such successes and then apply such factors to other problematic situations. Therefore, it is important to examine the classrooms and practices of teachers who recognize the importance of teacher-student relationships as well as the potential for cultural discontinuity and thus make an effort to teach in a way that is relationally oriented and culturally synchronous. In doing so, one can begin to identify some of the crucial pedagogy and teacher-student relations that can be strengthened and replicated in other classrooms.

There are many effective teachers who teach in ways in which low-income, culturally diverse students thrive academically, as well as behaviorally, socially and emotionally (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Foster, 1997; Gay, 2000; Karunagan, 2002; Ladson Billings, 1994; Phungstog,
1999; Pransky & Bailey, 2002). Teachers within these classrooms have created a caring, safe, and academically focused classroom environment conducive to learning with limited behavioral difficulties (Bergeron, 2008; Brown, 2004; Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007). These teachers are often named “master teachers” because of their ability to positively impact the academic achievement as well as the behavior, social, and emotional development of low-income, culturally diverse students (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Gay, 2000; Karunagan, 2002; Ladson Billings, 1994; Phungstog, 1999; Pransky & Bailey, 2002).

What culturally responsive master teachers have in common is the ability to bridge the existing cultural disconnection between the education system and the culturally diverse students and their families through culturally responsive education practices that they tailor to the students’ culture. Culturally responsive education combines culture specific pedagogical and instructional methods (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; King, 2004; Nieto, 2004a, 2004b) as well as culturally responsive classroom management and teacher-student relations (Brown, 2003, 2004; Bondy et al., 2007; Weinstein et al., 2003; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Culturally responsive educational practices take an ecological approach to the discrepancies in academic achievement by taking into account the broader context, noting that culturally diverse students are impacted by the various systems that they interact with on a daily basis which includes the school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Butler, 2003). Culturally responsive education gets to possible root causes of the discrepancies in achievement by recognizing the sociopolitical, systemic factors including bias and cultural discontinuity, and using a combination of instructional methods and a personal, growth fostering relationship to mitigate the negative impact.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Instructional Methods

“Pedagogy must provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically” (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 79). Both the student and the teacher are shaped by their “personal, social, cultural, economic and political values from prior beliefs and experiences” which affects how they interpret the classroom culture and social structure (Lalas, 2007, p. 20). Within culturally responsive pedagogy teachers recognize that students come to school with cultural experiences, prior knowledge and ways of learning, and thus utilize this knowledge so that all students can learn important academic skills as well as achieve within the classroom and beyond (Ladson Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2004a, 2004b; Phuntsog, 1999). Thus, culturally responsive instructional practices include the use of “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2000, p. 29).

The exploration of students’ knowledge is a crucial step in culturally responsive education. This exploration does not entail simply reading about a cultural group’s experience, but talking to parents, students, and community members and becoming familiar with the day to day life of students (Howard, 2001; Ladson Billings, 1994). Moll & Gonzalez (2004) call this accessing the students’ “funds of knowledge” which can emanate from various areas like gardening (biological/botanical knowledge), constructing patio walls (masonry), or car restoration (mechanical knowledge). After discovering the student’s funds of knowledge, a teacher can incorporate such knowledge into the instructional processes, as well as identify ways that the students’ daily routines employ reasoning processes that are similar to those needed in problem solving in various subjects, like math, science, etc. (Lee, 2001). Specifically with regard to students, teachers must find out who their students are, what they know, what they need to know, what they are interested in, and what they want to learn (Delpit, 2002; Karunungan, 2002). With
this knowledge of the students in the classroom, the teachers are able to teach in such a way as to builds on students’ strengths, their approaches to learning, and the knowledge that they bring to the classroom (Delpit, 2006; Espinosa, 2005; Ladson Billings; Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004).

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management and Teacher-Student Relations

In an era of educational policy that is marked by No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) and state mandated standardized testing, the focus of teacher educators and in-service teachers has been on pedagogy, instructional methods, curriculum, and content. While the instructional methods and pedagogy are necessary, they are not sufficient. As eloquently articulated by an ESL teacher, “it doesn’t matter what good content you have, or what good curriculum you have, or what exciting lessons you have; if you don’t care about students and they know that, you don’t have a chance to get to them” (Brown, 2003, p. 279). Paralleling the core tenets of Relational Cultural theory, educational literature notes how the relationship and the teachers’ empathy are integral to any academic achievement and personal growth that is going to take place (Ladson Billings, 1994; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Noddings, 1992). This has been found to be particularly true when students and teachers come from differing cultural and social backgrounds (Brown, 2004; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2002; Weinstein et al. 2003; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). Teacher education literature has noted the importance of relationships and other relational processes (McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Noddings, 1992). One approach, named culturally responsive classroom management, provides a description of teacher-student relations. The four delineated aspects include: (a) creating a caring student teacher relationship, (b) holding high expectations, (c) asserting authority, and (d) maintaining culturally congruent communication (Brown, 2003, 2004).
Collete, a high school English teacher, highlights the importance of creating a strong, personal relationship with students when she states “I really believe you have to make that social and emotional connection with kids in order to get inside their heads. You have to get to their heart before you get to their head. The fact that you care makes them see you differently” (Brown, 2004, p. 277). Caring can take the form of creating a personal teacher-student relationship with each student that includes almost daily communication stemming beyond solely academics (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2004; Ladson Billings, 1994). It also entails teacher’s sharing stories of their own lives, finding out about their students interests, giving the students agency in the classroom, and taking the time to actively listen to the student’s worries and opinions (Weinstein et al., 2003). Although students want to be cared for, this does not mean that caring is only demonstrated through affection and nurturing. Caring is also depicted in the way teachers expect the students to succeed and communicate their belief in the students’ abilities (Bondy et al., 2007; Howard, 2001). Being culturally responsive means holding clearly expressed high expectations, holding the students accountable for their work, and not accepting any excuses (Brown, 2003, 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2000; Weinstein et al., 2003; Wilson & Corbett, 2001).

A corollary to holding high expectations for these students is the teacher’s ability to assert his or herself as the leader within the classroom by being both assertive and authoritative (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2003). The teachers make it clear to the students that they mean what they say and they make a concerted effort to consistently enforce rules and hold the students to high behavioral standards. They also try to provide an environment where students are protected physically, socially, and academically (Brown, 2003, 2004; Delpit, 1995). The final component of culturally responsive classroom management involves being attentive to the culturally based
communication styles and language patterns that may be present when working with low-income, culturally diverse students (Delpit, 2004, Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006). Effective teachers of these students recognize these differences and develop congruent communication processes, which may entail modifying their own, so that they can create relationships with their students through genuine interactions (Brown, 2004; Weinstein et al., 2003). For example, Delpit (1995) noted that while it is common for White middle class teachers to use indirect strategies like “Jordan, would you like to begin?”, both African American students and students from working class families are more familiar with and more responsive to straightforward directives. To meet the communication patterns of lower income and culturally diverse students, culturally responsive teachers would incorporate more direct messages with their teaching style.

**Culturally Responsive Education Practices for African American Students**

Considering that the current study will specifically be examining the relationship development and the interactions between master teachers and their low-income, African American students, it is important to discuss culturally responsive educational practices with this population. Culturally responsive practices with African American populations are often called Afrocentric pedagogy or African centered pedagogy. According to Murrell (2002), this pedagogy is “what teaching and learning are like when they are centered in African American cultural heritage” (p.51). Though African American individuals and their family ascribe to their African American cultural heritage in varying degrees (Boykin, 1994; Lee, 2005; Walker, 2007) and while one cannot isolate African American culture down to a monolithic description of beliefs, values and characteristics (Murrell, 2002; Sue & Sue, 2003) the literature presents information which can situate learning, teaching and teacher-student relationships within a cultural context. That is not to say that African American children will not express cultural themes of European origin, but the centrality of Afro-cultural themes in African American children’s communities
and family activities will be of particular significance to their development. This is particularly so for low-income, African American children who may be more distanced from mainstream beliefs and practices because of lack of exposure due to economic circumstance (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Boykin, 1994). The three themes that appear central to African centered pedagogy and educational practice include communalism, epistemological belief in socially constructed learning, and verve (Boykin, 1986, 2001; Foster, 1995; Hale, 2001; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Murrell, 2002).

Communalism is a fundamental theme in understanding African American culture and African-centered educational practices. Communalism can be understood as encompassing a “we-ness” to all that is undertaken. Consequently in the classroom, it is not the teacher distanced from the students in the learning process, but instead teaching and learning is a joint venture embarked on together (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Murrell, 2002). The social context in an African-centered classroom is best described as a family in which there are set routines, traditions, practices, celebrations, and ways of interacting that bind the members together and facilitate nurturing caring relationships (Boykin, 2001; Foster, 1995; King, 2005; Murrell, 2002). Therefore, according to Murrell, a community is created which the link between students and with the teacher is socially recognized and individuals work together toward a common purpose or set of objectives. Moreover, given its familial context a holistic view is taken of each individual. Thus the teacher is concerned with more than just the child’s acquisition of knowledge and their cognitive growth, but also students’ moral, ethical, and personal development are of relevance (Foster, 1995).

The second central theme is greatly intertwined with communalism. African centered educational practice rests in the epistemological belief in socially constructed learning (Hale,
African American students do not typically learn best when their learning is oriented to objects, but instead they learn and develop when their learning is focused toward people (Hale, 2001; Murrell, 2002). According to Murrell, “the development of children’s capacity to think, reason, communicate and perform academically is a matter of practice—a matter of knowledge in use that is enacted in socially situationed and culturally contextualized settings” (p. 50). Moreover, there should be opportunities for continuous interpersonal engagement that allow for students to produce work products in a collective effort (Murrell, 2002). Learning thus takes places in a social process that is influenced by the community discourse, and it is through this that the students and the teacher acquire both received and constructed knowledge (Murrell, 2002). Part of this social engagement and interaction can take place through incorporating the knowledge traditions and communication patterns including narrative, call and response, indirection, and wordplay (Foster, 2001; Murrell, 2002).

The third theme of African pedagogy and educational practice is the theme of verve (Boykin, 1979). Verve is often referred to in education research in terms of the African American cultural tendency toward high levels of stimulation to action, energy, and ability to tend to multiple concerns at once (Berry, 2005; Boykin, 1983, 1986, 2001; Hale, 2001). Boykin and colleagues suggested that African American homes abound with stimulation, intensity and variation, due to the propensity in some homes for there to be a variety of activities occurring and a large number of people present in the homes. Also, they have asserted that some of the high stimulation in low-income, African American homes is based in a movement and expressive orientation connected with music (Allen & Boykin, 1991; Boykin, 1983; Boykin & Allen, 1988; Lee, 2005). Similarly, Hale (2001) refers to African American children’s exposure to high
degrees of stimulation through visual arts, video arts, and music. A number of researchers have thus noted how many African American children have an elevated “behavioral vibrancy” and an elevated affinity toward stimulus change (Berry, 2005; Boykin, 1983, 1986, 2001; Hale, 2001). Consequently, teachers wanting to create a learning environment that integrates African American students’ culture would use multimodal teaching methods as well as the use of multimedia in their instruction (Hale, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Furthermore, African centered educational practices would also include opportunities for student oral performance, movement and kinesthetic activity, (Boykin, 1983, 1986, 2001; Murrell, 2001; King, 2005; Lee, 2005).

Outcomes of Culturally Responsive Education

Academic outcomes

Examining the discrepancies in achievement levels through the lenses of ecological, cultural discontinuity and cultural relational theory, versus deficit theory, provides a more inclusive framework in which to explore some of the roots of academic underachievement and potential interventions. Specifically, as noted, the educational practices of culturally responsive, master teachers get to the potential causes of these achievement discrepancies resulting in academic gains for their low-income, culturally diverse students (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Foster, 1997; Foster, 2004; Foster et al., 2003, 2005; Gay, 2000; Karunagan, 2002; Ladson Billings, 1994; Phuntsog, 1999; Pransky & Bailey, 2002).

One example of the use of culturally responsive educational practices is that of the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP). KEEP is a K-3 language arts program that was developed after identifying cultural discontinuity as one of the major problems in the poor academic achievement of low-income, Native Hawaiian students (Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993). This program was created in the late 1970s, and is one of the older examples of the
effectiveness of culturally responsive practice. The program was adapted to include culturally responsive instructional practices, classroom organization, and motivation management based in Hawaiian culture (Vogt et al., 1993). Specifically, the program moved from a phonics approach to reading to a comprehension approach, implemented more group work, and used culturally based forms of encouragement, including indirect and group praise. According to Tharp and colleagues (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Tharp 1982) students made pronounced improvements in reading and maintained results above the academic achievement of non-KEEP programs.

A more contemporary example of the efficacy of culturally responsive teaching is that of the research conducted by Pransky and Bailey (2002). The researchers present a number of case studies regarding efforts to minimize the cultural discontinuity in the classroom for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Noting that various academic variables impact academic performance, the researchers documented academic progress made by these students through test results and observational data. In particular, they found that 80% of the students within the culturally responsive teacher’s classroom passed the state’s comprehensive assessment test. The passing rates for ESL students across the state averaged below 50%, with some districts passing rates as low as 10%. Additionally, aggregate test scores of these ESL students showed increased movement toward grade level performance and teachers observed an increase in quality of academic work and increased participation of the students.

Foster and colleagues (2003, 2005) also focus on culturally responsive teaching, but specifically focus on such practices with low-income, African American students. The researchers developed an after school programs for low-income, culturally diverse students focusing on language arts, mathematics, science, and the arts taught by culturally responsive master teachers at three locations. Overall, the afterschool program had a positive impact on
students’ academic achievement and behavior (Foster, 2004; Foster et al., 2003, 2005). In particular, the absence of problematic behavior and the presence of positive behaviors in the programs were noticed, as well as everyday classroom teachers noting the increase and influence of positive behaviors in the classroom as well. Conversations and informal interviews indicate that parents have noticed changes in their children’s behavior and their child’s excitement about learning. Additionally, students participating in the program showed increases in test scores based on pre and post test data in reading and mathematics (Foster et al., 2003) and outperformed a matched district sample in reading and writing on a district administered test (Foster et al., 2005).

Finally, Peterek and Adams (in press) present a case study of a fifth grade teacher who exemplifies culturally responsive education practices. Teaching in a Title I school that serves a predominantly low-income, African American population, this master teacher has set high expectations that her students not only met but exceeded. She addressed the cultural characteristics of her students by incorporating oral chanting, call and response, clapping, and rhythmic movements into her classroom practices. This teacher used her understanding of her students as a basis on which to create meaningful learning experiences. The results of such culturally responsive efforts helped students to move from poor to outstanding scores on the state’s standardized tests (Peterek & Adams, in press). In fact, her students had some of the highest standardized mathematics test scores in the state.

**Psychological outcomes**

Given the prominence of standardized testing in educational policy and practice and the continued existence of discrepancies in achievement levels, much of the emphasis with regard to culturally responsive education has concentrated on academic outcomes, including standardized tests and grade point averages. However, the impact that master teachers’ culturally responsive
practices can have on the psychological and emotional development of low-income, culturally diverse students has not been explored sufficiently.

In getting to know their students and integrating various instructional methods and content so as to meet the students cultural experiences, master teachers are affirming their students’ identity and demonstrating their care for low-income, culturally diverse students. Cummins (1996) suggests that teachers’ efforts to affirm students’ developing cultural identities through teacher-student interactions, may result in students putting forth more academic effort and actively participating in more instruction. Moreover, Cummins asserts that teachers, who encourage students to add a second language and cultural affiliation while preserving their home language and culture are more apt to create an empowering environment, versus those teachers who encourage the replacement of students’ home language and culture as a means of assimilation.

Rosario Diaz-Greenberg (2001) investigated the educational practices that encourage the emergence and legitimization of Latino American students’ voices. Using a participatory research approach, Diaz-Greenberg interviewed Latino American students and gained their opinions. The students spoke of their desire for more culturally responsive practices including a curriculum that incorporates the perspectives of the students and their families. Pervasive throughout the study included students’ comments regarding their ethnic identities and culture. Therefore, those students who felt their voices were respected and their culture validated reported feeling more positively about themselves (worth and self esteem), a sense of connectedness and safety in the learning environment, and greater belief in their ability to critically analyze information (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001).
In a similar qualitative study, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), in her renowned book *Dreamkeepers*, describes her qualitative study of eight successful teachers of African American students. She not only discussed the positive academic outcomes of these teachers’ students, but also of the impact on the psychological well-being of students. She stated that culturally responsive teaching practice respects students’ sense of humanity and dignity. Students’ self-worth and self-concept is promoted as teachers make an effort to get to know their students and incorporate their culture and knowledge, thus acknowledging the students’ worthiness. Ladson Billings asserts that the hope of these teachers is that the students have sense of ownership of their knowledge and are empowered by it. She also noted that the teachers also use the students’ culture as a source of celebration and a means of affirming them and their identities. Moreover, Ladson-Billings shares about the classrooms of culturally responsive teachers stating “psychological safety is a hallmark of each of these classrooms. The students feel comfortable and supported” (p. 73).

**Five Standards of Effective Pedagogy**

Despite the voluminous literature discussing culturally responsive education and its efficacy in impacting the academic achievement and the psychological well-being of students, it can often be unclear as to what exactly a culturally responsive teacher does. Some of the major aspects of culturally responsive instructional methods have been identified by Dalton (1998) and Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, and Yamauchi (2000). Tharp and colleagues (2000) identified the conditions that maximize academic excellence in low-income, culturally diverse and linguistically diverse students. Out of their work they proposed five principles of pedagogy that maximize teaching and learning for culturally, linguistically and economically diverse students across all subjects: 1) teachers and students producing together, 2) developing language and literacy across the curriculum, 3) making meaning and connecting school to student’s lives, 4)
teaching complex thinking, and 5) teaching through dialogue. The premise behind each of these five standards have been articulated in various other educational research across student populations (Bower, 1997; Carpenter, Fennema, & Franke, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Newman, 1996) and thus there has been consensus based agreement based on the evidence throughout educational research and development (Tharp, 1999). The Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) has named these the Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy.

The first standard, “joint productive activity” emphasizes that learning takes place most effectively when teachers and students work and communicate together to reach a common goal or product (Hillberg, Doherty, Epaloose, & Tharp., 2004; Tharp et al., 2000). Teachers play an active, but not a dominant role in the process and share in the experience to allow for extensive discussion. This is particularly important when students and teachers different cultures as joint product activities provide a shared common context within the school experience (Tharp et al., 2000). The second standard involves the facilitation of language and literacy in all subject areas and in all instructional activities. Students are to be continually given opportunities to speak, write, practice language use, and receive conversational feedback. The teacher’s role is to aid in students’ language development by questioning, rephrasing, and modeling (Tharp et al., 2000; Hillberg et al., 2004).

The third standard relates to what Moll and Gonzalez (2004) have named “funds of knowledge” discussed previously. Consequently, this involves connecting school learning to student’s lives, thus building on the experiences, interests, and knowledge that students obtain from their homes and communities. The fourth standard emphasizes teaching higher order thinking skills and enhancing students’ development of more complex thinking. Also called
“challenging activities”, these activities involve tasks that challenge the students to grow in their zones of proximal development, give students the chance to apply new information, and balance challenge and assistance to enhance students’ complex thinking. (Hillberg et al., 2004; Tharp et al., 2000). The fifth and final standard is teaching through conversation, also called “instructional conversation” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). According to Tharp and colleagues (2000), such student teacher dialogue creates conditions for maximizing learning, which include the development of the student-teacher relationship, the facilitation of the relationship between the school knowledge and the student’s home knowledge, and enhancements in critical thinking.

**Teacher Evaluation Research**

The Five Standards of Effective Pedagogy (Tharp et al., 2000) are an example of the instructional components found to be important in enhancing student performance. However, effective instructional methods are only part of the interaction process that occurs in the classroom. As Jeff, a high school English teacher states, “You’re there to teach kids—not subjects!” (Brown, 2003, p. 278). Educators and school counselors have long noted the importance of positive classroom climates conducive to learning and the caring relationship between teachers and students (Baker, 1999; Fraser & Wallberg, 1991; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Noddings, 1992). Much of the research has indicated that positive classroom climates are related to increased academic achievement, decreased behavioral difficulties, and affective outcomes including motivation, self-worth, and engagement (Birch & Ladd, 1997, 1998; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; Ryan & Patrick, 2001)

Furrer and Skinner (2003) investigated students’ sense of relatedness and its impact on students’ engagement level. According to the researchers, sense of relatedness can be assessed by measures of school climate and quality of teacher-student relationships, in addition to feelings
of belonging, inclusion, acceptance, importance and interpersonal support. A group of 641 3rd to 6th grades students’ rated their relatedness to their teachers and their parents, their perceived control in academics, and their behavioral/emotional engagement in class. Teachers also rated each student’s engagement. Regression analysis indicated that students’ perceptions of relatedness to teachers were positively associated with both student-rated and teacher-rated engagement. Additionally, teacher-rated engagement was associated with academic performance.

Ryan and Patrick (2001) investigated how eighth grade students perceptions of the social climate of their eighth grade classroom were associated with students changes in motivation and engagement as they moved from seventh to eighth grade. Social climate was broken into four components: the extent to which teachers fostered teacher-student relationships, promoted interaction among students around an academic task, fostered mutual respect among students, and the promotion of academic competition and comparison among students. Controlling for prior motivation and engagement, gender, race, and prior achievement, social climate was found to be significantly related to changes in students’ social efficacy with the teacher, academic efficacy, self-regulated learning and disruptive behavior. Students’ perception of their teacher as supportive were related to positive changes in motivation and engagement, including increased confidence with the teacher, self-regulated learning, and decreased disruptive behavior. Students who felt their teacher was trying to understand them and was available for help were more engaged with less off task behavior in the classroom.

A critical part of classroom is the teacher-student relationship. Researchers have long emphasized how the relationship can serve as the foundation on which learning and growth occur in both K-12 classrooms and college classrooms (Brophy & Good, 1974; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Noddings, 1992; Lowman, 1994). In their study of the intergenerational bonds between
teachers and students, Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004) found that stronger teacher-student relationships were associated with a higher likelihood of academic achievement and less likelihood of behavior difficulty. The teacher-student relationship has been deemed particularly important for those students deemed “at-risk” due to behavior, socioeconomic status, prior academic performance, and their community’s drop out rate (Baker, 1999; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Ladson Billings, 1994; Meehan et al., 2003; Muller, 2002).

Hamre and Pianta (2005) conducted a study with 910 five to six year olds identified as high functional risk or low functional risk based on the students’ scores on measures of attention, externalizing behavior, social skills and academic achievement. They found that “high risk” students in highly emotionally supportive classrooms had similar levels of conflict with teachers and levels of academic achievement as those students identified as “low risk”. However, “high risk” students in low or moderately emotionally supportive classrooms had lower achievement and higher conflict with teachers than “low risk” students. Baker (1999) conducted a mixed-method study using observations, interviews and self-report questionnaires to examine teacher-student relationships among low-income, African American third through fifth graders. Those students who reported high satisfaction with school indicated that they felt more supported and cared for by teachers than those students who reported less satisfaction. This is of particular importance as students’ feelings of school satisfaction have been associated with school engagement, school completion, academic motivation and achievement (Goodenow & Grady, 1992; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Sanchez et al., 2005).

Meehan, Hughes and Cavell (2003) focused on the association between positive teacher-student relationships, and the aggression levels of aggressive second and third grade students. Students were identified by their teachers as fitting the behavioral description of a physically or
relationally aggressive child. Meehan and colleagues found that teacher-rated support predicted lower levels of teacher-rated aggression. Moreover, the relationships between teachers and students were more strongly predictive of lower levels of peer-rated and teacher-rated aggression for aggressive African American and Latino students than for aggressive White students. The researchers suggest that the culturally diverse students may be more responsive to the positive relationship with their teachers than White students because positive interactions between teachers and White students are more commonplace.

Considering the information described above, exemplary teachers appear to be those who can create a semblance of balance between the creation and maintenance of relationships and the implementation of instructional methods. From his examination of effective teachers, Lowman (1984) developed the two-dimensional model which includes “intellectual stimulation” or the teacher’s stimulation of interest and clarity of presentation and “rapport” which depicts the teacher’s interpersonal skills and their ability to increase student motivation. The model depicts the complex negotiation of both the task and the relational processes of effective teaching (Lowman, 1994).

**Process Product Research**

The interactional processes of effective teachers have been of interest in educational research for over forty years as there has been a search for the instructional practices and relational variables that lead to positive academic outcomes. This research, called process-product or process outcome research, looks to identify and quantify the relationship between classroom processes and student outcomes. The classroom processes are understood in terms of teaching behaviors and practices, while the outcomes are the student’s learning and behavior (Gettinger & Kohler, 2006; Brophy & Good, 1986). While process-product research has
decreased currently, it was quite prominent in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. One area of interest within process-product research is teacher-effect research. Teacher-effect research examines teacher behaviors and interactions between teachers and students and their relationship with student performance.

Teacher-effect research consists primarily of observing the teachers at work in their classrooms. Using methods described as interaction analysis (Amidon & Hughes, 1967, Flanders, 1970) or systematic classroom observation (Hillberg, Waxman, & Tharp, 2004), researchers use classroom observation instruments to document teacher behaviors. The researchers then calculate the relationship between the frequency of such behaviors and measurable student achievement and behavioral outcomes (Gettinger & Kohler, 2006). This line of research has created an abundance of evaluation systems for examining the interactional processes within classrooms, including, for example, Flanders’ Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC; Flanders, 1970), Reciprocal Category System and Equivalent Talk Categories (Ober, Bentley, & Miller, 1971), Observational System for Instructional Analysis (OSIA; Hough & Duncan, 1970) and Classroom Observation Keyed for Effectiveness Research (Medley, Coker, & Soar, 1984). Many of the well-known quantitative process-product studies exploring teacher behavior and student achievement are reviewed by Brophy and Good (1986). It is important to note that historically teacher-effect researchers have assumed that these teaching behaviors were applicable to all students regardless of student background.

In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s there was a shift toward interpretive, qualitative paradigms of research as way of examining the complexities of classroom dynamics (Gettinger & Kohler, 2006). According to Cochran and Lytle (1990), “research from these perspectives presumes that teaching is a highly complex, context-specific, interactive activity in which
differences across classrooms, schools, and communities are critically important” (p. 3). Qualitative studies typically explore classroom interactions through detailed observation or small case studies which take the form of in-depth field studies or narrative descriptions (Jacobs, Kawanka, & Stigler, 1999). More recently, researchers returned to quantitative studies of teaching through the use of various instruments and questionnaires measuring student’s and teacher’s perceptions of teacher-student relationships and classroom interactions (Fraser, 1998; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005).

**School Counselor’s Role in Culturally Responsive Education**

Within the past twenty years, school counselors have inserted themselves more substantially within schools by taking on a greater leadership role (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Dollarhide, 2003). In the past, school counselors have used their psychological and relational skill sets to facilitate change within individual students and their families, however they are now moving toward also using these same skills when acting as systems change agent in schools. This role expansion is depicted in the American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) National Model (ASCA, 2003). The ASCA Model stresses that the school counselors’ responsibility is to take on leadership, advocacy and consultant roles that are integral to the academic mission and systemic change of schools. Theses roles are particularly important with school counselors working in schools with large populations of low-income, culturally diverse students (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007b; Bemak, 2000; Bemak & Chung, 2005; Lee, 2005).

Brown and Trusty (2005) specifically note that the school counselors can minimize the discrepancies in achievement levels through their role as consultant. The concept of the school counselor serving as a consultant is not a new concept. In fact, researchers have been advocating for school counselor consultation for decades (Faust, 1968; Hoskins, Astramovich, & Smith, 2007; Strein & French, 1984). Counselor educators have been emphasizing the importance of
increasing school counselors’ consultation knowledge and skills (Davis, 2003). Moreover, youth in schools particularly, low-income, culturally diverse students, face a number of complex problems. Noting this, Keys, Bemak, Carpenter and King Sears (1998) and Bemak (2000) emphasize the need for school counselors to consult with parents, community members, and teachers. School counselors already consult with teachers on a variety of topics including, for example, helping teachers to connect with the affective domain of their students (Strein & French, 1984), develop relationships and rapport with and among students (Rice & Smith, 1993; Wittmer & Clark, 2002), work in preventing behavioral issues within the classroom (Clemens, 2007) and work more effectively with students with attention deficit hyper activity disorder (Schwiebert, Sealander, & Dennison, 2002). More recently, there has been an emphasis for school counselors to integrate their multicultural competencies into their consultation with teachers (Coleman & Baskin, 2003). While school counselors have been encouraged to consult, an area in which school counselors could increase their consultation role with teachers is by helping them to develop and implement culturally responsive education practices (Amatea & West Olatunji, 2007b).

The ASCA Model’s three pronged emphasis on student academic, career, and personal/social development of students (ASCA, 2003) clearly indicates the necessity of involvement of the school counselors in not only minimizing the differences in academic achievement, but also improving the overall psychological well-being of their students. Although improvements in the psychological well-being of students has always been a goal of school counselors, within an ecological perspective, school counselors aim to intervene to impact macrosystemic factors, including bias and cultural discontinuity (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007a). Given this aim, one of the most significant roles of the school counselor in impacting the
discrepancies in achievement will be through his/her role as a consultant (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007b; Bemak, 2000). With the student to counselor ratio averaging 475 to one (Sable & Noel, 2008), it is impossible for the school counselor to be able to reach all of these individuals directly and do so effectively. Because teachers interact with students on a daily basis, they are in a critical position to create a classroom environment that will ensure cultural integrity and academic achievement (Phuntsog, 1999). Thus the school counselor’s partnership with teachers can be crucial.

Preceding the call for more leadership skill development among school counselors, many school counselors perceived the issues of teacher preparation, teacher instruction, and classroom dynamics as less relevant to their daily responsibilities (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). However, given the current directive and the pervasiveness of the achievement discrepancies, it is imperative that school counselors attempt to transform the experiences and significantly impact achievement outcomes for low-income, culturally diverse students (Bemak, 2000; Hines & Fields, 2004; Lee, 2005). As a consultant the school counselor can partner with teachers to create culturally responsive environments to not only positively impact low-income, culturally diverse students’ academic performance, but the students’ psychological well-being as well.

School Counselor Preparation and Competencies

School counselors are uniquely trained to work alongside teachers to create culturally responsive environments. While school counselors have not been trained extensively in teaching pedagogy or instructional methods, school counselors have received training in relationship development, interpersonal skills, and human development, as well as multicultural awareness and understanding. In fact, the main accrediting body for counselor education programs, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP), requires that school counseling students accrue a minimum of 48 semester hours of graduate coursework
including eight core areas which must address strict standards (CACREP, 2001). Three of the areas that specifically point to school counselors’ preparation and ability to work with teachers regarding culturally responsive practices include the areas of human growth and development, helping relationships, and social and cultural diversity (CACREP, 2001).

The area of “helping relationships” focuses on creating conditions which can facilitate the ability to connect with another human being on an interpersonal level. In particular, this area focuses on the “characteristics and behaviors that influence helping processes including age, gender, and ethnic differences, verbal and nonverbal behaviors and personal characteristics, orientation and skills” (CACREP, 2001, p. 14). Therefore, school counselors are aware of the various intricacies within relationships. Considering the expansive literature pointing to the importance of the teacher-student relationship and its link to positive student outcomes, particularly for low-income or culturally diverse students (Baker, 1999; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Meehan et al., 2003; Ryan & Patrick, 2001) school counselors knowledge of relationship development is significant. School counselors’ knowledge and skills will be further enhanced with a better understanding of how master teachers develop relationships and use their relationships with their low-income, culturally diverse students in the learning process.

The human growth and development area emphasizes the developmental processes throughout the lifespan. Specifically some of the topics that must be covered include theories of individual and family development, theories of learning and personality, and approaches for facilitating optimum development (CACREP, 2001). A working knowledge of these theories gives school counselors a context in which to understand classroom climate and student learning processes. In addition, the standards require that counseling students gain an understanding of developmental crises, psychopathology, and environmental factors that can impact behavior
School counselors particularly focus on child and adolescent development which provides an understanding of some of the potential social and emotional needs of students at different age levels (ASCA, 2003).

The third area of social and cultural diversity is of particular importance regarding the unique skill set of school counselors. This area focuses on the:

- cultural contexts of relationships, issues and trends in a multicultural and diverse society related to such factors as culture, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical characteristics, education, family values, religious and spiritual values, socioeconomic status and unique characteristics of individuals, couples, families, ethnic groups and communities. (CACREP, 2001, p. 12)

Additionally, aspects of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination as well as how certain behaviors that are supported by the majority culture can negatively impact individuals psychologically and physically are addressed (CACREP, 2001). To avoid the continuation of such negative outcomes, the profession has emphasized the significance of training culturally competent counselors who are able to effectively work with clients from a variety of backgrounds and orientations (Sue & Sue, 2003). The American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) code of ethics stresses professional school counselor’s duty to strive toward cultural competence and gain an improved “awareness, knowledge, skills and effectiveness in working with diverse populations” (ASCA, 2004, p. 4). More recently there has been a movement toward social justice and the importance of counselors taking an advocacy role in addressing the needs of marginalized populations (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Keys et al., 1998; Lewis, Lewis, Daniels, & D’Andrea, 2003) which aligns with ASCA’s (2003) promotion of school counselor advocacy.

The teacher education literature indicates that even with a mandatory multicultural education class within most teacher training programs and/or discussions of multicultural
education practices, many novice teachers are resistant to or have difficulty with its practical application (Bergeron, 2008; Bondy et al., 2007; Jenks et al., 2001; King, 2004; Ladson Billings, 1994; Marbley, Bonner, McKisick, Henfield, & Watts, 2007; Nieto, 2004a). Given their multicultural training, counselors can help teachers deepen their understanding of the negative influence of mono-cultural instructional practices and the necessity of using more culturally responsive educational approaches (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008).

Unfortunately, counselors are not always a part of the conversation regarding teacher preparation, teacher instruction, or classroom dynamics as these topics seemed to be less relevant to the daily responsibilities of professional school counselors (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). School counselors have developed interventions aimed at decreasing the impact of cultural discontinuity on students, but these interventions often do not include working in partnership with teachers (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Mitchell, Bush, & Bush, 2002). For example, Bailey and Paisley (2004) developed Project: Gentleman on the Move (PGOTM), a comprehensive and developmental program that takes a holistic, culturally based approach about the empowerment of African American male adolescents. The program took place during after school hours and on the weekends. One of the components of the intervention included content aimed towards the students’ academic and social growth. Academic topics included African and family history and study skill enhancement, while social topics included self-efficacy, community service, professional etiquette and acceptance of individual differences. The students also participated in individual and group counseling as well as went on field trips, college visitations, and community service projects. The program also involved parents and family members but did little to involve teachers or impact the school context. Results showed that students who participated in the program had higher GPAs than those students who were referred
to the program but chose not to participate. Interviews from the students indicated that students who participated had increased academic motivation, self-efficacy, and increased leadership. Parent interviews revealed similar themes as well as improved social skills and a peer support network.

Although a promising intervention, the role of the school counselor cannot be limited to direct services solely aimed toward decreasing and remediating for the impact of cultural discontinuity. Given the current mandate school counselors must insert themselves proactively into the conversation regarding the differences in achievement levels so as to prevent low-income, culturally diverse students from experiencing cultural discontinuity and relational disconnections in the classroom. As psychological, interactional experts, with multicultural training school counselors must play a more integral role in ensuring the minimization of discrepancies in achievement levels and the enhancement of the psychological well-being of low-income, culturally diverse students through partnership and consultation with teachers (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). However, in order to do so more effectively it is important that school counselors get a fuller picture of the practices and interactional processes of culturally responsive master teachers.

Conclusions

Discrepancies in the achievement levels between low-income, culturally diverse students and their economically privileged White classmates continue to plague educators, school counselors, and parents. Many attempts to minimize the discrepancies have been based in deficit theory, aiming to remediate the students and their families. Not only have these efforts failed to significantly minimize the achievement level discrepancies, they may actually negatively impact low-income, culturally diverse students. Educators have begun to acknowledge the sociocultural and sociopolitical context in which students live, and how these students often experience a
disconnection between the culture of the school and that of the students’ homes which can negatively impact their academic achievement and psychological well-being.

As a result, some educators have begun to develop and implement more culturally responsive educational practices, including instructional methods and relational processes. Research suggests that such practices not only positively impact the academic achievement of these students, but also positively affects their psychological well-being. Given the psychological, relational and multicultural training of school counselors and their dedication to the academic progress and psychological health of all students, school counselors must take a role in facilitating culturally responsive educational practices. However, in order to do so, a more detailed, illustrative description of culturally responsive educational practices is needed. Researchers have begun to describe the instructional methods and behavioral practices of master teachers that impact the academic achievement of low-income, culturally diverse students. However, a dearth of research exists pertaining to the interactions between master teachers and their low-income, culturally diverse students which may yield positive psychological outcomes.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to develop a theory using grounded theory methodology that describes the relational processes characterizing how culturally responsive master teachers develop and use their relationships with their low-income, African-American students to facilitate learning. In particular, the present study identified and described specific teacher-student interactions, responses and relationships that might affect the psychological well-being of students. Psychological well-being has not been uniformly defined, but has been measured in various ways through self-report instruments (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Sandvick, Diener, & Seidlitz, 1993). However, there does not appear to be consensus regarding directly observable behaviors reflecting psychological well-being. Consequently, only students’ behaviors reflecting either levels of engagement with the teacher or other students, or students’ interest or on task behavior could be inferred from the data. In this chapter a description of the methodological framework, the researcher’s subjectivity statement, the participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures are presented.

Methodological Framework

It was decided by the researcher that the purpose of this study and the research questions posed in this study were best examined through qualitative methods. Because the existing theories such as Relational Cultural theory and Sociocultural theory did not provide specific detail to guide the study theoretically, the methodology of grounded theory was used.

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and is based in a post-positivist framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Post-positivism asserts that the entire truth can never be fully realized, but that it can be approximated through the research process (Lincoln &
Grounded theory seeks to discover or build theory from the data, thus moving away from the tradition of theory testing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). More specifically through data collection and systematic data analysis, grounded theory aims to gain an understanding of concepts in order to provide a theoretical explanation of social phenomena (Straus & Corbin, 1998). Data analysis is a cycle of inductive processes in which concepts are identified and hypotheses made based upon the observations from the data, which are then proceeded by hypothesis testing to provide verification of the emerging theory.

Within grounded theory, the sample of the study is not set prior to the beginning of the study. Instead the sample is determined by the process of data analysis and the identification of concepts categories and themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, data collection and analysis continues along with the constant comparative method in order to “maximize opportunities to discover variations among concepts and to densify categories in terms of their properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 201). When the added data collection and analysis no longer yields new information that augments the developing theory, thus reaching what grounded theory calls “theoretical saturation” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Corbin and Strauss (1990) note the provisional nature of concept discovery in the research process of grounded theory. Actual incidents or activities are analyzed as having the potential to be indicators of phenomena, and are given conceptual labels (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, concepts must repeatedly present within the observation data, or significantly absent, in order to be integrated into the emerging theory. Therefore concepts are grounded in the reality of the data and not based upon the researchers’ preconceived notions. A key part within this process is the constant comparative method (Glaser & Straus, 1967) also called comparative
analysis (Straus & Corbin, 1998). This process includes comparing the similarities and differences between incidents and incident’s properties to begin classifying incidents into categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Straus and Corbin discuss moving beyond comparing incidents to making theoretical comparisons to facilitate understandings of properties and dimensions of concepts. From the analysis of various concepts, relationships are hypothesized and then tested as the more data is analyzed and through this process a theory emerges.

There are three specific phases of coding in grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding consists of doing a line by line or video segment by video segment analysis of the data. The segments are broadly coded and then compared to one another in terms of similarities and differences. Codes of interaction/action segments that are conceptually similar or related are grouped under conceptual labels, often called concepts or categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding is followed by axial coding in which categories are grouped and assembled according to their relationships among one another. Axial coding is “the process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed ‘axial’ because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123).

The final phase, selective coding, consists of examining and incorporating the categories’ properties and dimensions, as well as relationships among the categories into a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In grounded theory the researcher uses theoretical memos to document his/her reflective process regarding the codes, categories and emerging theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical memo writing is considered foundational to the development of a theory (Glaser, 1978). According to Glaser as one analyzes the data, he or she should be writing down his or her ideas regarding the codes and categories and their
relationships among one another. In writing theoretical memos, one is to have a nonjudgmental attitude to allow for a free flow of ideas. This memo writing facilitates the expansion of properties and dimensions of categories, the integration of categories, and theory conceptualization ideas (Glaser, 1978).

Subjectivity Statement

In this work, the researcher must acknowledge the frame of reference from which she engaged in this research. The researcher is a white female in her late 20’s. She grew up in a white family of middle to upper-middle income. She has not experienced living in an income bracket that would be considered low-income. Even as a graduate student, though financially strained at times, her experiences do not approximate the experience of the students from which this research study focuses. Moreover, her culture aligns with the Eurocentric base espoused in the U.S. education system and to her knowledge has not experienced cultural discontinuity either during her K-12 or higher education experiences. Her experiences in school have been predominantly positive, and she has never struggled significantly academically, nor did she have behavioral difficulties.

Since she was an undergraduate over 6 years ago, she has been interested in working with low-income, culturally diverse youth and their families. It is here that her passion lies, and thus after earning her undergraduate degree she spent a year living and working in a boy’s group home that served low-income, African American youth. It is during this time that she was exposed to some of the realities of their experiences of living with limited resources and some of their negative educational experiences. Her time in the boy’s group home inspired her to pursue a graduate degree in counseling so that she could be more equipped to serve this population. She holds a Master of Education and Education Specialist in school counseling and guidance and is
seeking her doctorate in mental health counseling. Therefore, she has been trained in human interactions and thus will be examining the practices of teachers through a counselor’s lens.

Most of her research as well as her counseling practicum and internship experiences have been directed towards working with this population, often times within the school setting. She has seen the disparities in achievement levels and the impact of cultural discontinuity exemplified in students of local schools serving low-income, culturally diverse populations. She has seen these students positioned as non-learners, labeled as “problem children”, and sent out of the classroom. In counseling these children, she has witnessed the angry and frustrated looks on their faces, heard descriptions of their dislike of school, and noticed their defeated language. Her immersion in multicultural education research focusing on Sociocultural theory, culturally responsive education, and cultural discontinuity has provided a lens through which to view her experiences.

Data Collection

The videotaped data that was examined in this research study was obtained from existing research and professional development projects. As the focus of the study was the examination of the interactions between master teachers and their low-income, African American students during their first days together, the researcher sought a sample of teachers who had demonstrated their effectiveness with these students both academically and behaviorally. Two master teachers were chosen based on this criterion. The two teacher sample provided the basis for theoretical sampling, but the number of videotapes examined for each teacher was determined upon reaching theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The first set of videotapes was part of a research project conducted by Foster, Lewis, and Onafowora (2003, 2005) depicting a teacher conducting lessons with her first through third grade students in the first week of an afterschool program in the 2001-2002 school year. While the
teacher was taped throughout the duration of the afterschool program, Foster and colleagues only provided videotape data on the first three days of the program for this study. The second set of videotapes depicted a teacher conducting mathematics lessons with her fifth grade students in the first week of school during the 2006 – 2007 school year. The data were part of a professional development project sponsored by a Center for Learning associated with a college of education at a large university in the southeastern United States. With permission from the researchers and as an extension of their research, the videotaped interactions between these two master teachers with their students during the first week of the after school program (Ms. B) or school year (Ms. M) were examined.

Qualitative research literature denotes many of the advantages of using videotape data (Jacobs, Kawanka & Stigler, 1999; Ratcliffe, 2003). Videotaped data as an information source is advantageous as it is provides a rawer form of data than observational data such as field notes and it allows for repeated viewing, coding, and analysis in multiple phases. Therefore, a researcher can look at different dimensions of the recorded verbal and physical behavior (Jacobs et al., 1999). Furthermore, the capability of watching the data repeatedly enhances the potential for the reliability of descriptions (Ratcliffe, 2003).

Data Set of Ms. B

The first data set was derived from a research project on culturally responsive master teachers conducted by Foster, Lewis, and Onafowora’s (2003, 2005). Foster and her colleagues’ began an after school program at multiple sites to serve as both professional development sites and research sites in which to explore aspects of teaching and learning. The primary purpose of the project was to link inexperienced teachers with master teachers who had demonstrated their effectiveness with low-income, African American students as perceived by their administrators and peers. The goals of Foster and colleagues’ research project were to “document and analyze
the processes by which inexperienced teachers learn to teach in these laboratories” and to “document and examine the processes of learning among children who are enrolled” (Foster et al., 2003, p. 271). Foster and colleagues reported that an aspect of the second goal included understanding how culturally responsive teachers created conditions that impacted not only the students’ cognitive, social, and affective dimensions. However, no analysis was conducted on this aspect of their data. Therefore, with permission from Foster and her colleagues, this study used a part of their data set to examine aspects of their second goal.

As part of their research project, Foster and her colleagues developed a multi-site after school program for elementary school students in grades one through four called Learning through Teaching in an Afterschool Pedagogical Laboratory (L-TAPL). The afterschool programs were created to increase the academic achievement of groups of participating first through fourth grade predominantly African American students as well as to serve as professional development sites for teachers. The program was started in three urban school districts in California and New Jersey students participated in the program on a voluntary basis three days a week for a little over three months. The master teacher was responsible for the curriculum and the teaching strategies for her mixed age group students, and the curriculum focused on language arts, mathematics, science, and the arts. Teachers from the district’s schools were given the opportunity to observe and at times work alongside the master teacher (Foster, 2004; Foster et al., 2003; 2005).

Data Set of Ms. M

The second set of data is part of a professional development project sponsored by a Center for Learning associated with a large university in the southeastern United States. The primary goal of the center is to work to promote quality teaching, improve school performance, and facilitate the development of educational leaders. This particular professional development
project focused on the mathematical instructional and methodological practices of a renowned fifth grade teacher teaching in an elementary school in north central Florida. The school is a Title I school serving a predominantly low-income, African American population. Known for her culturally responsive educational practices, the project coordinators sought to observe and videotape this master teacher and her fifth grade students in order to use her instructional methods and teacher-student interactions as an example and teaching tool for other in-service and pre-service teachers (E. Peterek, personal communication, January 7, 2009)

Participants

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), in the fall of 2007, approximately 3.7 million teachers were employed full time in elementary and secondary school in the United States (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2008). NCES also reported that in 2003-2004, 75% of public school teachers were female, 41% percent were under the age of 40, 48% had a masters degree or higher and 83% were white (Planty et al., 2008; Snyder et al., 2008). Schools with higher percentages of minority students, higher percentages of low-income students, and higher percentage of limited English proficient students were more likely to employ beginning teachers. Furthermore, the teacher turnover rate is 7 percentage points higher at high poverty schools versus low poverty schools (21% vs. 14%).

Ms. B from the data set from Foster and her colleague’s research project was nominated a “master teacher” by her school and district personnel as a result of her demonstrated ability to effectively teach low-income, culturally diverse urban students (Foster et al., 2005). Ms. B depicted in the data culturally responsive educational practices, drawing on her low-income, African American students’ cultural resources as well as incorporating students’ language routines (Foster et al., 2003). The effectiveness of Ms. B is substantiated by the impact of the L-TAPL program on students’ academic achievement, engagement, and behavior (Foster, 2004;
Foster et al., 2003, 2005). In particular, the researchers found an absence of problematic behavior and the presence of positive behaviors in the afterschool classroom. Participating students’ regular classroom teachers reported an increase in positive behaviors in the classroom as well. Conversations and informal interviews indicated that parents had noticed changes in their children’s behavior and their child’s excitement about learning. Additionally, students achieved increases in test scores based on pre and post tests data of the Test of Early Reading Ability and the Test of Early Mathematical ability (Foster et al., 2003). Ms. B is an African American teacher who traveled to a neighboring urban school in central California to serve as the master teacher at one of the sites of the L-TAPL after school program and thus does not have pre-existing relationships with the students. The afterschool program which was named the Mind, Body and Spirit club consisted of 14 low-income, predominantly African American first, second, and third grade students. The videotape data reflect the first three days of the afterschool program.

Ms. M, from the Center for Learning’s sponsored professional development project, was selected by the researchers because of her demonstrated ability to facilitate the academic achievement of her low-income, African American students. Yearly, her students had some of the highest mathematics gains in the state’s standardized tests (Chun, 2008). Specifically, in the year in which the videotapes were recorded, the 2006-2007 school year, 56% of her fifth grade students obtained mathematics scores on grade level or above on their fifth grade test. Of the students attending her elementary school in fourth grade, in the previous school year of 2005-2006, only 35% were on or above grade level in mathematics (Florida Department of Education, n.d.), thus indicating a 21% increase in the number of students performing at or above grade level assuming all other factors are the same. In 2006 – 2007, her students achieved the greatest
mathematical gains in the state of Florida (Chun, 2008). Empirical data regarding Ms. M’s impact on her students’ behavioral, social and emotional development is not available, though members of the professional development project have noted her effectiveness in those areas as well (E. Peterek, personal communication, January 7, 2009).

Ms. M is an African American, fifth grade teacher at a Title 1 school in north central Florida in which 65% of the school’s students qualified for free and reduced lunch. Ms. M holds her bachelor of arts in elementary education and at the time the videotapes were taken, she had been teaching for approximately 29 years. The videotapes depict her teaching mathematics to 50 fifth grade students during the first week of school. Because of her demonstrated effectiveness in teaching mathematics, in the 2006 – 2007 school year she began teaching mathematics to all the fifth graders in the school. Thus, the students in the videotapes are from her homeroom class as well as another fifth grade class. The other class’s teacher served as an aide in the Ms. M’s class during mathematics (E. Peterek, personal communication, March 21, 2009). Additionally, the videotapes depict the first week of school, and thus although Ms. M’s students may have been aware of her reputation as a mathematics teacher in their school, the videos still reflect the relationship development process.

Data Analysis

The videotaped data were examined and analyzed using the video analysis software, Studiocode (see www.studiocodegroup.com). To familiarize herself with the software, the researcher attended a six-hour session conducted by the software company which provided basic training on the capabilities and processes of the software. The software combines the video with a timeline so that researcher codes can be applied to instances or video segments. Thus, upon the completion of coding, the software has compiled a short “movie” of all of the instances of a
particular code, thus allowing for easy viewing and application of the constant comparative method.

**Theoretical Memos and Theoretical Saturation**

In order to organize and keep track of her thoughts and hypotheses, the researcher wrote theoretical memos throughout data analysis. Initial memos noted potential codes, possible patterns in the data, and questions regarding the differences between and among the codes. As the researcher moved beyond open coding the theoretical memos became more detailed and theoretically based as the researcher began to develop hypotheses regarding relationships between the open codes and axial codes, and as the theory began to emerge from the coding process.

The researcher began the data analysis process with a set sample of two culturally responsive, master teachers. However, the number of videotapes that would be needed to gain an adequate depiction of these teachers and how they developed relationships with their students was not determined a priori. Therefore, the researcher viewed videotapes for each teacher until she reached theoretical saturation and the analysis no longer generated additional new codes. Consequently, the researcher analyzed three, hour long videotapes for Ms. B, and four, 40-50 minute videotapes for Ms. M.

**Open Coding**

Prior to beginning open coding, the researcher watched two videos of each teacher in order to become acquainted with each teachers teaching style and the overall dynamic of the classroom. Next the researcher open coded each video three different times in order to code with specificity and in detail. During the first time, the researcher focused predominantly on the teacher’s verbal actions and thus the researcher used words or created simple phrases to describe incidences relating to the teachers verbal “interactions” with students. The researcher focused on
the teacher’s non-verbals and actions in the second time. The third time the researcher focused on the students’ responses to the teacher’s verbal and non-verbal actions. In the process of open coding, the researcher created a series of theoretical memos to record potential themes, patterns and relationships emerging from the data. To ensure credibility and monitor researcher bias, a Masters level graduate student in school counseling, independently watched and coded the videos using a standardized coding sheet (see Appendix). The researcher and the research assistant then met to discuss findings and the research assistants’ codes and identify areas of agreement and disagreement.

**Axial Coding**

Using the theoretical memos and reflection, the researcher began the process of examining the open codes searching for themes or categories that described the data. The emerging themes were initially quite broad. Therefore, in order to facilitate axial coding and become more detailed, the researcher returned to the video data and began transcribing multiple instances of each code that exemplified the meaning of each code. With numerous examples of each code transcribed, the researcher continued to compare instances in each code as to their similarities and differences. The researcher then reviewed note cards related to each open code and began to group the open codes into categories and sub-categories according to their relationships with one another, returning to the transcribed data and video data to ensure the relationships were grounded in the data. Again, throughout this process the researcher wrote theoretical memos to record her thought processes, reasons for categorizing, and hypotheses regarding possible theories.

**Selective Coding**

Upon completion of axial coding the researcher again compared the codes within each category with regard to similarities and differences which assisted selective coding. The research
recognized themes based on the interrelationships and connections among the axial codes, which became the selective codes. The selective codes and their associations with and among one another became the basis for the emergent theory. The researcher met independently with two members of her dissertation committee to discuss the theory and expound on and clarify the selective codes. She then met with the research assistant for peer debriefing to explain the initial theory and to receive feedback regarding whether the theory was grounded in the video data, to limit researcher bias, and further refine the theory.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Throughout the data analysis process steps were taken by the researcher to facilitate the enhancement of trustworthiness and credibility (Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, as a way of promoting credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher used the technique of persistent observation by focusing in on the aspects most relevant to the study over a series of seven videotapes. In describing the emergent themes the researcher also attempted to provide rich, thick description to provide the reader context (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher also kept an audit trail and documented her reflections and process of interpreting data as a researcher through the use of theoretical memos promoted in grounded theory (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Additionally, the researcher used triangulation of the data analysis process and peer debriefing to promote trustworthiness and credibility (Creswell, 1998; Golafshani, 2003; Johnson, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A master’s level research assistant examined the video data in its entirety and met with the researcher to discuss agreements and disagreements in codes and to clarify codes and their meanings. Moreover, once the researcher began to develop her theory, she presented her conceptualizations to the research assistant to explore researcher biases, elaborate on themes, and confirm that the theory was grounded in the data. The researcher also presented her
conceptualizations and abstractions to two members of her dissertation committee to explore and refine her interpretations of the data and check for researcher biases.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Two separate research questions were posed in this study. One addressed how culturally responsive master teachers developed relationships with their low-income, African American students and the other addressed how they used their relationships with students to facilitate students’ learning. Examination of the teachers’ interactions with their students revealed that these relational operations were so intertwined, that these two questions were most effectively answered as one question rather than two. Thus, in this chapter a theoretical schema is presented depicting three major dimensions of teacher-student relationship development. These dimensions were: emotional connectedness, facilitating conditions of relationship building, and students’ affective responses (see Table 4-1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major dimensions of teacher-student relationship development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-student connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-class connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency and Joining</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The major theme of emotional connectedness was conceptualized as the connective interactions that foster a sense of attachment and emotional bonding between the teacher and the students. Connective interactions may be contrasted with interactions that generate emotional distance like nagging, reprimanding, harsh punishment, or shaming. Emotional connectedness has three critical themes: (a) the teachers’ connective interactions with their individual students, (b) teachers’ connective interactions with the class as a whole, and (c) teacher transparency and joining the classroom community. Teacher-student connections were interactions between the teacher and the individual student that created bonding such as engaged listening, re-engaging, and ensuring individual student success. A surprising finding was that in addition to interactions
between the teacher and individual students that built a sense of emotional bonding, these teachers also engaged in connective interactions with the class as a whole. This was not anticipated, but proved to be a rich source of information about relationship development between teachers and their students. Although some of the ways that the teachers interacted with the class as a whole were similar to their interactions with individual students, there were also some unique aspects that enhanced the teachers’ connection to their class. The third dimension that emerged relates to each teacher’s transparency and willingness to join with their class community. Teacher transparency and joining was defined as each teacher’s process of integrating herself as a part of the class community and sharing herself in terms of their thought processes, their playfulness and their imperfections. Table 4-2 presents a list of themes and sub-themes of the dimension of emotional connectedness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creating teacher-student connections</th>
<th>Creating teacher-class connections</th>
<th>Being transparent and joining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending to students</td>
<td>Defining class community</td>
<td>Voicing thought processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged listening</td>
<td>Attending to the class</td>
<td>Sharing their imperfections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathizing</td>
<td>Believing in the class</td>
<td>Being playful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-engaging individual students</td>
<td>Believing in capabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing in students</td>
<td>Affirming class’s strengths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging voice</td>
<td>Ensuring the class’s success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing academic capability</td>
<td>Using knowledge &amp; culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing in social capability</td>
<td>Using existing competencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming strengths</td>
<td>Using music and dance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring student success</td>
<td>Using communication styles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second dimension of facilitating conditions of relationship development appeared foundational to how Ms. M and Ms. B were able to develop and use their relationships with their students. The facilitating conditions were conceptualized as the way in which each of these teachers created an environment in their classrooms in which students could feel psychologically and physically safe. Each teacher verbally communicated the classroom procedures and what
was expected from the students. Disorder was not tolerated in either classroom; both teachers
maintained control of their classrooms and required respect. When a student did not follow the
rules or directions, Ms. M and Ms. B would both redirect the students’ behavior. Of significance
however, was the fact that each teacher always kept their composure when directing behavior
and refrained from yelling at or scolding students nor did they humiliate students. Students who
answered incorrectly or were not obeying the rules were respectfully corrected or redirected and
were not shamed or made an example of by the teacher.

The third and final major dimension, students’ positive affective responses, framed the
positive responses of the students in relation to the emotional connectedness and the facilitating
conditions. Ms. B and Ms. M’s students demonstrated behaviors that reflected the positive
emotions of joy, interest, contentment, and self-love. Minimal negative student affective or
behavioral outcomes were observed. Students generally followed directions, and at the times
when their behaviors were directed, the students quickly heeded the teacher’s directives with no
objections or arguing. In the few instances where students were pouting or demonstrating
behaviors of disengagement, the teachers quickly reconnected the student with themselves by
attending to the students’ needs and feelings.

To further describe the theory that developed from the data analysis the following sections
will present descriptive information about both teachers and each of the major themes. Thick
descriptions will be given to illustrate the behaviors and words of instances in the sub-themes,
concepts and categories that make up each of the major themes.

**Describing the Master Teachers**

Prior to providing rich descriptions of each of the above described themes which emerged
from the data, it is important to briefly discuss the differences between Ms. M and Ms. B in order
to provide a general context and background for each of the themes. Ms. B and Ms. M differ
with regard to their personalities, styles of interacting with their students, and methods of teaching and structuring their classes. Therefore, while both created emotional connectedness and facilitated conditions within their classroom that were conducive to positive interactions, their means for doing so diverged.

Ms. B had a nurturing and motherly personality and style of interacting with her fourteen, first, second, and third grade students. She smiled frequently, fixed their hair and their clothes, hugged and patted them, joked with them on a variety of topics and used terms of endearment like “sister”, “girlfriend” and “honey.” There was also an intensity in the way she tried to connect with her students as she listened to and engaged them in conversations about themselves and their work. Additionally, she loosely structured each day of the afterschool program and seemed to adjust her lesson plans according to her spontaneous thoughts or the academic needs and interests of the students. Some examples include stopping from transitioning to an activity to discuss what a “club” was, suddenly teaching the class the definition of metamorphosis, and spontaneously creating an activity during the daily check in to show the students how the mind connects to and directs the body.

Her flexibility and easy-going nature were also reflected in the amount of noise and student movement around the room which she tolerated. During individual or small group work, she allowed a high level of volume in the classroom as students talked with each other and she also allowed students to get up from their seats and get supplies as long as she deemed that they were staying on task. In the midst of this she maintained control and directed students in terms of their volume level and maintenance of their on task behavior.

Ms. B’s classroom was divided into two sections as illustrated in Figure 4-1. One section was used for large group activities where the students sat in a semi-circle around Ms. B, and the
other section consisted of tables at which the students engaged in individual or small group work. Ms. B spent the first half of each day with the students in a large group and the second half with the students working at their tables. As the students worked at their tables, Ms. B walked around and checked their progress as well as spent time talking with individual students about their work or their lives in general.

Figure 4-1. Diagram of Ms. B’s classroom

Ms. M personality and style of interacting with her large class of 49 fifth-grade students was stern and intense. She interacted with her students exclusively in the context of academics, and used mathematics as a medium through which to connect with her students and class. She often referred to her students as “sir” and “ma’am” and occasionally used their last names, “Mr. X” or “Ms. Y.” Her teaching style can be described as intense and structured as she spent the
entire class time engaging the students around mathematical concepts and ensuring that her students understood the material. She began each class by handing out materials and making sure students were equipped with supplies. She then reviewed what was covered the day before, presented new information and concepts, had students work with the new concept, and then reviewed the material once again before the end of the period. There was an intensity in which she presented the information and her expectation for the students. She did not get off-task but continually stayed focused and challenged the students to push themselves further academically.

While Ms. M smiled and was playful with her students throughout, she ran her class in a business like manner. She allowed the students to get loud when chorally responding to her questions or completing mathematical problems to the beat of music, but did not tolerate her students engaging in side conversations or getting up out of their seats during class time. Ms. M’s class was in a large room in order to accommodate the 49 students. As illustrated in Figure 4-2, she had her students sit at tables of four or five students. The majority of class time was spent with Ms. M at the forefront performing and engaging the class in call and response or asking the class or an individual student to respond to a question she posed. On occasion students worked independently at their tables when taking a quiz or test, using white boards to practice problems, or writing in their math journals. Therefore, because of the structure of her class day, Ms. M interacted with her class as a whole more frequently, and interacted with individual students only during the brief intervals of seatwork when she was monitoring their progress.

In summary, the ways in which Ms. B and Ms. M taught, interacted with, and even their classroom settings were quite different. The differences in classroom arrangement and class organization facilitated more opportunities for teacher-student interactions for Ms. B and more teacher-class interactions for Ms. M. The divergence of their personalities also influenced how
and in what ways they interacted with their students, as will be depicted as each of the themes and sub-themes are described below. Nonetheless, even though they each used different means of teaching and interacting with their students, the students in both classes demonstrate positive affective responses by their words and behaviors depicting joy, interest, contentment, and self-love, as well as seeking out more connection with the teacher.

Figure 4-2. Diagram of Ms. M’s classroom
Creating Emotional Connectedness

Creating Teacher-Student Connections

A critical theme in how the culturally responsive master teachers developed relationships with their low-income, African American students was their use of a combination of interactions with individual students that built connections with each of them. These types of positive teacher-student interactions reflected in the video data can be categorized into four general themes: (a) attending to individual students through listening intently and empathizing, (b) conveying a belief in students and holding high expectations for them, (c) reconnecting disengaged students, and (d) ensuring individual student’s success.

Attending to individual students

One way in which the teachers developed relationships with their students on an individual basis was through their attentiveness to their students in the classroom. Attentiveness at the individual level related to how both teachers actively acknowledged and attended to the thoughts, feelings, and personal needs of their individual students through their words and actions.

Engaged listening: Both teachers demonstrated their attentiveness to individual students through engaged listening. Engaged listening, much like “active listening” described in interpersonal communication literature and the counseling literature (Devito, 2007; Ivey & Ivey, 2008; Wood, 2007), includes both what was expressed in the teacher’s body language and what was expressed in the teacher’s words that conveyed the message “I am fully listening to you and trying to understand.” In the classroom context, engaged listening did not always look or sound like it has been often been described in this literature.

Instead, the busyness of classrooms, the number of students, and the task focus of classrooms can make engaged listening difficult and yet Ms. M and Ms. B listened intently to
their students. When interacting with a student one-on-one while the student was at their seat both teachers leaned in and got at the student’s eye level instead of speaking to students from a standing position. Eye contact was typically maintained unless another student interrupted or the teacher had to attend to another student who was off-task. Because Ms. B often engaged with the students when she and the class were sitting in chairs in a circle, she leaned in towards an individual when he or she was speaking and turned her body based on the location of the student. If the students were seated and she was standing, she would walk closer to the student speaking. Ms. B often tilted her head when listening to an individual student, and the angle in which her head tilted became more pronounced in instances when she was unsure of what the student was trying to communicate (see Figure 4-3).

Figure 4-3. Ms. B’s non-verbals for engaged listening

Both teachers also expressed their desire to truly understand what the student was trying to say through their use of clarifying statements or questions. With interest, they asked the individual student to repeat him or herself, asked students to speak more loudly, or asked questions like “what does that mean?” or “what did you say?” They also coached the individual
student to express themselves so as to be sure that they comprehended what the student was saying to them. For example, Ms. M told a student whose hands were in front of his face to put his hands down, and Ms. B respectfully told a student who was answering a question with a hand motion by tilting his hand back and forth “I don’t know what that means. You have to talk to me.” Additionally, both teachers paraphrased student’s answers by restating the students’ answers or comments in full. Therefore, through these methods the teachers conveyed their interest in each of their students’ words and communicated that what he or she said had value.

**Empathizing:** In their effort to understand and share their understanding regarding what their individual students were trying to express, both teachers also responded to their individual students’ feelings and concerns at varying levels. Neither teacher reflected student’s feelings to a great extent, yet there were instances throughout the video data that indicated that the teachers were aware of their students’ feeling states by how they attended to them. Ms. B, for example, would verbally acknowledge individual student’s feelings by means of questions such as “are you mad at me?” or “are you embarrassed?” She also used indirect methods to convey she understood how a student was feeling. For instance, Ms. B gave students the opportunity to be a “bug scientist” if they correctly named the insects in her pictures. The first two students she called on correctly identified the insects and thus were chosen to be “bug scientists”. Ana, who had her hand raised to be chosen but was not called upon responded by sagging her shoulders, sighing and hitting the chair next to her. Ms. B stopped and turned her head to the sound, her eyebrows furrowed and her lips pursed. She then looked at the Ana’s face and Ms. B’s eyebrows relaxed and she placed her hand on Ana’s shoulder and said in a soft voice “yes, you can name them.” At another point a student sighed and frowned at not being selected for a task and without stopping what she was saying, Ms. B patted the student gently and gave her a small smile,
acknowledging the student’s disappointment. Ms. B did not reprimand the student’s responses but empathized with and fluidly responded to each student.

Ms. M was also responsive to individual students’ feelings and demonstrated concern about their well-being. One of her students had hurt his finger earlier in the day and was having difficulty writing the definitions of the math terms given his injury. The student told the assisting teacher and the teacher approached Ms. M to tell her about the student. Ms. M scrunched her forehead as she listened and said, “Oh! Let me give him a band-aid. I need to give him a band-aid.” She walked toward the injured student and said, “If you can’t write it, don’t worry about it Zachary. You gotta put it in there later. Okay?” Though she continued to hold the expectation that the Zachary needed to get the work done, she simultaneously showed concern for him. Similarly, when one of Ms. B asked one of her students about her self-discipline that day, the student reported that her side was hurting earlier. Ms. B responded saying, “And what does that mean, ‘but your side was hurting’? Did you still use your self discipline?” and the student answered “yes,” nodding her head. Ms. B leaned in and replied, “You were suffering? Suffering… hurting?” When the student nodded her head Ms. B said, “I am sorry about that. Do you feel better?” The student answered, “yes” and smiled up at Ms. B.

In conclusion, both teachers connected with their individual students by being responsive during one-on-one teacher student interactions. During these relationship-building connections Ms. M and Ms. B communicated their willingness to stop what they were doing and focus on and attend to their individual students. They shared their desire to know and understand each student and thus affirmed the student’s value and worthiness of the teacher’s attention.

Re-engaging individual students

Regardless of the teacher and her ability to engage relationally and academically with her students, there are bound to be periods of student disengagement. Within the data there were
instances of student disengagement in which students either disengaged from the academic task or disengaged relationally and emotionally. These two types of disengagement either occurred simultaneously or one might trigger the other. In two instances an observable teacher-student interaction precipitated the student’s emotional and relational disengagement from the teacher. While in other cases the students’ disengagement precipitated the teacher response. Therefore, for this reason and for ease of description, the teachers’ response to these two types of disengagement and re-engagement will be described independently.

Disengagement or distraction from an academic task was infrequent in both classrooms, but did occur. Observed behaviors that indicated student disengagement from an academic task included staring into the distance, talking to peers, fiddling or doodling, and/or sitting idly when supposed to be completing a task. Emotional disconnection was observed only in Ms. B’s classroom and involved an individual student withdrawing relationally from the teacher and the class. The behaviors consisted of frowning and pouting, directing their attention away from the activity or the rest of the class, pushing one’s seat back from the group, unwillingness to make eye contact, and/or staring into one’s lap.

While the teachers’ recognition of the disengagement was important, what appeared most significant was their response. Neither Ms. M nor Ms. B would allow a student to distance themselves nor would they ignore the disengagement. Instead they both but responded quickly, actively trying to re-engage a distracted or emotionally withdrawn student, which at times could involve a lot of energy and time focused toward one student. The result of such efforts however, was the student’s re-engagement.

**Re-engaging distracted student:** Although each teacher consistently attempted to keep the students engaged during their class periods, the students at times would get distracted and get
off task. Ms. B and Ms. M used different methods to re-engage the distracted student. Other times, they re-connected a distracted student to the academic task without the use of many words. For example, one of Ms. B’s students was standing up talking to two students working on their assignments. Ms. B approached the table, tapped the student’s paper three times and looked the student in the eyes. The student sat down in his seat and immediately began writing on his paper. In Ms. M’s class, a student was staring off into the distance. Ms. M touched his paper and said, “concentrate, concentrate” and kept walking. The student paused and then began to write on his paper. Both teachers also just called out a student’s name if they saw a student getting off task. In other instances, both Ms. M and Ms. B found it necessary to converse with individual students to get them back on track academically. One of Ms. M’s students was not writing a definition in his math journal, but just fiddling with his pencil. Ms. M approached him, picked up his math journal, turned to the right page and placed the journal in front of the student. He looked down at the journal and she leaned in and asked, “Where are unlike fractions? Like fractions? Where is it? I don’t see it. Where are like fractions?” As the student found his pencil and started to write, she walked away. In each of these examples there was an absence of ridicule or punishment, but instead the teachers, gently but firmly re-engaged the student to the academic task.

A series of interactions between Ms. M and Ronald, one of her students who had struggled with the mathematical concepts, exemplifies Ms. M’s care for her student’s academic progress and efforts to re-engage her students with their academic task. Ronald had been demonstrating difficulty on paying attention and understanding the mathematical material throughout the week and it was no different on test day. About ten minutes into the test, Ronald was staring at his paper, with his pencil tucked behind his ear and with his chin in both of his
hands. Ms. M walked up to him and said, “Take your hands down, get to work”. Ronald stopped propping up his head and looked at the paper, but he didn’t write anything, and began to look around the room. Two minutes later Ms. M returned to Ronald and said, “Try it, try it. Concentrate. Concentrate.” He continued to just stare at the paper, look around the room, or tap his pencil to his finger. After about 10 minutes he tried to get her attention and Ms. M leaned in to listen to him. Ronald shared, “I don’t know how to do this.” Ms. M looked him in the eye and asked, “Do you know your multiplication facts?” Ronald hesitantly replied, “yes.” Ms. M looked down at his test and asked, “What is seven and three, how are they related? What number times seven is twenty-one?” In response, Ronald whispered, “I don’t know,” and looked in his lap.” Ms. M then said, “Instead of you out there on the cart asleep yesterday, you know what you should have had this open,” as she pointed to his math journal. She proceeded to get him a multiplication card that had the multiplication facts up to 12 and helped him complete two problems. Again he said he did not know the multiplication fact and she said, “That is why it is important to write your multiplication facts every day” and then helped him figure out the answer. She asked him, “You got it? Now you try one on your own.” Ronald leaned forward and started writing occasionally looking back at the multiplication chart.

**Re-engaging emotionally withdrawn students:** When Ms. B reconnected with an emotionally withdrawn student, her appreciation of students as individuals is further illustrated. Ms. B reconnected with emotionally withdrawn students through affection, touch, humor, and terms of endearment. There are two particular instances that exemplify Ms. B’s manner of connecting with relationally disengaged students.

The first involved Kayla, a student who was disciplined and told to sit in the corner prior to Ms. B’s arrival in the classroom. Kayla was sitting on the edge of the semi-circle with a frown
on her face. Kayla was looking down, chewing on her bracelet, and otherwise not participating as
Ms. B engaged with the other students about their self-discipline. Ms. B turned her attention to
Kayla and said, “and this little brain over here, this little girl” and touched Kayla’s shoulder and
then tried to pull Kayla out of her seat. Kayla hesitated initially but Ms. B continued, “Come on,”
and Kayla stood. “Told her to sit off on the side” as she put her arm around Kayla in a side hug
and she tried to make eye contact as she smiling said, “to chew on her bracelet. We should have
brought pizza then she would not have had to eat her bracelet.” She patted Kayla on the shoulder.
Nevertheless Kayla maintained a frown on her face. Ms. B looked her in the eye, and then turned
to another student to ask about their self-discipline--but she kept her arm around Kayla. She
continued to hug or hold Kayla’s hand for the duration of the “check-in” activity. Once the
activity was completed, Ms. B let go of Kayla as she directed the students to break off to go to
their small group tables to do an assignment. Kayla, however, did not follow; instead, she sat
back down and chewed on her bracelet.

Ms. B approached her, grabbed her hand, and asked her, “do you want to work with your
stuff over here?” pointing to a table off to the side. Kayla, still frowning, nodded yes. The
woman operating the video camera can be heard saying, “Kayla, you should tell Ms. B about
your self discipline in Mind, Body and Spirit club.” Ms. B says “uh oh,” and the woman
continued, “when you first got here and how you treated Ms. Tanya. Tell her.” Ms. B wondered
aloud, “Maybe that is why she is so forlorn?” The woman operating the camera confirmed: “It
is.” Kayla continued to frown and had her hand in her mouth, looking down. Ms. B grabbed
Kayla’s hand and sat her down, “Come over here. I know I have to talk to you, come on.” Ms. B
then had to attend to the rest of the students but came back and said, “What are you going to do?
Just sulk over here all day? Do you owe sister Tanya an apology for how you acted? Do you
need to have a private talk with sister? Hmm? Please? Think about it for a minute I am going to come back to you.” Approximately ten minutes later, Ms. B was sitting on the floor working with students and a magnifying glass. Kayla asked her an inaudible question and Ms. B said, “I would like for you to but can you apologize first…have a private talk.” Ms. B then turned to someone behind the camera and said, “Tanya, she would like to have a private talk with you. Can she speak with you for a minute privately?” The apology takes place off camera, but Kayla can later be seen engaged with the rest of the class.

This series of interactions that took place in order for Kayla to reconnect with Ms. B and the rest of the class took effort and time on Ms. B’s part. However, there were no visual or audible indications of frustration or exasperation by Ms. B, even though she tried to engage the student on three separate occasions. Moreover, Ms. B did not punish or discipline Kayla for what the camera woman reported, but instead helped prepare her to apologize.

The second instance also involved a discipline issue, but actually entailed Ms. B having to sternly direct a young boy, Donovan. Donovan was slumped in his chair as he was reporting that he had had a difficult day with his self-discipline. Ms. B directed him firmly to sit up in his chair and he did not respond initially. She repeated with her eyebrows raised and said, “Sit up in your chair, I am not kidding.” Ms. B then expressed her disappointment that he had talked back to his teacher saying, “You didn’t yell at the teacher? I don’t want to believe that.” After finding out more information regarding his talking back Ms. B said to him, “I hope I don’t hear that again” as she shook her head. She then stepped toward him, raised her eyebrows and said emphatically, “I really mean it. I mean it.” Donovan shifted in his chair as she moved on.

After this interaction, Donovan began to withdraw. Ms. B had the students go to work on their assignments at their tables, and walked Donovan, with her hand on the small of his back, to
his seat and then she walked away to help other students. Initially, he slumped in his chair and crossed his hands across his chest. Students at his table began to tease him about his picture. Ms. B went and sat down with him at his table. As she sat, he tried to get up from his chair but she grabbed his arm and asked him to sit. She tried to talk to him about his project but he continued to slump and leaned his head on his shoulder. She leaned and asked him, “Are you mad cause I snapped at you?” He sat up and said “I want to go home.” She leaned back in her chair and looked at him. He said. “Can I go call my mama?” The rest of the conversation was inaudible, but Ms. B was talking to the students at his table and can be heard using the term “teasing”. She then turned her attention back to Donovan who remained slumped in his chair. She got interrupted by other students, and stood up and leaned down to talk to him and said, “Now its science.” His shoulders rose slightly as he got out of his chair and walked out of the screen. Ms. B returned to him minutes later and drew him in to participate in looking at a bumble bee under the magnifying glass. He smiled and laughed as he described what he saw under the glass.

Again, Ms. B took time in the midst of a busy group of students to respond to and reconnect with an individual student, noting that he was upset and emotionally withdrawn. Later in the day, she even assigned him the task of being in charge of keeping the magnifying glass safe. In response to her request he smiled, nodded and sat up straight, seemingly proud of his responsibility. Although during most of her efforts, Donovan remained frowning and disengaged, her persistence eventually led to Donovan reconnecting with her and the rest of the class. The impact of her attention could also be seen when later in the class time Ms. B took a turn looking in the glass and as she leaned over, Donovan affectionately and gently patted her hair.

Therefore, whether it is re-engaging a student who is distracted from an academic task or re-engaging an emotionally withdrawn student, Ms. B and Ms. M are committed to re-engaging
their students. Although their styles and methods of re-engaging students varied greatly, each teacher expressed their care and concern to individual students. Moreover, the ability to notice individual student disengagement and actively attend to re-engaging them communicated to the student that their teacher valued their engagement, participation, and connection.

Believing in individual students

Ms. M and Ms. B repeatedly showed their individual students that they believed in them through their words and their actions. Both teachers invited and encouraged their students to express their ideas and opinions and share their knowledge. They also communicated that they believed in their individual student’s academic abilities and social abilities, and encouraged students to believe in themselves. They expressed these beliefs by setting high standards and conveying that they expected their students to meet the standards, and that they would accept nothing less. In addition to affirming the strengths of their individual students and applauding their efforts and achievement, they also challenged the students to go even further.

Encouraging student voice: In the classes of Ms. M and Ms. B, one did not only hear the teacher’s voices in the teaching process. In fact, the teachers rarely lectured for long periods of time. Instead these teachers often invited students to voice their ideas. When these teachers were talking to the class explaining a concept or providing information, neither teacher talked for longer than five minutes without engaging the class as a whole or asking an individual student a question. Thus, most of the class time was spent in an interactive process between the students and the teachers versus the teacher lecturing and the students passively receiving the content. They were constantly encouraging students to share their knowledge and opinions in the midst of the teachers presenting their material. Both teachers started off their classes by seeking the individual opinions of their students. Ms. B asked her students, “why are you here?” referring to
the after school program, while Ms. M asked her students what they wanted to learn in mathematics.

In addition to asking the individual student’s opinions, both teachers acknowledged their students’ knowledge and ideas. For example, Ms. M had two students come up to the front of the class and help teach a new student about how to figure out the perimeter of a figure. They were given the opportunity to not only tell the student but then Ms. M encouraged them to actually show the student on the board “to help him understand about perimeter.” As both students were “teaching” they stood tall and explained and showed their classmate on the board without looking to Ms. M or asking her any questions. Ms. B operated in a similar manner. A student demonstrated her spelling ability by spelling a sentence that was called out as Ms. B was writing it on the board. Ms. B looked at the student, smiled and holding out her pen said, “Here you write it out.” The student hesitated, but Ms. B encouraged her and said, “Hurry up,” and the student walked up to the board and began to write.

On other occasions Ms. M asked for volunteers from the class, “Who wants to explain it?” or acknowledged, “I am sure you understand the prefix ‘un’.” Ms. B would ask a student what he wanted her to write on the board, saying, “You said it Michael, so how would you say it?” She would explicitly acknowledge the student’s knowledge with statements such as, “Some people have heard of self-discipline, so I would like them to tell me what it means.” She also expressed to individual students that they could teach her as well. Tyreek was reciting a quote from a movie that Ms. B had asked about and she responded with a smile and laughter, “Ooh, that is a good one. Oh, I am going to remember that. Say that again. Yeah, but tell me that part again. You said ‘you better watch out… no I think it’s you’, tell me that part again.” Tyreek with a wide smile on his face and his eyes looking up at Ms. B, repeated the quote, and Ms. B
stated, “Oh, I like that. I am going to use that” as she clapped her hands. Tyreek maintained a
smile even after Ms. B walked away.

Another way both Ms. M and Ms. B encouraged their student’s voices was when they
insisted that when a student was answering a question or sharing their work that their words were
heard and their work was seen by the rest of the class. Ms. M repeatedly told individual students
to “speak up, speak up” or to “take your hand down” so that others could hear them. Similarly,
Ms. B also affirmed her students and their work by making sure that when a student was sharing
his or her work with the rest of the class that everyone could see what the student had created.
Ms. B would also have to remind other students not to interrupt students or to quiet down
students so that the speaking student could have the floor. Through these actions, Ms. M and Ms.
B conveyed to the student that what they had to say or had created was important and/or special
and thus should be shown to or heard by everyone.

**Believing in individual student’s academic capabilities:** Both teachers’ steadfast belief
in the capabilities of each individual student and how they interacted with students in expressing
their beliefs emerged from the video data repeatedly and in a variety of forms. Each teacher
conveyed the beliefs that each of their students could achieve at a high level and they expected
nothing but each individual student’s best. Ms. B and Ms. M set high standards for their students,
and demonstrated that they would not accept anything below their standards and would push
individual students to meet the standard.

An area in which both teachers emphasized was their faith in individual student’s abilities
to think critically. Consequently, they regularly facilitated the development of critical thinking
skills. One of the ways in which they did this was by giving individual students extended time to
think when answering a question. There can be a tendency for teachers to move on to another
student or provide the answer when a student hesitates, but Ms. B and Ms. M allowed their students an opportunity to process the question and share the knowledge or information that the teachers were confident the students possessed. Students were not rushed nor where they mocked, but instead encouraged.

Individual students were not only encouraged by being given adequate time to think and respond, they were also encouraged to think more critically. For example, Ms. M often pushed her students to examine the process by which they arrived at a correct answer. Frequently, if a student gave an answer, Ms. M questioned the individual even further by asking, “How did you come up with [X]?” or “How would you prove [X]?” The correct answer was not all that she was seeking, but instead comprehension and critical thinking. At one point, two students were trying to describe perimeter to a classmate, and she asked them, “So can you explain it to him? What ways can you show him to help him understand about perimeter?”

In another instance, when the other teacher in the classroom started to help another student on the test, Ms. M stopped the teacher saying, “No, no. He has to try.” The student looked up at her as Ms. M asks “what does it say right here?” The student responded, “Give an example.” Ms. M continued, “For what? Define means give us the definition. You know what we have been going over every day.” The student nodded his head. Thus, Ms. M pushed him to figure it out on his own, conveying to him that she believed he had the capability within himself. In a similar situation she gave a student back his test after looking over it and said, “You need to show what you were thinking.” He turned the test in again, only for Ms. M. to return it to ensure his success, saying “Where is the little brain down here, up under the numbers? See like the person did here,” pointing to another test. “Show what you thought about.” The student nodded his head and looked down at his test and began to write. Again, Ms. M expressed her belief that
he had the knowledge in him and that he could think through, understand, and complete the questions on the test.

Ms. B also pushed her students to think critically and expand on their answers. Ms. B was asking her students why they came to the afterschool program. One student answered, “To get out of school.” Ms. B questioned, “To get out of school? But this is after school, and guess what? We are still in school. How can we say that, you are out of school, but you are in school?” The student responded, “To go home?” She scratched her head and asked, “Did you come here to go home? You picked a bad way to get home to come here and sit in a chair. I don’t get it, you are out of school, but you are not here to get out of school.” The student then answered, “Okay, then to learn.” In another situation she had students look in the magnifying glass at a dead bumble bee and describe what they saw. Erin looked in the magnifying glass and then started to walk away. Ms. B called out to her, “What do you see? You gotta tell me one thing. Erin, you gotta tell me one thing you saw?” The student came back, looked in the magnifying glass and said, “I see a bug on its back and its leg on its back.” Ms. B held up her hand, palm out and said in a questioning tone, “Wait a minute, is he lying on his back? Come back and look.” Erin looked again and said, “No, on its side,” with a small smile. Ms. B responded, “Right girl!”

Ms. B would also ask her students a lot of questions about their skills in completing projects depicting themselves in the present and in the future as a grown up. She would ask individual students things like, “Do you want this to be you as a grown woman?”, “Is this you now?”, “Are you going to color this some more or are you going to leave it like this?” and “Tell me about your picture.” As part of their project they talked about what they wanted to be when they grew up, and Ms. B encouraged high aspirations. When one student first said that she
wanted to be a doctor, and then after being asked what kind, responded that she wanted to be a nurse. Ms. B replied, “Ok, a nurse is not a doctor, but we will talk. You can be a doctor.”

An interaction between Ms. B and her student, Tamia, exemplifies Ms. B’s interest in her student’s work, facilitation of student’s individual thinking processes, and encouragement of their future goals. Ms. B was walking around the room checking on students’ progress and stopped next to Tamia and commented, “Tamia, this is nice. What do you want to be when you get older?” Tamia replied, “A teacher.” Ms. B raised her eyebrows and said, “Are you sure?” Tamia softly said, “Yes.” Ms. B smiled and extended her hand out toward the class and said, “You want to deal with these little children like this?” Tamia smiled and looking at Ms. B, replied, “I probably won’t be a teacher. I will probably be something else…a lawyer.” Ms. B asked, “What do lawyers do?” Tamia shared, “They go in the court and then…but uh, the people who in court they talk about… they ask questions for the people.” Ms. B raised her eyebrows and asked, “Would you like that? You could be real important like that?” Tamia nodded her had smiling and replied, “Yes.” Ms. B continued, “Okay. Let me get you a piece of paper and I want you to draw yourself in the courtroom, okay?” Tamia nodded her head and smiled. Therefore in this interaction, as well as the ones previously described, Ms. M and Ms. B articulated their beliefs in their student’s academic capabilities by expecting the best and pressing them to think critically. Such expectations can facilitate the student’s own belief in him or herself and compel the student to meet the academic challenges set before them.

**Believing in individual students social capabilities:** Students were viewed in terms of their multiple capabilities and thus Ms. M and B’s high expectations not only focused on each student’s academic development, but each student’s emotional and social development as well. Often the teachers’ beliefs in their students’ academic abilities were coupled with beliefs in the
student’s ability to follow the rules and interact appropriately with others. Neither teacher had situations in which they had to administer a punishment for misbehavior. However, on one occasion one of Ms. B’s students had to be punished prior to Ms. B’s arrival. While, students did not demonstrate major discipline problems in either teacher’s classroom, the teachers did redirect student’s behavior and guide individual students both verbally and nonverbally. The directing and guidance were never given out with vindictiveness or anger, but instead both teachers remained calm and never lost control of their emotions.

Though she did not act vindictively or out of anger, Ms. M was very stern in her guidance, clearly expressing her dislike of certain behaviors and her expectation for a different behavior. The sternness and high standards was constant regardless of the behavior and the redirecting of behavior was very fluid. She did not stop everything to redirect a student, but did so and moved on seemingly with the expectation that her direction would be followed. When a student was leaning back in his chair with only two legs on the floor, she approached him, touched the chair and said firmly, “Chair on the floor, pull it up,” and kept on walking. The student immediately did so and got back to work. She would direct silently as well, tapping the side of a student when he is sitting up on his knees in his chair. The student quickly responded and sat on his bottom. She responded to another instance silently when a female student was playing with fake flower petals on her desk while Ms. M was teaching. Without stopping giving information to the class, Ms. M approached, scooped up the petals and put them on a back table. The student responded by fiddling with something else on her desk and started to answer chorally, though minimally, with the rest of the class. Sometimes after redirecting a student’s behavior, Ms. M would say “thank you” as a student responded. A more serious instance that could have evoked an angry reaction was when Ms. M was telling her students to get out a piece of paper and repeated
herself, “A sheet of paper. One sheet of paper.” Quincy, one of the students in the class echoed what she said each time. Ms. M just turned to him and said, “Quincy. Don’t mock me? Ya hear?”

Ms. B was also firm in her direction of individual student behavior, and directed student behavior in both indirect and direct ways. To curtail misdirected behaviors, she used instructional time defining the term “self-discipline” and providing and asking the students for examples of self-discipline. Thus, when she directed a student not following her directions, Ms. B often offered what might be called “reminders”. Some examples include instances where she pointed to a student and said, “You are breaking the rules,” or when she shook her head and said, “That’s not using self-discipline” or when she touched a student on her shoulder and reminded, “You belong in the circle.” The reminders were voiced with emphasis, but Ms. B did not raise her voice. The even voice and calm demeanor were typical when directing individual students. When one student was playing with a balloon during an activity, after telling the student once to put it away, she turned again to the student and said, “You know what? If I see it again I am going to take it okay? Cause I think you are just fooling around with it.” The student maintained eye contact with the teacher, his feet swinging and put the balloon in his pocket and folded his hands in his lap. She continued, “We don’t want balloons in the class at all. That is a strict rule; maybe I should talk to you about that.”

Ms. B often also used facial expressions and touch to redirect student behavior in combination with words and without words. When one student was talking to his neighbor while another student was speaking, Ms. B remained focused on the answering student, but put her arm around the talking student and the student got quiet. She would also use touch to keep a student behaving after having to direct a student. For example, a student, Donovan, was sitting while everyone else was standing and said to the boy next to him, “Stop kicking me little boy.” Ms. B
turned to look Donovan and held his gaze for four seconds. The rest of the class started giggling. Ms. M replied, “Ah, ah. Do not laugh at him.” She leaned over, grabbed Donovan’s arm, and directed, “You need to stand up.” Donovan followed her directions, but she kept her hand on his arm, while she continued with the activity. There were also instances when a student or two was talking or playing with another student and Ms. B would give them “a look”. The “look” consisted of raised eyebrows, a downward tilted head, and pursed lips (see Figure 4-4) and conveyed multiple messages: “stop it”, “get in line”, and “should you be doing that?” The look was sufficient to get the student to change his or her behavior.

![Figure 4-4. Ms. B’s “look” for re-directing student behavior](image)

A practice that was particular to Ms. B was her review of her student’s behavior during the school day. She spent approximately 12 minutes checking in with each individual student asking them how their self-discipline was during the school day, expressing to the students that she expected the best in terms of their behavior. A female student shared that she had been talking too much during the day, and Ms. B said with emphasis, “You can do better than that girlfriend.” Another student, Tyreek, reported that he had some difficulty in class with talking and had to give his teacher tokens because of his behavior. After some discussion with Tyreek, Ms. B asked, “What are you going to do about it?” Tyreek shifted in his seat and answered
while looking down, “I don’t know.” Ms. B raised her eyebrows and frowned replying, “Now, don’t tell me that,” and then pointing to Tyreek she said. “I am going to have a talk with you, I don’t like how that sounds.” She moved on to asking the next student. Tyreek followed her with his eyes, swallowed, and looked down, rubbing his hands on his pants. Another female student admitted to having to be told by her teacher to be quiet. Ms. B questioned, “She said that to you? Should she have to say that? She has to take all her time and she could be helping all these students here.” When students reported poor behavior, Ms. B never got angry, but instead made it clear that she was disappointed and knew that they were capable of more.

Another category particular to Ms. B, that might be labeled “individual guidance”, consisted of teacher comments to facilitate the overall development of pro-social behaviors in students. In one instance, Ms. B asked a student if her teacher was Ms. G. The student replied, “Uh huh.” Ms. B turned to her and said, “Say yes. We don’t say ‘uh huh’.” Similarly, a student was presenting her picture to the class, and was wiggling and rocking back and forth and Ms. B guided her to stop moving and when the student continued to rock and shift her weight, Ms. B stated, “Stand still honey.” Though minimal, Ms. B wanted to give the students feedback. In another situation a student got upset because she was not called on, and Ms. B called her over and said. “I have a job for you and I want you to name [the bugs], but I can’t ask you if you have an attitude. Can you straighten your little face please? You are going to name this and then be the entomologist, okay?” The student’s face then brightened.

Another interaction that demonstrates the category of individual guidance is one between Ms. B and Lani. Ms. B was handing out nametags and Lani did not get one. Lani, whined loudly, “You didn’t give me none.” Ms. B with her eyebrows raised said, “Excuse me.” Lani looked down at the table in response. Ms. B directed, “I think you should raise your hand and say ‘Ms.
B can I have one please’.” Lani immediately looked up, raised her hand and began to say “Ms. B can I have one please” and Ms. B said “Wait a minute. I have to call on you. Raise your hand.” She returned to handing out nametags and then asked the class to stop and listen and indicated that Lani should begin. Lani started, “Ms. B…” and then paused. Ms. B guided her saying, “May I…” Lani repeated, “May I have a …” and paused again. Ms. B said, “Nametag.” Lani repeated, “Nametag please,” and smiled. Ms. B complemented, “Oh, that was beautiful,” and then handed Lani a name tag. Lani took the nametag and got to work. Modeling after Lani, another student at the table immediately raised his hand and repeated the whole question asking for a nametag for himself. This particular instance, not only exemplifies “individual guidance”, but how Ms. B gave Lani a chance to perform her new skill, to which Lani received praise and another student learned from Lani.

Consequently, Ms. B and Ms. M challenged their students to believe in themselves and demonstrated to the students the teachers own faith in individual student’s abilities to think critically and follow directions. Also, by being stern and firmly holding their students to high expectations, each teacher showed her students that she cared for them. In fact, they were cared for so much that their teacher would not accept poor behavior or academic mediocrity. Consistently, individual students responded to the behavioral or academic standard by working harder, pushing themselves further, or following the teacher’s direction.

**Affirming individual student’s strengths:** In the midst of holding their students to high standards and expecting nothing less from them, both Ms. M and Ms. B connected with their individual students by complimenting them individually on their abilities. Neither teacher praised or affirmed individual student’s strengths excessively. Specifically, Ms. M did not do this as much on an individual basis as did Ms. B, but both teachers took the time to acknowledge the
individual student’s accomplishments and progress. Based on their body language, be it a small grin, sitting up straighter in his or her seat, or more subsequent participation, one can posit that the individual students experienced feelings of pride at being positively recognized.

Ms. M’s manner of affirming the strengths of her individual students was a subdued, yet seemingly genuine process. She did not shower the student with praises, but quickly expressed her positive feedback which differed from her praises for the class as a whole. For example, after administering a short pop quiz, she collected a student’s paper and looked at his answers as she kept walking. She turned back at the student and smiled at him as she took another student’s paper. She then turned and reached for his hand and shook it. She pointed at him and gave him a small smile, then gave him a thumbs up and smiled even wider. In a comparable situation, a student received a perfect score on her test. Ms. M walked over to her, patted the student’s shoulder and said, “Good job” and the student smiled. In another instance, Ms. M was asking the class the definition of an improper fraction. Most students had answered with statements like, “The top number is bigger than the bottom number.” However, when Ms. M called on a student and the student replied, “When the numerator is bigger than the denominator.” Ms. M nodded her head and turned to the class and said, “We are using words. Very good. She says an improper fraction is when the numerator is larger than the denominator.” She then looked at the student and pointed to her and said, “Excellent.” The student responded by smiling slightly and looking down at the desk. Later that day, the same student can be seen with her hand raised to respond to other questions posed by Ms. M.

Ms. B’s complimented an individual student more frequently than did Ms. M, and at times her style of complimenting was more demonstrative. She gave small compliments in passing by saying, “Beautiful job,” “I see my artist in this room, excellent,” or “This girl knows her insects.”
She would also have brief conversations in which she praised a student. A student showed Ms. B her picture, and Ms. B responded by opening her mouth and breathing in. Ms. B then grabbed for the paper effusively and then said, “I love it. You can’t have it”. The student responded by resting her chin in her hands and looking up at Ms. B smiling.

Occasionally she affirmed a student in front of the entire class. For example, when the students were at work on their individual projects, she called them to attention and with her student Kim at her side she said as she put her arm around Kim, “I was to share with you Kim’s… work that she did. I want to tell you why I am so proud of her.” Kim looked up at Ms. B with a wide smile and her hand in her mouth. Ms. B continued, “Not only did she complete her assignment, but she made herself… she followed instructions she made herself as a little girl and a grown woman.” Ms. B emphasized the words “grown woman”. Kim responded to this by throwing her head back and laughing. Once Ms. B finished, the student was seen walking away with a big smile on her face. Another time, a student was able to guess the rule of the game that the class was playing and Ms. B got a wide smile on her face, clapped her hands and gave the student a high five and said, “I need one of my stickers with a big brain on it.” The student smiled and stood up straighter, then turned to look at the camera. In addition to praising her students academically, she also complimented students on their hair, eyelashes, and smiles as well as called students “handsome” and complimented their names.

In classrooms, it could be easy to focus predominantly on what students are not doing right or well, and forget to search for and praise what students are doing right. However, Ms. M and Ms. B spent time affirming individual student strengths, qualities and capabilities. Their praise and compliments demonstrated to the students that their hard work, efforts, and improvements were recognized and deserved commendation. Such compliments could
potentially serve to further motivate students to continue striving to perform academically and socially.

**Ensuring individual student’s success**

Not only did Ms. B and Ms. M set high standards with regard to their students’ academics, they also took measures to attend to each individual student’s academic needs to help them meet the standards. Moreover, each teacher took the time to ensure that each and every one of their students was making academic progress. Neither teacher would let a student fall behind and made sure that each individual student comprehended the material that was presented. Ms. M repeatedly asked, “Are there any questions?” And she followed up her words with actions. When a student did raise his hand and said he did not understand volume, Ms. M stopped and returned to the board and explained the process of finding the volume again. She then checked in with the student to make certain that the student now understood.

Absent from any of these interactions was any evidence of shaming or questioning concerning why the student did not understand. Likewise, neither teacher shamed a student when they answered a question incorrectly nor did not ridicule the student. Instead they responded respectfully to individual student’s incorrect answers. The respectful manner in which they responded differed however. Ms. B was more indirect in her responses to incorrect answers and acknowledged the student’s attempt. For example, while holding a Polaroid camera she asked the students to guess what she was holding. A student answered, “A video camera,” to which Ms. B smiled and responded, “Nope. Close. It does look like a video camera.” With her hand, she indicated another student’s turn. That student answered, “A tape recorder?” Ms. B responded, “Good thinking” and pointed to another student. In response to Ms. B’s replies, the students did not display any behaviors that would indicate that they felt embarrassed or ashamed of their
incorrect answer. In this instance one of the students, upon guessing wrong, immediately raised her hand again to try to answer again.

In another example, Ms. B had separated the students based on the number of syllables in their names and was having the students guess how she had divided them up. Two students consecutively shared that they thought she separated the class by height. Ms. B demonstrated that the answer was incorrect by demonstrating the absence of a systematic height differential between the two groups. She then called on a third student, Tamia, who was jumping up and down with her hand raised. Tamia answered smiling, “I know, I know.” Tamia then put her hand on the top of the taller student next to her and said, “Because tall” and then Tamia put her hand on her own head and squatted and said, “Short”. Ms. B replied with her eyebrows furrowed, “But we already talked about that.” Tamia responded by bending over and waving her hands and giggling smiling. Ms. B then paused, and recognizing the plausibility of Tamia’s answer said, “But wait a minute, it could be, it could be. It could be a pattern of tall, short, tall short,” as she pointed to the students, “but I didn’t do that.” Ms. B could easily have snapped at the student for repeating the same answer, but instead remained collected and thus was able to interpret what the student was saying and acknowledge the plausibility of Tamia’s answer.

Ms. M took a more direct approach to responding to wrong answers and correcting individual student’s incorrect answers. She typically did not acknowledge the plausibility of the students’ answer or the attempt, yet still remained respectful and did not shame the individual student. If a student gave a wrong answer she might say, “No sir” or “No ma’am” and move on to asking another student. Most of time she used their incorrect answer to facilitate the student’s learning. The following example depicts this facilitation.

Ms. M: What is six times nine? (asking the whole class)
Student: 63
Ms. M’s focus on making sure the student knows and understands the correct answer conveyed to the student that it was important to Ms. M that the student know and understand the information.

Both teachers also conveyed this message to individual students by the teacher’s constant engagement and their consistent monitoring of the student’s progress. Ms. M and Ms. B never sat down or did their own work while the students were engaged in another task. Instead Ms. M and Ms. B constantly walked around and checked on individual students’ work to ensure that individual students understood and completed their academic tasks. Ms. B would move around the room, asking her students about their progress and answer any student questions. Ms. M however, would monitor individual students more closely, reading over students shoulders and checking their answers. She even provided feedback on individual student’s note taking saying, “You must write with a capital letter here,” or “Your words go on the line, not swinging up in the air.” The students responded by fixing their mistake, and Ms. M would continue walking and checking on other students.

Another way Ms. M and Ms. B were responsive to and ensured their individual student’s progress and command of the material was by using class time to check individual student’s comprehension. Ms. M walked around the class and asked each individual student to define one
of the mathematical terms and on other occasions would walk around and call on individual students at random. For example, on one occasion the student did not give the correct definition of a mixed fraction, and she said, “No, no, no. That is not right. Open up your journal and read it.” The class as a whole started chorally reading the definition”, but Ms. M expressed that it was important for the individual student to learn the material and said. “No, I want Javon to do it,” and thus Javon responded by reading the definition aloud.

Therefore, as depicted through the examples, Ms. M and Ms. B invested in making certain that their individual students were succeeding in their classroom. This investment was demonstrated by how they respectfully corrected the students and how both teachers constantly engaged in monitoring student progress. Rather than sitting down or talking to other adults in the classroom, Ms. M and Ms. B gave their undivided attention to the students and their student’s academic growth. Ms. M and Ms. B expressed through their actions that the information and each individual student’s comprehension was important. Both teachers were devoted to seeing their students achieve and would expend the effort to assure it.

Summary

The development of one-on-one relationships with students in classrooms is a complex process that looks much different from relationship development in other contexts because of the academic, task focused nature of classrooms. However, Ms. B and Ms. M seamlessly developed relationships with individual students through a series of connection building interactions interwoven within their instruction. They facilitated teacher-student interactions within the classroom context through their communication of their investment in their students. Ms. M and Ms. B conveyed their investment through their efforts to listen to and empathize with their students and their students’ experiences, show their faith in their students’ potential, re-connect students who withdraw, and exert themselves to make certain their individual students
succeeded. Therefore, through their words and actions the teachers expressed to the individual students that they were of value and that they were worthy and deserving of their time and efforts, and that the teacher wanted a relationship with each of them.

**Creating Teacher Class Connection**

Although each student was seen as an individual and both teachers had connective interactions with individual students, each teacher emphasized the importance of the individual student as part of the class as a whole. Both teachers stressed the collectivistic nature of the class and conveyed a commitment to building a relationship with their entire class. Ms. B and Ms. M communicated that everyone was connected to one another in the classroom. Consequently, each teacher took measures to highlight that the class existed as a learning community and that she was invested in the class community. Ms. M and Ms. B developed their relationships with the class by focusing on the learning and the success of the class a whole, and thus by attending to, believing in, affirming the strengths of the class.

**Defining the class as a community**

Both Ms. B and Ms. M defined in concrete ways how their class operated as a learning community. In her first meeting with her students, Ms. B began the afterschool program by having the class sitting in a circle and Ms. B taking the time to learn and memorize each student’s name and making student to student connections by asking, “Who else is in your class?” When new students started the program on the 2nd day, she returned to this activity and thus she highlighted the importance of being known by others in the group. She also expressed how she viewed the class as a family group when she stated, “We are all here as a family,” and “I am the fake mother and you are the fake children.”

The emphasis on the communalism in the classroom as a supportive group was also demonstrated in how Ms. B and Ms. M prompted the class to help one another and provide
feedback. For example, when Ms. M was walking around checking students’ progress, she stopped and addressed one student, “How would you visualize...how would you show your ‘A’?” The student answered inaudibly, but Ms. M replied, “No, uh uh. No sir.” She then pointed to the student sitting next to him and directed her, “Show him,” and the student responded by getting up and leaning over her classmate’s board and started to point to the board and talk to her classmate. In another instance she asked a student for the definition of perimeter and he hesitated to give an answer and she asked, “You know the definition for perimeter?” The student looked down at the desk and then shook his head no with his eyes furrowed and upper lip upturned. She directed the rest of the class to help him when she stated, “Alright, let’s give him the definition again, what is perimeter class?”

Similarly, Ms. B had students give one another feedback regarding on each other’s behavior during the school day, when she would ask, “Did she use her self-discipline today? Who’s in her class?” Ms. B also directed two students who completed their projects early to help their classmates mount their pictures on construction paper and to have students who were knowledgeable about bugs teach their classmates what they knew. As a learning community, both teachers signified to the class that they were to help one another by virtue of being in class together.

The centrality of the class as a community was further underscored by how Ms. B and Ms. M attended to the inclusion of every student and in doing so indicated the importance of each student as part of the class. Ms. M made an effort to identify and welcome the students in her class that were new to the elementary school when she stated, “My new students raise your hands. My new students...new to Smith, new to Smith. Okay, welcome to our school, hopefully you will have an enjoyable experience this year. Okay?” Also, because of the large number of students in her classroom, many students had to sit at tables on the edges of the room. Ms. M
went to those students sitting on the edge and ensured their inclusion by directing them, “You all are going to have to turn at an angle so you can see the board okay?” See Figure 4-2 for a diagram of the classroom.

Ms. B was also very intent on the inclusion of each student. If the students were seated in a circle she would ensure that everyone was part of the circle, with statements like, “You have to go way back, way back, because he has to get in the circle.” She did not allow any student to be on the outside of the circle. Additionally, if a student was seated on the edge of the circle, she inquired, “Can you see?” When the class presented their work to one another she made certain that everyone could see by saying, “Show everybody? Make sure everybody gets to see it.” She also double checked that everyone had an opportunity to share when she asked, “Who did we forget?” and checked with individual students, “Did you share Mia?” Also, as described previously, Ms. B made efforts to re-engage emotionally withdrawn students and bring them back into the class community.

As depicted in the examples, Ms. B and Ms. M demonstrated their commitment to creating a sense of community by emphasizing the interdependence of the students as a community of learners. By doing so they were emphasizing the collectivistic beliefs transmitted to the children by their African American families. Additionally, each teacher was also stressing the significance of inclusion and how they attached importance to each individual as a worthwhile member of the class community.

**Attending to the class as a whole**

Both Ms. M and Ms. B demonstrated skills in assessing, empathizing with, and attending to the emotional and cognitive states of their class as a whole. They were attuned to their class’s engagement with and mastery of the academic material. Their attentiveness to their class was demonstrated by their flexibility with regard to lesson plans, recognition of the need to review
material more extensively, or judgment concerning how the class was understanding the
information. However, just because the teachers recognized the engagement level, did not mean
that they thus bended to the will of the class, but they did acknowledge and validate the students’
experiences. However, acknowledging and validating the students’ experience did not result in
the teacher lowering their standards.

Ms. M’s class time consisted of the class chorally stating definitions and answering
questions repeatedly over and over again. At times the students began to drop in their energy
level or could be seen displaying body language that may be perceived as conveying their
boredom. For example, this might include the students with their head in their hands, sometimes
covering their eyes, fidgeting with different materials or barely responding when Ms. M asked
the class to respond chorally. Ms. M empathized with this one day saying, “I know you get tired
of the lessons over and over and over again, but it is important that we do it over and over again.
Alright?” She also just noted the fact that they were not as engaged when she stated, “Some of
you are not staying focused and you won’t understand…it is very important that you pay
attention in this classroom.” She also empathized with the difficulty of the material, and said,
“It’s okay for you not to understand but you have to let me know. You have to raise your hand
and say ‘I don’t understand’. So when you tell me that then what should the teacher do?” The
class responded, “Help.” She then continued, “Help you by doing what? By going over and over
and over and over it again.” Consequently, in being empathic and responsive, she did not
dismiss covering the content she had planned for class because the students were not fervently
engaged, but she did acknowledge their response and discussed the importance of the class
knowing the material.
Both Ms. B and Ms. M were also sensitive to the class’s understanding or confusion with regard to the material being presented. When Ms. B noticed that most of the class was mispronouncing the word “math”, saying “maff” instead of “math”, she stopped what she was doing and taught the students to enunciate the “th” sound. She even joked with them saying, “This is one time you get to stick your tongue out at your teacher. You get to say ‘math’.” As she did this she scrunched up her face and stuck out her tongue as she pronounces the “th” sound. The students laughed but then repeated, saying it correctly and Ms. B exclaimed “that worked” as she smiled.

Ms. M would acknowledge her students’ confusion or frustration by reviewing the material again, providing the students with hints, or allowing them to look at the notes they had taken about the particular concept. For example, her class struggled with defining and comprehending the concept of unlike fractions. At one point when she asked the class for the definition, they responded out of sync with a number of students giving the incorrect definition. She stopped them, recognizing their confusion and said, “Take a deep breath. In. Out. In. Out,” as she made hand motions indicating when to breathe in and out. The students responded by taking deep breaths, with some students doing so exaggeratedly. She then told them to close their eyes or put their head on the desk, which they did. She then said, “Think of ‘un’. What does ‘un’ mean to you?” The students with their eyes still closed shouted “Not.” Ms. M then said, “Now give me the definition for unlike fractions. Take a deep breath before you give it to me please.” The class then correctly stated the definition in completion.

Therefore, in summary, both Ms. M and Ms. B were attentive to and responsive to their class as a whole. They did not disregard the experiences of their students but instead validated the class’s experiences through their words and actions. Moreover, the teachers demonstrated a
willingness to be flexible and respond by changing what they were doing and responding to the group’s level of understanding or engagement.

**Believing in the whole class**

Similar to their process of believing in individual students, Ms. M and Ms. B also communicated that they believed in their class’s abilities and potential. They communicated that they expected the best, accepted no excuses, and emphasized the class’s responsibility for their own learning. Additionally, the teachers supportively challenged and encouraged the students to work harder, go faster, and achieve more. However, throughout the process of challenging and expressing high standards, the teachers complimented and acknowledged the strengths and progress that the class had made.

**Believing in the class’s capabilities:** Just as Ms. B and Ms. M shared their belief in individual student’s capabilities, they also demonstrated this belief about the class’s potential as a whole. Therefore, it was not just that individual students needed to do well and reach high standards, the entire class needed to do the same. Ms. M, in particular, focused on this quite heavily and at a much greater frequency than did Ms. B. However, both Ms. M and Ms. B expressed to their class that they expected the class’s best and if either teacher felt that their students had not done so, they would address it in some fashion. For example, Ms. B had her students try to guess the rule of a game that they were playing. Some of the students were repeating each others answers instead of giving their own and some of the answers given were not on track. Ms. B expressed that she wanted more from the class by stating, “Who can raise their hand and give me a serious answer?” and raised her hand in demonstration. The students raised their hands, and Ms. B said, “Isn’t this the Mind, Body and Spirit club?” As she pointed to her head she said. “This time use our mind. Let me hear it, come on.” Ms. B also verbalized her high expectations regarding the class’s behavior during the school day, prior to afterschool.
As mentioned, she took time to check in with each student concerning their self-discipline. However, she also emphasized this again with a comment to the entire class. She said with a strain in her voice, “I really don’t like Mind, Body and Spirit kids coming in here and telling me that they didn’t do things like if your teacher told you to do something. That is very serious.”

Ms. M also made sure her class knew that she expected the best. In fact, she started off the class on the first day stating, “Who knows what I expect?” As she had a reputation at the school for being strict, most of the class raised their hands. Ms. M replied, “Everyone right, except my new students? But you will know. Right?” She then repeated multiple times, “I accept no excuses” to make sure the class understood. When introducing their math journals and how she expected the students to have them in class every day, she said, “When you come here in the morning I don’t need you to say, ‘I left it at my aunt’s house’.” The fervor in which she upheld her expectations was demonstrated when she told the class a story about the past year’s students. “Some of them came in last year, ‘I had to go to the hospital to see my aunt’ and then I asked the question ‘were you the doctor? Did you take care of your aunt?’ ‘No.’ ‘Then maybe you can sit in the waiting room and do your homework assignment.’ I accept no excuses. Let me see the hands of those who understand. When I give you an assignment this is what I expect for you to do. Bring your assignment.” Thus, she did not ignore the difficulty of having a sick family member, but she did express that her expectations still had to be met even in the midst of hard times.

She reinforced her high standards and her expectation that they could and would do their best, by not allowing anything less than their best. When they answered chorally and stumbled over an answer or definition, she had them do it over again. At one point she asked the class to chorally provide the definition of a mathematical term. Only a few students responded and then
tapered off. She announced to the class, “We are going to have to do better than that. Read it again.” Similarly, she asked the class what an unlike fraction was. The class responded correctly, but they did not answer in a complete sentence, which is what she required. Thus Ms. M said, “Well, let’s try it again, but this time I need you to give it to me in a complete sentence.” On another day, the class again stumbled on giving the definition of an unlike fraction, and she said, “Get it straight, get it straight. Unlike fractions are what?” The class then responded with the correct definition, in a complete sentence. She wanted their best even down to the grammar. Consequently, when the students start off chorally saying, “A improper fraction...”, Ms. M jumped in saying emphatically, “I keep hearing the word ‘a’. It’s ‘an’, ‘A’, ‘N’. An improper fraction. An improper fraction. Make sure you have that in your journal, ‘an improper fraction’.”

Because Ms. M believed in the capabilities of her students and expected the best from her class, she encouraged and supportively challenged her class to push themselves beyond what they felt they were capable of doing. This would take the form of challenging them to write faster, write more clearly, state the correct answer or just participate more actively. The “challenging” could be seen by some as too demanding or harsh, and yet the students responded by heeding her challenge and meeting her demands. For example, Ms. M felt that the class was taking too long to write down a definition and thus she had them recall the fact that they had passed the state’s fourth grade writing test. “You all did Florida Writes last year right? Did you have all day to do Florida Writes?” Similarly, she would state things like, “You don’t have all day to write in your math journals. Everybody should be finished.” or “You need to hurry up. You are in fifth grade now so that means you are timed.” At other points the class would answer one of her questions quietly, with little enthusiasm, to which she would respond “Come on, come on. Say it. We are learning today,” or “Don’t fumble over the words.” In one instance, class was
answered the question, “What is perimeter?” with little force. Ms. M responded by telling the students, “Stand tall in your mind when you’re saying perimeter.”

Finally, the last way that Ms. M expressed her beliefs in her student capabilities was by putting the responsibility for their learning on the class. She did not avoid her own responsibility as she told them, “We are here to help you,” referring to herself and the other teacher and she told them on multiple occasions to ask questions. However, she conveyed that their learning was also their responsibility. Echoing an instance referred to earlier in terms of her expectations, she said to the class, “When I give you an assignment, this is what I expect for you to do. Bring your assignment. Because the assignment is for who?” Ms. M then waved toward the class to get them to respond. The students answered “You.” Ms. M continued, “It’s for you because if you want to learn you have to do the assignment.” She also told them that their studying was fully their responsibility, “You got to develop your own study habits. Nobody should have to remind you to study.” In asserting that learning was their responsibility, Ms. M empowered the students to take their learning in their own hands and make decision regarding their learning accordingly. However, in line with her high expectations, she expected them to follow through and take the necessary steps to ensure that learning occurred.

**Affirming the class strengths and achievements:** As their class met the demands and high standards set for them by their teachers, both Ms. B and Ms. M also affirmed the strengths and progress of the entire class. Though they expected nothing less, both teachers recognized the class’s efforts through giving compliments and words of praise to the class as a whole, and showing excitement and pleasure in their class’s accomplishments. Both teachers not only praised the class, but stressed that they believed the students should be proud of themselves as well.
Ms. B expressed her delight with the class both in terms of their academics and their behavior. For example, she acknowledged the class’s good behavior when she commented, “People are taking turns nicely” and “Good listening and good quieting down.” Likewise, when the class was talking about why they were in the afterschool program, she said, “Ooh, you guys are coming up with some great ideas.” As they worked on their projects, she announced, “I see some nice pictures coming along.” While they were presenting their projects she told them, “You did a good job.” She also wanted the class to acknowledge their hard work and thus continued, “Who actually feels proud of the job you did? Give yourself a pat on the back.” The students with gusto patted themselves on the back, smiling and giggling.

Although Ms. M did not give numerous compliments and praise to individual students, she did compliment the class as whole. Typically this consisted of brief statements of “very good”, “good job”, and “alright!” or clapping for the class. The excitement behind the compliments varied, at times with Ms. M saying them with an even voice, but other times saying them with a large smile, a raised voice, and/or enthusiastically clapping. Like Ms. B she had the students recognize their own advancement by repeatedly telling them, “Give yourself a hand” or even “Give yourself a hand because you have really done a super job.” She further emphasized this when she stated “Now you can go out and tell somebody what you did on day one. Are you proud of yourself?” The class responded affirmatively. Ms. M tendency was to also point out how far the class had come. On the first day she commented, “You are starting off day one learning how to do mixed numbers, very good.” She also stated, “Give yourself a hand. That means you learned something this week.” On the fourth day of school she pointed out, “Fourth day of school and y’all are doing fractions.” Ms. M not only noted how far they had come, but how much further they could go. For example, when the class repeatedly was getting answers
correct, she said, “If you are getting this on day four can you imagine by the end of the year what you will have going for yourself?” She had so much hope for the class and she wanted them to have the same hope for themselves in terms of what they were able to accomplish.

In summary, as described, the recognition and affirmation of their class’s strengths and communication of beliefs in the class’s capabilities occurred repeatedly in the classrooms of Ms. M and Ms. B. The process of looking for, finding, and complimenting strengths demonstrated their investment in their class and their desire to acknowledge their class’s efforts and progress. Moreover, the setting of high standards and unwillingness to accept anything less than the students meeting the standard demonstrated the teachers’ faith in their class’s capabilities and potential. The expression of these positive messages created numerous opportunities for positive teacher-class interactions to build on in developing a relationship between the teacher and the class.

**Ensuring the class’s success**

Much in the same way that Ms. M and Ms. B ensured that every individual student was making progress academically, they were also doing the same with the entire class as well. One of the first steps Ms. B and Ms. M took to ensure student success was that they met the students’ needs with regard to school supplies and ensuring every student had the material that they needed. This was particularly significant with Ms. M, because students are often expected to provide their own school supplies, versus in an afterschool program the expectation may differ. Regardless, both teachers rarely started a lesson or activity without ensuring all the students had the necessary supplies.

As indicated, both teachers used the student’s seatwork time to walk around and check on individual student’s progress, and yet at the same time they were able to gauge the class’s progress as a whole. For example, when Ms. M was walking around the classroom checking
what students were writing in their math journals, she announced, “We need to practice our writing.” They also both gauged the class’s readiness and their engagement by checking in with their students. Ms. M often asked her class, “Are you ready?” or “Are we ready?” and Ms. B checked in with her students with “Are you guys with me?” Ms. M also made it clear that when she asked a question to the class as a whole that she expected the entire class to answer. If the class did not initially respond as a whole, but only a few students answered, she would raise her voice and with repeat the question more forcefully until the entire class answered chorally. For example, at one point when she was trying to gauge the class’s readiness, she asked, “Are you ready?” Some students answered quietly “yes.” She asked again much louder and waved her hands back and forth in front of her and exclaimed, “Are you ready?” The class shouted back, “Yes.” Ms. M sighed and said, “Okay, I thought at one time you weren’t ready.”

Similar to checking the class’s readiness and engagement, Ms. M and Ms. B would each also maintain the class’s engagement by giving directives to either direct the class’s focus or continue the class’s participation. They conveyed to the class that the entire class’s engagement and participation was important. For example, whenever Ms. B was writing on the board while the students were watching her, she would direct them, “You read while I write.” If they started to taper off, she would stop and say, “Everybody read,” or “Read please, read.” During one instance she was going to write a long word on the board so she asked the class to count the number of letters in the word. She started to write the word, but no one was counting, so she turned to them and said, “I want you to count. I don’t hear anybody.” Ms. M too would direct the class to maintain engagement by asking them to “read what you have again” or directing them to “read this for me please.” Ms. M also focused the students by saying, “Eyes on the
board” or “Eyes up here.” Though short statements, Ms. B and Ms. M’s classes each responded by following the directive and either read or focused their attention where indicated.

Ms. M also checked the class’s understanding and comprehension of the material throughout the class period. She expressed her desire for everyone in the class to understand when she frequently stated, “Let me see the hands of those students who understand.” She did acknowledge aloud that some students would raise their hand even though they did not understand. At one point when she was talking about how they will be going over material repeatedly, she then continued, “But if you sit up in this classroom and I ask the question ‘do you understand?’ and everybody say ‘Yes! Yes!’.” Ms. M puts her hand up in the air and waves it around, and then stated, “But when it is time to take the quiz and you tell me, ‘I don’t understand’, then it is too late.”

Ms. M reemphasized to the class on multiple occasions that they could and should ask questions if they were unsure of something. Ms. M told her students, “It’s okay for you not to understand but you have to let me know.” She even pleaded with the students saying, “Please if you don’t understand the math, stop me at some point.” She conveyed to the class that the class was a community and that it was important that every member of the class understand the material when she stopped the entire class to go over material again when one student did not understand a concept. She then checked in with the student afterward, “Now do you understand?” Once, the student said “yes,” Ms. M continued the lesson. Therefore, Ms. M was emphasizing through that interaction that because the class was a unit, when one of the students in the class needed help, the class would not leave them behind.

Ms. M did not let the class get by with just chorally giving definitions or even just giving their answers. Often, she would take the time to ensure that they knew their facts, understood
what they were saying and could explain how they got there. She did this through assignments in
which she required students to repeatedly write each of the multiplication facts they had
difficulty with so as to fill an entire page. Or if a student missed a question on a quiz, they were
required to write the problem twenty times, because “by the time you get to 19, guess what you
will understand how to do the problem.” In addition to assignments, Ms. M had them sing a rap
song called, “Rapping with Math”. She noted, however, that some of the class was rapping
without understanding what they are saying. “It is very important when you are rapping or you
sing a song, you need to understand those songs that you are singing…With the math rap...we
can rap the math rap everyday, but the question is do you understand what you are rapping? You
give me the definition for volume. But do you understand what volume is?” She followed up
such statements by later having the class explain how they came up with certain answers. In once
teacher-class interaction, she tested the class on how they figured out the area of a figure. “Are
you sure it is 18. I might say it is 19. Your teacher might say that it is 19.” Three students
shouted out saying, “Prove it.” Ms. M asked the class “You are telling me that I am wrong?” and
the class answered chorally “yes.” She asked, “How do you know I am wrong?” They replied
with force, “We added it.” Ms. M responded, “You added. Oh okay then you have to prove your
answer. Am I correct?” The students answered, “yes.” She then proceeded to call on a student to
prove how she got 18. Consequently, just saying the answer was not enough, but to be certain
that the class understood the concept fully, they had to prove to her that they understood.

Ms. B and Ms. M expressed, by what they said and what they did, that they were invested
in the success of their class as a whole. They took measures to repeatedly check that their class
was paying attention and ready, check their class’s comprehension, and direct their class’s focus.
Because the class was a community, no one was allowed to fall behind and thus the teachers
made efforts to make certain that it did not happen, even if it meant stopping the entire class to do so. In conclusion, these teachers’ investment in the success of their classes can be viewed in terms of their willingness to expend the energy and the time to take the necessary steps to provide opportunities for their students to succeed. They demonstrated they cared about the class and the class’s future.

**Using the class’s funds of knowledge and culture**

While instructional methods and pedagogy are not the focus of this research study, Ms. M and Ms. B each had positive interactions with their class and developed relationships with their class through the way they taught information and used their relationships in the learning process. Ms. M and Ms. B both used the existing skills and competencies that the group had obtained from their families, their communities and their experiences as a basis for the way in which they structured their class and taught new material. As most of the students in both Ms. M and Ms. B’s classes were predominantly low-income, African American students, both teachers also incorporated African centered practices. Some broad examples of how they used students’ existing skill and knowledge bases as well their culture was through their inclusion of music and beats into the classroom, dance and movement, performance, using narrative and call and response, visual arts and common family routines.

**Using the class’s existing knowledges:** Ms. B and Ms. M used the class’s knowledge bases and competencies as a foundation from which to present information. Beginning in the first few minutes of the first day of class, Ms. M linked one of the procedures of the class with the students’ existing knowledge. Ms. M had her students take notes and complete their homework in math journals and thus expressed to the students how integral it was that they bring the journal every day. To ensure that the students understood the importance of their journals, she related their math journals to a train ticket. She asked the class to raise their journals in the air and
stated, “That is your ticket and this is the train that is moving. In order for you to get on the train you cannot ride for free. What do you have to have?” The students replied chorally, “A ticket.” She asked again, “What do you have to have?” Again the class replied. “A ticket.” She continued pointing to the journal, “So this is what you have to have.” This connection of the math journal to the class’s ticket to the math class reinforced the point that Ms. M was trying to make in that students must bring their math journals each day.

Similarly, Ms. M was trying to teach the class that their brains tell their bodies what to do. To make her point she connected the concept to what the students were doing at that immediate moment. She approached a student and pretended to stick a marker in the student’s mouth. Ms. M, talking about the brain said, “It says close your mouth so someone doesn’t stick a finger or marker in it.” The students laughed and Ms. M squeezed the student’s arm and smiled, “You didn’t even close your mouth. You better get your brain in order.” She continued around the circle where the class was seated and approached each student commenting on whatever the student was doing at that moment and how their brain sent the message to their bodies. One student saw her coming and turned around in his chair. She approached him and said, “Your brain is telling you to turn around and show [Ms. B] your back.” The students responded in laughter, with a couple of students throwing their heads back in laughter. The next student was grabbing his nose, and with incredulousness in her voice Ms. B said “your brain told you to grab your nose?” The student covered his mouth and laughed, as classmates laughed with him. Ms. B said to the next student, “And your brain says to just laugh goofily.” The student closed his eyes and threw his head back laughing.

Creating ways in which to connect the material to the student’s existing knowledge and skills can take time and effort. Ms. M noted this when she shared with the students about how
she had been thinking about them that summer and how she would teach them about mixed numbers. She shared, “I thought about mixed numbers this summer and I say ‘well, what can I tell my kids about mixed numbers?’ I thought about cake mix, eggs. How can I make this cake? I have my mixture there, how can I make this cake. Do I just pour all of that in a pan? What do I need to do? Huh, I have my cake mix and I have my eggs, tell me…my mixture is already in the bowl, what do I need to do?” A student answered “Put in the eggs.” Ms. M responded, “The eggs already in there. What do I need to do?” A student answered, “Mix it up.” Ms. M continued, “What do I need to do? I need to mix it up. So with this mixed number you are going to have to mix it up. With this mixed number you cannot work with this number until you do what with the number?” The class answered, “Mix it up.” Ms. M continued, “Until you do what with the number?” The class then responded more loudly, “Mix it up.” Later in the class period, Ms. M returned to the idea of making a cake and said, “In order for you bake this cake you had to mix your ingredients up, so think of this,” she pointed to a mixed number on the board, “as your cake mix. What do you need to do with this number? Mix it up” demonstrated a stirring motion with her finger, “in order for you to work with it.” To solidify her point, she proceeded to have the class actually act out the stirring motion. Consequently, in this example she not only tells the students about how she thinks about them during the summer, but also connects the concept to something that the students are familiar with, baking cakes, and ties it to a motion.

Ms. M used a number of other concepts to relate the mathematical material with experiences with which the students were familiar. For example, in teaching unlike fractions to the class she related unlike fractions to receiving a gift that you dislike. She told them, “I want you to think about something you don’t like. Say for instance that your parents bought you something from the mall that you didn’t like. What do you have to do with it? What are you
going to do with it?” After hearing some answers from the class, she asked them, “What are you going to do with it? You gonna go to the mall and take it back?” The class shouted, “yeah.” She continued, “Take it back and change for something that you what?” The students responded, “like.” She repeated, “Change it for something that you like. That is what you have to do with unlike fractions.” Additionally, Ms. M built upon the strong emphasis of family and kin within the African American culture (Boykin, 1986, 2001; King, 2003; Merell, 2002). One example of this was when she had the problem “3/9 of 27=” written up on the board. She pointed to the nine and the seven and asked the class, “are these numbers in the same family? Are they related?” and later when discussing similar problems stated, “We talk about family and talk about how they are related,” and “We talk about cousins, are they in the same family? So my question is how do you know they are in the same family?” She also used family terms to teach the class the concept of least common multiple. She wrote “½ + ¼ =” on the board and referring to the two and four said, “They are in the same family but you are going to pick the oldest child. Looking at ½ plus ¼ in your mind, who is the oldest?” The class replied, “four.”

**Using music and dance:** Ms. M and Ms. B both also incorporated music and beats into their classrooms, but they used music for different purposes. For example, Ms. B used jazz music to indicate a transition time between the class working individually on their project and when they had to gather together as in their circle for group time. When she initially turned on the music she did not say anything and multiple students stopped what they were doing and looked around. She then directed the students back to the circle and one student danced on his way to pick up the chair and another student just smiled as she walked to the circle. Ms. B also used Halloween music as a way of initiating a conversation about the holiday.
While Ms. B used music sparingly, Ms. M used music and beats throughout each class period as a bridge to teaching and solidifying mathematical concepts. On the first day of class she asked her class, “Did y’all work with music last year in your class with math?” When the class answered “no”, Ms. M informed them that she uses music in her classroom. Before incorporating music, she taught the students how to change a mixed number into an improper fraction beat. She kept the beat for them by snapping her fingers, thus they know the speed and cadence in which to convert the mixed number. For example, if the mixed number is $3 \frac{1}{2}$, the “mixing it up” would proceed as follows “two (snap) times three (snap) equals six (snap) plus one (snap) equals seven (snap) over two (snap)”. Ms. M would then say “huh?” and they were to repeat “seven over two.” She repeated the same problem over and over so that the class learned the rhythm, and once they perfected that she played a CD that had the same rhythm. The students used this CD to practice changing mixed numbers to improper fractions every day.

In addition to using the music and the beat Ms. M also combined dance and performance with the course content. She called it “dancing with math” or the “math dance”. Each dance move corresponds to a mathematical concept. For example, for “parallel” the students put their hands straight up in the air above their heads (see Figure 4-5). For a line the students put each hand straight out at the shoulder level with their hands open. For a line segment, it is the same motion but their hands were closed in a fist. She also taught them angles within “dancing with math”. To reinforce the concept of a right angle and where their hands should be positioned she related a right angle to cheerleaders when they say “give me an L.” Thus, when she asks them to do the movement of right angle, she prompted them with “What do cheerleaders say?” and she responded her hands in the position of a right angle and exclaimed in a teenager’s voice, “Give me an L!” There were multiple other movements and sometimes phrases that were included in
“dancing with math” and she required the students to practice them before adding music. Once the music was added she encouraged them to dance with the beat and stated, “Bounce with it. I know you can dance.” She then would call out a mathematical term and with the beat they were to position themselves. During the math dance the students typically smiled and/or really got into the dancing as demonstrated by their personalized touches to the motions and how they bobbed to the beat of the music.

Ms. M also used a song that not only connected to what the students knew, but simultaneously expressed a message of high expectations and acknowledged the students' capabilities.

I don’t know what you’ve been told
Learning is as good as gold
Using our hearts our hands and minds
Learning that you are right on time
Sound off
We come to school
Sound off
We follow our rules
Sound off
At our school we do our best
So we conquer any quest (2x)
Look at me what do you see (2x)
Somebody trying to be the best they can be (2x)
Sound off
We come to school
Sound off
We follow our rules
Sound off
Let’s go. Let’s go. Let’s go.

The message conveyed in the song is much different than the messages that low-income, African American students are intellectually inferior or incapable (Perry, 2003).

**Using familiar communication styles:** Ms. M and Ms. B also incorporated the communication styles of oral storytelling, narratives, and call and response as well as incorporating performance into their classrooms, all of which are common aspects of African American culture (Foster, 1995; Murrell, 2002). Both teachers used call and response throughout their teaching by asking questions and having their students respond chorally. Additionally, Ms. M told her class short stories that related to a mathematical concept or emphasized a point she was trying to make. For example, Ms. M referred to her class last year and how they would come to class without their math homework, “Some of them came in last year ‘I had to go to the hospital to see my aunt’…I accept no excuses.” Or she told stories about how she helped others understand material, “I told an adult one time because they were having problems trying to figure out what was the numerator and what was the denominator. If you think of ‘D’ meaning down. Denominator is under. ‘D’. Down.” She often related the different mathematical concepts to
stories about families by talking about cousins and statements like “I told them the story, if they are related, they are in the same family but you are going to take the oldest child.”

In order to emphasize a point or demonstrate something for the students, Ms. B and Ms. M would often act out points they were trying to make. For example, Ms. B acted out examples of how she did and didn’t want to see her students present their projects to the class.

She told the class, “I am going to pretend that I am a kid. I am going to do it fake.” Using a kid’s voice, she said. “My picture,” pointed to the paper and said “me” and the pointed to the bottom of the picture and said “teacher” and then threw the paper down. The class laughed in response. She said. “Please don’t do that. I will have nightmares. I want you to say ‘My name is Vivien B and this is a picture of me in the Mind, Body and Spirit club after school and this is me when I was a teacher and I have 14 real kids.’ Who can do that?” All of the students’ hands were immediately raised in response to the question. Similarly, Ms. M stressed to the students that though they sing their answers in class that it is not always appropriate. She stated, “Let’s say if you see you see somebody walking down the street and you are in the store and they say ‘well, what is perimeter?’ And you say ‘the distance around a figure’.” She sang the definition and then asked “Are you going to say it like that?” The class shouted, “no.”

Not only did Ms. B and Ms. M perform in their demonstrations of key points, but Ms. M and Ms. B created opportunities for the students to perform as well. As mentioned, two ways Ms. M did this was through having the students dance, sing, and change mixed numbers into improper fractions with the music. She also called an individual student up to the board to perform the steps of changing a mixed number to a fraction. On another occasion she called two students up to the board to describe the concept of perimeter to the new student. Therefore, the students were given a chance to perform as teachers by describing perimeter verbally, as well as
visually depicting the information on the board for the new student, and the rest of their classmates who were watching. Ms. B also included performance in her classroom on a number of occasions. When one student, Lani, asked for a nametag incorrectly, Ms. B taught her how to correctly do so when she corrected, “I think you should raise your hand and say ‘Ms. B can I have one please’.” After giving Lani some time to think, she then had Lani perform for the rest of the class the correct way to ask for a nametag. Lani was praised for her performance, and one of her classmates learned from it by then asking for a name tag in the same format. Ms. B also gave each student a chance to present their project to the class as a whole and explain what they drew to their classmates.

Ms. M and Ms. B made their teaching relevant and culturally relevant to the students in their classrooms. At times the teachers’ connection of class material to the existing knowledge and culture of the students seemed spontaneous and required knowledge of students and quick thinking on the part of the teacher. For example, Ms. B responded to her students’ confusion about “clubs” by connecting the concept to the students’ experiences with their parents going to clubs. At other times connecting academic content may be a more involved task that took thought, time and creativity. Such was the case with Ms. M found music with a beat that could facilitate the changing of a mixed number to an improper fraction, or coming up with the math dance. However, the teacher’s efforts to make the concepts familiar and even fun, further established their investment in their class, the class’s learning, and the class’s success.

Summary

One of the central themes that emerged from the data with regard to how Ms. M and Ms. B developed relationships with their low-income, African American students was their efforts to connect and build relationships with their class as whole. In building a relationship with their
class and re-emphasizing their class as a community, each teacher created a communalistic atmosphere which may have been familiar to their African American students. Although many teachers develop relationships with individual students and hold high expectations for some of their students, Ms. M and Ms. B had high expectations for each of their students and for their entire class of students. Ms. M, in particular, constantly challenged her students to go beyond their limits and achieve more. Again, the teachers not only held the high expectations but worked to help their students meet the standards by being attentive to the class’s needs and endeavored to link the academic content to the students’ culture and existing knowledge base. In doing so, the teachers affirmed the students’ culture and lived experience, and appeared to convey the message that the students and their culture were of value.

Being Transparent and Joining

An integral component to the development of relationships with their individual students and the class as a whole that emerged was Ms. M’s and Ms. B’s transparency and willingness to share themselves with their students and actively join the community of learners. Joining was conceptualized as the process in which the teachers minimized the separation between themselves and the students, such that the teachers too became members of the class community alongside their students. While a hierarchy between teacher and student was maintained, both teachers flattened the hierarchy. Rather than disclosing personal information about themselves to the students, Ms. M and Ms. B joined with the students in multiple ways. They physically joined the students by Ms. B sitting on the floor with her students and Ms. B dancing and singing along with her students. Moreover, they joined by voicing their thought processes, being playful and joking with their students, and revealing their fallibility.
Voicing their thought process

Ms. M and Ms. B did not separate themselves from their students by acting as the “all knowing” teacher who kept information from his/her students. Instead they both verbalized their thinking and provided insight into what, how, and why they thought certain things. Specifically they revealed their thought processes with regard to their reasoning for their action, their plans for the class, as well as their general thoughts.

Absent from the teaching of both Ms. B and Ms. M was the phrase “because I said so”. Alternatively, both teachers often described their reasoning behind their behaviors, decisions, and procedures. For instance, Ms. M did not just tell her class to keep their chairs pulled up, but explained on multiple occasions, “Make sure you pull your chairs up because I do walk.” Ms. B said something comparable to her students, “We have squeaky chairs so can you please sit still.” Ms. M however voiced her thinking most frequently with regard to the reasoning behind her teaching procedures. The class originally had difficulty with their multiplication facts when changing their mixed numbers to improper fractions. Thus in response to the difficulty, Ms. M explained her reasoning behind their current homework assignment saying, “That is why you have multiplication facts as your homework. Am I correct? Because in a few weeks I expect you to just rattle it off, not sit and think about it.” In a similar instance, the class messed up when reciting a definition and Ms. M stated in response, “Now you see why we have to keep going… why we have to go over and over. Some of you say I understand, but at this point you do not understand. That is why it is very important that we go over and over and over and over.” When an individual student struggled to explain how she arrived at an answer Ms. M stated, “Let’s go over that again cause you act like you are not sure of yourself.” Moreover, Ms. M did not just tell her students that it was important to pay attention in the class but reinforced the importance by
stating, “It is very important that you pay attention in this classroom because I might give you a quiz in a few minutes.”

While Ms. M explained her reasoning with regard to her teaching and academics, Ms. B explained her reasoning in a variety of different areas. For example, she communicated her thought process about Halloween when she told her students, “I picked this story for today because it is a scary story.” In other instances in which Ms. B’s students demonstrated their excitement and desire to answer her questions by saying “ooh”, jumping up and down, and waving their hands in the air. Ms. B articulated her process for calling on certain students by stating, “If you go ooh, I will not call on you. If you don’t want to get called on just go ‘ooh’ and I will not call on you” and by saying, “I don’t call on people jumping up and down.” She explained her process more fully in one instance when she stated, “I don’t call on people who do this” as she waved her hand back and forth. “And I don’t call people who say ‘ooh ooh ahh’. I don’t call on people like that cause I think you need to calm down.”

With regard to calling on students, Ms. B would sometimes explain why she chose a student, like when she said, “I am going to call on Anna because she had her hand up first, but wait, sometimes I don’t call on a person that raises their hand first, sometimes I call on somebody else.” Also, she asked her students to look at her when she spoke stating, “The only way I know if you are listening is if you are looking at me, okay, look at me.” She also voiced her reasoning when a student shared her picture of herself as a grown up said that in the picture she was twenty and had two kids. Ms. B replied smiling, “I think you need to put thirty. You know why? Because if you are twenty years old you have had no time to go to college and get a job or find you a decent man.” The student laughed and nodded her head and later returned to Ms. B to show her that she changed the year to 30. In summary, in hearing the reasoning behind
their teacher’s words and actions, the students had a better understanding of their teacher’s decisions. This may lead to the students being more accepting of the directives and procedures. Interestingly, the students consistently followed directives and never objected to or rebelled against either Ms. M or Ms. B.

In addition to sharing their reasoning with their students, Ms. B and Ms. M also shared their thought processes concerning what was to proceed next in the class, either in the short term or long term. Through this the class knew what the teacher was going to do next and/or the plans the teacher had for them. For instance, Ms. M told her students at the beginning, “We are going to start off with mixed numbers and I don’t start off with something easy.” She then proceeded to tell them, “Some people start off school day one with a worksheet adding, subtracting, well here you are doing fractions on day one. Right? So that means we are working in the back of the book and we going to go all the way to the front. Basically I don’t even much teach the front of the book because at this point you in the fifth grade and you should know how to add and you should know how to subtract. Okay?” Consequently, the students had a general idea of what was to come during the year in math class. Ms. M also shared her plans regarding class time. She shared, “We are going to try it with music too,” referring to changing mixed numbers to improper fractions. She would also prompt them with statements like, “We are going to move on to something else” and “next thing we are going to do is the math dance.” She also voiced both her thought process regarding her plans and the reasoning behind them, like when she said, “We are going to have to keep reviewing until you understand what unlike fractions mean.”

Ms. B would also share her plans and the reasoning behind them with her class. When she was reading a story to the class and had engaged the students in a conversation about the main character Nathaniel. She stopped the conversation and said, “I am going to put his name up here
and show you how he spells his name.” In another instance she said, “Okay, I have a big important question for you guys…and I am going to get a piece of paper to write down your answer.” More frequently however, she prompted her students on what was to come. She revealed what topics were upcoming with statements like “We are going to talk about that, and then what kind of job a hero can have”. She also told students the schedule for the day like when she said, “I am going to start off playing a little game” and she signified transitions saying, “Now we are going to change hats and we are going to get to be scientists.” She also indicated to the students the order in which she would be calling on then, “I am going to call on Donovan and then you.”

At times Ms. B shared her process about her thoughts in general or her decision making process. For instance, she began to tell the class that she was going to read them something and then stopped midsentence and said, “Oops…I don’t see my water. When I start reading I always get thirsty.” In an additional instance one of the students shared her name which was unfamiliar to Ms. B. Ms. B stated, “Boy I can’t wait to see these names written down. See I have forgotten your name already. What is it?” At another point, she disclosed her thoughts about where to teach from, “ummm let’s see. Next week I want to work over there, but I am trying to think…yeah let’s work over here.”

In communicating their thought processes to their students, Ms. And Ms. M provided a window through which they revealed more about themselves, who they were and how they thought. Rules, directions, and assignments were provided with an explanatory context as to their purpose, and the purpose always related to something that would benefit the students. In providing this context for their students, the students could see that almost every decision, rule
and assignment was intended to benefit the students in some way and was not just the teacher’s whim.

**Sharing their imperfections**

Paralleling Ms. B and Ms. M’s tendency to share their thought processes with their classes, they also revealed their imperfections to their students or allowed their students to teach and/or correct them. Consequently, they disclosed to their students that they were not “all knowing”, that they too made mistakes and at times needed assistance. For instance, Ms. M asked a student to put on one of the CDs to song four for a math activity and the student was taking a long time. Ms. M approached her and the student told her “it can only go up to two on this one.” Ms. M asked her, “Which one?” The student opened up the CD player to show her the CD. Ms. M stated, “There it is” pointing to the CD and said “number four.” The student softly said, “It doesn’t go up to four it only goes up to two.” Ms. M asked her, “Is it two? It might be two. Try two.” At another point Ms. M was up at the board referring to a problem on the board and asked the class, “What is five times two?” The students hesitated and Ms. M looked at the board and saw that the board read “5 X 6”. She said “I mean five times six. I’m sorry”

Ms. B was good natured about admitting her mistakes and allowing her students to correct, often laughing and smiling in the process. For example on a number of occasions when she was trying to learn the students’ names, the students corrected her. In one situation, three students had similar names and she confused them and the students told her she got it wrong. Ms. B did not shut down their correction, but instead facilitated it when she said, “What did I say wrong?” A student pointed and gave the correct name “Michaela”. Ms. B repeated the three names and turned to the students for feedback. The students answered, “yeah,” and Ms. B said, “Okay, okay, now I get it.” In another instance she went around the room and stated the name of each student. She messed up and the student said, “No, it’s not Becca” as she smiled. Ms. B
smiling replied, “I mean Lani. I am sorry,” and laughed. When Ms. B was telling the class that they were a family and said, “I am the fake mother and you are the fake children.” One of the students replied that they weren’t fake and said, “We are children.” Ms. B smiled at the student and agreed, “You are children. Well I am the mother so I guess we will be alright.” Ms. B also shared her thought process when she made a mistake. Ms. B messed up when writing the word “self-discipline” on the board and pointed out her mistake to the students and said, “When I make a mistake a lot of times I like to circle it so I can look back and see what it was.” By Ms. B and Ms. M’s acceptance of correction and disclosures of mistakes, they stepped off the pedestal of “teacher” and potentially became more relatable to the students as just a human being.

**Being playful**

The students were given insight into Ms. B and Ms. M’s personalities through the teachers’ playful interactions with their students. Though both women were committed to their students’ learning and were serious when needed, they also made sure to have fun and laugh in the process. Whether it was through playfulness in presenting and checking comprehension of an academic topic, joking with students as a way of breaking the ice, or sharing their softer side; Ms. B and Ms. M periodically interspersed their class periods with humor and laughter.

Ms. B revealed her softer, playful side to her students in a variety of ways. During clean up time one day, Ms. B started singing, “Da tada dad a,” and shuffled her feet around dancing. The students responded by looking at her initially in awe and then broke into smiles. She reviewed students’ names on the second day and when said one of the students names, “Donovan”, and Donovan shook his head no. Ms. B tilted her head and smiled at him and exclaimed, “Yes it is!” The students in the room along with Donovan smiled and some slight giggling was heard. Ms. B then said smiling, “If it is not Donovan then it must be pumpkin pants!” All of the students, including Donovan, started laughing. Ms. B also showed her
playfulness through facial expression as well as her words. An interaction that exemplifies this occurred during the opening name activity after a student missing her two front teeth introduced herself.

Ms. M: I have a question for you Lani. What happened to your teeth?
Class: Laughter
Ms. M: You came to school without your teeth today?
Lani: My teeth came out and the fairy took it. (laughing as she said it)
Ms. M: Have you ever heard of such a thing? (Looking around at the other students, mouth open wide, eyebrows up) You better tell those fairies to give them back. You need your teeth.
Class: Laughter
Ms. M: That is outrageous.
Lani: It gave me a dollar.
Ms. M: You sold your teeth. (Mouth open wide, eye brows up) Don’t you think you are going to need your teeth? Oh my…my goodness gracious I have never heard of such a thing (eye brows furrowed). Any body else here sell their teeth?
Class: Laughter. (hands raised and smiling)
Kayla: I did
Ms. M; Ohh, (hands up to her face to cover her mouth) that is terrible.

The lighthearted interaction depicted Ms. B’s good-natured personality and was enjoyed by both Ms. B and the students as evidenced by their laughter and smiles.

From the outset Ms. M too hinted at her playfulness when she introduced one of the new teachers who would be occasionally helping out in the class as “our new kid on the block” and asked the class, “Are you ready for us?” She also told her students her lighter side when she shared her views on learning and teaching by disclosing, “Learning is noisy and I am noisy.” Not only was Ms. M willing to get noisy in her interactions with the students and let them be noisy when she asked for it, but Ms. M also joked playfully with her students in the context of academics. She asked her students one day, “Let me see the hands of those who have learned something so far.” All of the students raised their hands. Ms. M waved her hands in front of her, scrunched up her face smiling and said, “Oh boy am I good,” as she snapped her fingers.
Ms. M also tried to playfully trick her students on a number of occasions. For example, she was going around checking individual’s comprehension and pointed to a student and asked him a number of questions in a row with regard to numerator and denominator. She stated “top” and he answered “numerator” and she stated “bottom” he answered “denominator”. She kept asking him with a smile on her face and as she did so students giggled and smiled, the student continued to answer correctly. She stopped quizzing him and smiled and clapped as she walked away from him. The student threw back his head, sighed and then smiled. Similarly, she was quizzing the class saying “top” and “bottom” repeatedly and they were responding correctly, and then she tricked them by saying “numerator” and they repeated “numerator” instead of “top”. Ms. M smiled widely and said, “Ahhhh,” and the class laughed and smiled at their mistake. She also showed her playful side when she was relating a right angle to a cheerleader who says “Give me an L” because she changed the pitch in her voice, tilted her head exaggeratedly and drew out the phrase. In revealing their playful sides, Ms. B and Ms. M showed their personalities and brought fun and laughter to the learning environment. Though tasks needed to be accomplished and information presented, during that process, the students were still given opportunities to have lighthearted, friendly teacher-student and teacher-class interactions.

**Summary**

How Ms. B and Ms. M’s developed relationships with their students appeared to be tied to their transparency and their efforts to join with their students. They each shared themselves with their students by allowing students to hear their thought processes, see their fallibilities, and see their softer, more lighthearted side. Through their words and their actions Ms. B and Ms. M expressed to the students that their classroom did not consist of the class and the teacher, but instead that they were a unified community of learners. Instead of being “the teacher”, they
became “Ms. M” and “Ms. B”; real people with thoughts, feelings, and imperfections who the students could connect with and relate to in the classroom. While they maintained their authority and the hierarchy between themselves and their students, they joined the students and became members of the classroom learning community.

**Facilitating Conditions for Relationship Building**

The importance of physical and psychological safety in the learning environment and the development of relationships have been cited repeatedly in the education literature (Brown, 2003, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Weinstein, 2003; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). Ms. B and Ms. M created conditions within their classrooms that could facilitate relationship development between the teacher and their students in that the students knew what was expected and could be certain that their teacher would maintain control of the classroom and keep them safe. Ms. B and Ms. M did this through clearly establishing classroom procedures and expectations, requiring respect and order in the classroom, and by eliminating processes of shaming in their classrooms.

**Expressing Clear Procedures and Expectations**

Ms. M and Ms. B each concentrated on communicating concrete classroom procedures and expectations regarding assignments and acceptable behavior. Though the expectations could be viewed as strict and unyielding at times, the students knew from day to day what was expected from them and could depend on that. For example with regard to assignments, Ms. M gave a homework assignment that consisted of the students writing a whole page of particular multiplication tables. She told the students, “Don’t come to me and say ‘I didn’t know I had to write the whole page’. But you do have to write the whole page and I accept no excuses.” She also stated repeatedly what was expected when students completed math problems with statements like, “When you are doing your math in this class you have to prove your answer so
that means you have to show your work. You don’t just look at it and write 18 like I did, you
have to go back and show how you are coming up with your answer.” She also demonstrated
what she meant when she said “show your work” by going up to the board and writing out what
she wanted to see on their papers.

Classroom procedures and behavioral expectations were a focus in both classrooms. On the
first day of class Ms. M articulated her basic rule to the class. “When I am talking, you do
questions? For the new students while I am talking you do what?” A couple of students
answered, “Listen.” Ms. M replied, “You listen,” and then paused and said, “Unless you want to
teach this class.” With regard to her talking she also stated, “While I am talking what are you
supposed to do with your pencil? Put it down because you cannot write while I am talking.”
Also, math work was to be done with pencil, “You do not write with ink in here, with an ink pen,
supposed to write with a pencil.” Another of her rules related to the students pushing up their
chairs and she told them, “Keep your chairs pushed up because I do walk,” and this was constant
throughout the video. Ms. M followed up on her rules consistently. Thus, for example, if students
did not have their chairs pulled up, Ms. M would loudly tap their chair or sternly direct the
student to pull it up.

Ms. B also clearly stated what she wanted behaviorally from her students. She expressed
the need for her students to raise their hand if they wanted to be called on. She reminded them,
“Remember, we are going to do what when we want to share something?” and the students
answered, “Raise your hand.” She also stated, “I don’t call on people that are jumping up and
down.” The first time she had the students read aloud what she wrote on the board they shouted
and thus she directed, “When everyone reads, I want you to read at a softer voice.” In one
instance a student left the classroom to go home without telling her. Ms. B shared her concern and her expectation with the class when she said, “I don’t want anyone to leave here with anybody unless you say ‘Ms. B I am leaving now’.” She then had the class to repeat it.

**Requiring Respect and Order**

In addition to the clear procedures and expectations, Ms. B and Ms. M endeavored to constantly maintain respect and order within their classrooms. Ms. B showed her students that disrespect towards one another would not be tolerated by quickly addressing instances of disrespect. For example, she did not allow students to interrupt one another and thus the interrupting student would be addressed with a statement like, “Excuse me honey, you are interrupting,” or “Do not answer for other children in this classroom.” Ms. B also required her students to give each other think time and advised them, “When someone is thinking it is best to be nice and quiet because when you get on the hot seat and I am waiting for you to say something you want to be able to think.” Ms. B also demanded that her students give one another their attention if a classmate was talking. Ms. B would say things like, “No hands while people are talking,” and “Attentive listening to X.”

Ms. M expected an extremely quiet classroom during the class time unless she was engaging the students in answering questions individually or chorally as a group. Therefore, in the few instances in which students talked amongst themselves Ms. M would quiet them with a statement like, “And I shouldn’t hear any talking.” Ms. B however, did not require a silent classroom, but instead allowed the volume in the classroom to rise and for students to move around the classroom during seat work if students remained on task. However, Ms. B did not tolerate disorder and any disorder was quickly addressed. In one instance, Ms. B’s students were excitedly shouting out answers to the questions that Ms. B posed. Ms. B had to stop the students and stated, “There is too much answering out and yelling out. You guys have to calm yourself.
down and use your self-discipline and raise your hand.” If the students were having side
conversations with one another she would state, “I am going to wait until it is quiet in here,” or
“I have to wait until everybody stops moving around.” Consequently, as depicted in the
examples, students in both Ms. M and Ms. B’s class could be certain that their class would not
get out of control or disrespect tolerated. The maintenance of order and respect were further
reinforced when the teachers quickly redirected the behavior of individual students who were off
task or not following the rules, or bothering a classmate. The students who witnessed their
classmates being redirected were again assured that they would be respected and the class would
be controlled.

**Using Non-shaming Consequences**

A unique condition that emerged from the data was the lack of shaming demonstrated by
either Ms. M or Ms. B. Regardless of whether a student was not paying attention, answered a
question incorrectly, interrupted, or was talking to a neighbor at the wrong time, neither Ms. B
nor Ms. M shamed or ridiculed them for their behavior or answer. Wrong answers were
responded to with respectful correction or directed to the correct answer. For example, when a
student gave a wrong definition, Ms. M did not shame him, but said, “No, no. That’s not right.
Open up your journal and read it.” Another student did not give an answer in a complete
sentence and Ms. M prompted him, “Think about how you are supposed to tell me what a mixed
number is.” Though she had already expressed the procedure for saying definitions multiply
times, she did not denigrate him, but instead gave him another chance. Likewise, Ms. B’s
students had been using the words “mine” and “mind” interchangeably and thus she was going
over the difference between the two. She had given multiple examples and then asked the
students to tell her the difference. One student stated back to her one of the examples incorrectly
when she said, “You say it is mind can you give it back.” Ms. B did not humiliate her but
respectfully corrected her saying, “Nope, it is not ‘mind’ it is ‘mine’.” Also, when students were off task, Ms. B and Ms. M did not berate them or punish them, instead redirected students back to the task through non-verbals such as tapping the student’s paper or through words of encouragement like “concentrate”. When a table of students was getting loud in Ms. B’s class, particularly Tyreek, Ms. B did not single him out but when over to the table and said “this table needs to quiet down. Especially somebody whose name I am not going to say.”

Ms. B not only did not shame students who were off task or not following directions, she also made an effort to prevent or stifle shaming among students. In one situation, Ms. B noticed a student’s zipper was down and called him over and whispered something in his ear that was inaudible and then told the student to “turn that way” and he turned his back to the class and zipped up his pants. He returned to the group smiling. In another instance, some of the students were calling attention to the fact that one of their classmates may have peed in her pants. Ms. B responded by saying, “You guys know what? Becca and Erin, that is personal. We don’t yell that out loud. We go to the teacher.” Another time Ms. B was asking the students who liked school. All of the students raised their hands except one and a classmate called it to everyone’s attention. Ms. B turned to the student and asked him, “Do you like it sometimes?” The student shook his head “no” and she asked, “Never?” He replied, “I don’t like school” as his classmates stared at him. Ms. B then turned to the class and said, “You know what? He is here and even if he doesn’t like it he might enjoy some things while he is here.” As she said this, she smiled slightly and nodded her head at the student. Consequently, not only did Ms. B refrain from shaming, she made sure her students did not shame others, and as in the example above, even normalized the student’s opinion.
Summary

The creation of a learning environment in which students can feel safe appears to be a necessary condition for the development of relationships between the teachers and their students. Without such an environment, some students may be hesitant to share themselves and their knowledge with others for fear of the consequences. However, Ms. M and Ms. B created conditions within their classrooms which facilitated the development of psychological safety by setting clear expectations and procedures as well as consistently maintaining order. The students knew the rules of the classroom and what the teachers would and would not accept. If they or a classmate broke these rules, they could be sure that the teacher would respectfully and sternly address and redirect their behavior. Moreover, they did not have to fear being berated or shamed by Ms. M or Ms. B, as neither teacher lost control of her temper or shamed a student in her class for giving a wrong answer or not following directions. Consequently, through their words and actions, and lack of shaming words and actions, Ms. B and Ms. M created psychologically safe classrooms which could facilitate relationship development between themselves and individual students as well as themselves and their class as a whole.

Students’ Affective Responses

An agreed upon definition of psychological well being has not been identified nor has a list of observable behaviors depicting psychological well-being of students in the classroom been developed. However, in examining student responses in the videotapes to the individual student interactions with the teacher and the students’ responses to the teacher’s interactions with the whole class as well as teacher transparency, four categories of student responses emerged. Three of these categories are subsumed under the positive emotions enumerated by Frederickson (1998) which she suggested could be linked to aspects of psychological well-being: joy, interest,
contentment, and love. The fourth category, demonstrated specifically by Ms. B’s students, was their tendency to seek out opportunities to connect with her on an individual basis.

**Demonstrating Joy**

Though the researcher cannot definitively say that the students experienced joy and happiness during their time in either Ms. B or Ms. M’s classroom, there are a number of observed student behaviors that appeared to reflect joyfulness. The most easily identifiable were the students’ smiles and laughter that were observed repeatedly in each teacher’s class. Students smiled and giggled in response to praise such as when Ms. B clapped for a student who got answered a difficult question correctly and said “We need to give you your props” or when Ms. M congratulated a student for getting a perfect score on her test by patting the student’s shoulder and saying “good job”. The smiling and laughing continued when Ms. B and Ms. M were playful and joked with the students. The students at times would respond with giggles, but at other times the laughter was much more pronounced. For example, when Ms. B was joking with the class about losing their teeth and getting paid for it, students were laughing so hard they were throwing back their heads. Similarly, when Ms. M students were doing the math dance and reached a point where they had to “freeze”, students laughed out loud as they had to hold their body position depicting perpendicular lines. Students also smiled in response to being able to share their knowledge with the teacher, such as when Tyreek grinned ear to ear as he shared movie lines with Ms. B and when two of Ms. M’s students smiled as they were given the opportunity to go to the board and teach a classmate about perimeter.

The student’s joyfulness was also demonstrated in how they related to each other and their teachers. In Ms. B’s class, there were only two instances of teasing by students that were observed and other than that the students positively interacted with one another either at their tables were they participated in seatwork or when they were in the large group semi-circle. For
example, when Ms. B’s students were sitting at their tables working on their projects they could be heard asking each other questions about their drawings or laughing at each other’s jokes. In the large group they gave each other feedback on their self-discipline, clapped for each other after a right answer was given, and smiled at their classmates when one was selected for a special job, like when Ms. B allowed Kayla to write on the board and said “here you write it”. They also laughed with one another, like when Lani is kissing the Polaroid picture of her self and Ms. B, smiling asked “Who is kissing their own picture?” Lani, threw her head back and laughed as the class laughed with her. While Ms. M’s students did not get many opportunities to engage with one another on an individual level, the students did help each other when directed by Ms. M. For example, when one student was struggling with the concept of area, Ms. M said to his classmate “help him.” Another example is when Ms. M’s students collectively laughed along with their classmate after he was playfully quizzed by Ms. M and had answered the questions correctly.

Of course the students were not always laughing, smiling and positively interacting with their classmates. There were times when students pouted or started to emotionally withdraw, but the pouting and the withdrawals were often short lived as Ms. M and Ms. B sought to draw the student back into the classroom. After these efforts, students were seen re-engaging with the material and with their classmates and teacher.

**Demonstrating Interest**

Ms. M and Ms. B’s students displayed their interest in academic learning through their demonstration of mastery of the academic task and active participation in the learning tasks. The students’ mastery and comprehension was illustrated when they successfully answered questions, completing assignments and did well on tests. For instance, Ms. B’s students successfully finished their projects depicting themselves in the afterschool program and as a grown up and successfully presented their pictures to the rest of the class by sharing their pictures in complete
sentences. Ms. B even noted their presenting abilities, “Wow, good presentation.” Ms. M’s students displayed their mastery of the mathematical concepts when the assisting teacher reported to Ms. M that of the all the tests she had graded thus far (approximately 90% of the class) “nothing under 90. One 90, one 95, all the rest one hundreds.”

The students’ interest in learning was demonstrated by the students’ on task behavior, their participation in activities and their attempts to answer questions. Both teachers’ students stayed on task the majority of the time. Staying on task was determined by observing an absence of off-task behaviors when the students were told to take notes, practice math problems, work on projects, or listen to the teacher. While determining from the videotapes if the students were listening was not always possible, the students in both classes kept their eyes on the teacher while she was talking and often adjusted their bodies when their teacher moved around the room. In instances when students got off task, they were re-engaged immediately by the teacher. For instance, when Ms. M approached a student who had his math journal closed when the class was supposed to be taking notes, she opened his journal and asked, “Where is volume? And you are sitting here with you book closed?” He responded by beginning to write in his math journal.

The amount of student participation in the teacher’s classes was quite high. On numerous occasions, in both Ms. B’s and Ms. M’s classes almost every student in the classroom could be seen raising their hand in response to a question (see Figure 4-6 and Figure 4-7 respectively). Ms. B’s students wanted to answer her questions so much that they jumped up and down, wiggled in their seats, waved their hands in the air, and shouted “ooh ooh”. Ms. B often had to remind them “I don’t call on people who say ‘ooh’.” When the students were not chosen they would often sigh or could be heard saying “uhhh” in disappointment, but were then seen with their hands up trying to answer the following question. While not nearly as frequently, on a few
Figure 4-6. Ms. B’s students raising their hands demonstrating interest

Figure 4-7. Ms. M’s students raising their hands demonstrating interest
occasions the students in Ms. M’s class also would wave their hands in hopes of getting called on. In one situation, Ms. M referring to a problem on the board asked “how are they related?” One student was so engaged that she raised one hand to answer and with the other hand put up three fingers, the correct answer.

Interestingly, individual students’ participation did not appear to wane even after they answered a question wrong or spoke incorrectly and were corrected by their teacher. On a number of occasions, the students can be seen moments later with their hands up again in response to a question. For instance, Ms. B commented to her class “I think we need more boys, don’t you?” A student replied “There are more boys than girls.” Ms. B with her eyebrows furrowed, looked at the student who was smiling and asked “there are more boys than girls?” The student laughed, leaned forward in her chair and replied “no” as she started to point and count students. She was not shut down by the interaction, but remained engaged. Similarly, in Ms. M’s class a student made a multiplication error when giving an answer to the class. On the next problem on the board, 2 X 2 X 2, the same student again made a mistake and gave the wrong answer. Ms M asked her “How did you come up with six? Two, four, six? Is that what you did?” Therefore, even after getting a question wrong in front of the class, the student still attempted again thus displayed her interest and investment.

Ms. M’s class as a whole also participated consistently as they were expected to respond chorally to Ms. M’s questions. The student’s level of enthusiasm fluctuated when responding chorally at times but they always responded nonetheless. The students were so used to responding chorally that sometimes Ms. M had to stop them when she wanted an individual to answer. For example, when a student gave the wrong definition, Ms. M directed him to “open up your journal and read it”. The class as a whole began to read the definition, and Ms. M had to
stop them and say “No, I want Javon to do it”. Instances where Ms. M’s students’ interest and engagement were the most evident were when music or dance was incorporated into the lesson. When the students changed mixed numbers to improper fractions with the music the students would answer more loudly and some student could be seen bobbing their heads to the music. Similarly, many of Ms. M’s quieter students would become more engaged when performing the math dance as demonstrated by their smiles, their exaggeration of the movements, and how they bounced to the beat of the music.

Two instances in Ms. B’s classroom illustrate the level of engagement and interest of her students. In the first, Ms. M was holding up pictures of insects and one of her students, Erin, was correctly naming each one. With each correct answer, Erin who was kneeling on her knees, would shift back and forth and lean in closer and her smile would spread wider across her face. Ms. B said “This girl knows her insect” and Erin kept smiling and wiggling in excitement. In the second instance Ms. B had divided up the students into two groups based on the number of syllables in their names and was having the students guess the rule. The students jumped up and down in order to be given an opportunity to guess the rule, yet they were unable to guess correctly. Ms. M told them “I am going to give you a hint if you don’t guess it in two guesses.” A number of students sighed in response and one student shouted out “please don’t”. The students’ responses clearly articulate the students’ engagement in and enjoyment of the learning activity.

**Demonstrating Contentment and Self-Love**

The students in Ms. B and Ms. M’s classes either through their behaviors or a lack of negative behaviors demonstrated a general contentment while in their classrooms as well as a love for and belief in themselves. Contentment for the purposes of this study can be conceptualized as evolving when situations are viewed as safe and as having a high degree of
stability (Ellsworth & Smith, 1988) and the reflection on successes and the creation of a new sense of self through integrating recent events (Frederickson, 1998). The students of each teacher demonstrated their contentment and feelings of safety in their classes through the absence of fighting and arguing with their peers or their teachers. The students did not have to defend or protect themselves from others as Ms. M and Ms. B did not lose emotional control or act out in anger towards their students. The students did not display signs of shock at having their behavior re-directed when they were off task or not following directions which appears to indicate an understanding of the class procedures and expectations. The students responded to teacher re-direction by immediately following the teacher’s directive. For example, in Ms. M’s class a student was fiddling with the eraser for the white board that was on her table though Ms. M had directed the class not to touch them earlier in the class time. Ms. M approached her and took the eraser from the student and said “Why don’t you keep your hands off of that?” The student did not pout but followed Ms. M’s directions and Ms. M replied “Thank you ma’am” and continued the lesson. Similarly, when Ms. M was trying to make an announcement, she directed the class “eyes on me.” Becca knelt on the ground instead of sitting in her chair and Ms. B responded “you do not do things like that. Please sit down like I just asked you.” Becca immediately sat down in her chair as she scratched her head and turned to face Ms. B. The students did not talk back to the teachers, complain or argue when directed by their teachers, but followed the teacher’s directions quickly.

As described, contentment also relates to the integration of successes into one’s sense of self. Though such cognitions cannot be directly observed, some behavior sequences of the students seemed to reflect integration of successes. For instance, one of Ms. B’s student’s, Kim, was an active participant in class but displayed behaviors of low confidence, like covering her
mouth when she talked and looking down when she answered. Ms. B stopped the class one day and shared Kim’s project with the entire class and explained how she was “so proud of her” and how Kim was able to follow directions. As Ms. B did so Kim smiled, laughed and covered her mouth, looking down occasionally as if embarrassed yet pleased. However, a few minutes after her public commendation, Kim was seen walking around the class with her shoulders back, her head up and her hand away from her mouth, helping other students with their projects. In another example, Donovan had looked in the magnifying glass and said that he saw a bee with his “head ate off”. Ms. B turned her attention to him and gently grabbed his arm saying “No. When you are doing science you can’t say somebody ate their head off…you have to say only what you see. You have to say ‘I observe’. Say ‘I observe a dead bee’.” Donovan said it correctly and then the two return to the magnifying glass with some other students. Ms. B then gave Donovan another chance to respond and in front of his peers and with a smile on his face, Donovan correctly stated what he observed in the magnifying glass.

Physical manifestations of pride and self-love were also depicted in Ms. M’s class. Students sat taller in their seats or slightly smiled upon responding correctly to a one of Ms. M’s questions. Additionally, when the class was told on a number of occasions to “give yourselves a hand”, multiple students clapped with enthusiasm. When Ms. M asked her students “did you learn anything today?”, the students responded with a boisterous “Yes!” and proceeded to share the different concepts they had learned that day. A student even left the class smiling one day saying to Ms. M, “that was easy” to which Ms. M replied “I like hearing that.” Two of the most illustrative examples involve students who were asked to demonstrate their knowledge to the class by going to the board. Ms. M called Paul to the board to show the class how to write out the process of changing a mixed number to an improper fraction. He slowly walked to the board
with his shoulders slumped and his eyes down. However, after correctly showing how to complete the problem and receiving a “good job” from Ms. M, he walked back to seat more quickly and with his shoulders back, his eyes still down. In the second example, Ms. M pretended one of the students in the class had “no idea what perimeter [was]” and called Zachary and Sara to the front of the room to teach the concept to him. Without hesitation they jumped into an explanation of perimeter and even used the board to draw figures to further explain the concept. The students correctly explained and demonstrated perimeter without soliciting the help of Ms. M and stood tall as they fielded questions from the student. Again, while one cannot be certain how the students integrated their success into their sense of self, some of their outward behaviors appeared to depict that the students potentially felt pride regarding their accomplishments.

**Seeking Connection**

The response of some students’ responses to Ms. B’s and Ms. M’s efforts to create relationships was to seek out more connection with their teachers. Not only did the students continually raised their hands excitedly to be given a chance to share what they knew with their teacher, but some students would seek out opportunities to interact with her in other ways as well. During times when Ms. B was not leading the class as a large group, students would approach her and she usually responded by stopping what she was doing and giving the student her full attention. On numerous occasions as she was checking the progress of other students, individual students would bring her their projects to show their work and she would give them her undivided attention and give positive feedback like “Ooh, that is fancy.” She would also ask them questions about their pictures once they showed them to her “Is this you as an adult?” Students would walk away from the interactions smiling and one student even walked away and did a little dance. At other times students brought up unrelated topics in order to have a one on
one interaction with Ms. B and/or to impress her. For example, one student initiated a conversation with her while he was working on his project by saying “I know six plus five.” Ms. B stopped what she was doing turned to him and said “What?” The student hesitated and then said “Nine”. Thus, even though he did not really know the answer, it appeared that he just wanted to engage in a personal conversation with Ms. B.

Another way Ms. B’s students tried to connect with her was though helping her with simple tasks. Any time Ms. B would ask for someone to volunteer to do something for her, numerous hands would go up and from time to time students shouted out “Me!” Students exhibited their disappointment if they were not chosen, like when Ms. B chose a student to get her bag, two other students frowned at not being chosen, and one student said “aw, man.” Students even asked her for opportunities to help her as on two different occasions when two different students interrupted her interaction with another student to ask “Can I collect the markers?” and “can I be your helper?” Interestingly, as the days continued the students volunteered to do tasks she asked for in greater numbers and with more fervor. On their third day together, Ms. B, indicating their projects, asked “Who would like to collect these for me please?” Every student in the class raised their hand to be chosen. Consequently, whether it was to engage Ms. B in a seemingly random conversation or to help her around the classroom, the students sought out any chance to interact and connect with Ms. B and form an even stronger relationship with her.

**Conclusion**

These two culturally responsive, master teachers developed relationships with their low-income, African American students and used these relationships to facilitate student learning through a process of creating emotional connectedness with their students and creating conditions that facilitated relationship building. The students corresponding responses to the
teacher’s efforts appeared to reflect positive emotions and positive behaviors. Ms. M and Ms. B created emotional connectedness through connective teacher-student interactions, teacher-class interactions, and their willingness to join the class community and share themselves. In these interactions both teachers expressed their belief in and intense commitment to the students and conveyed that the students were of value and were worth the teacher’s investment. The series of connective interactions along with the teacher’s transparency and a safe environment appeared to facilitate the development of teacher-student and teacher-class relationships as well as students’ positive affective responses.

Figure 4-8 illustrates theoretical model that emerged from the findings and depicts how each major dimension is related to one another. The dimension of emotional connectedness impacts and is impacted by the facilitating conditions dimension. As Ms. M and Ms. B shared themselves through their playfulness and voicing their thought processes and connected with their class and their students, they made the environment safer because students experienced or witnessed the connections and the teacher’s investment in the students. Similarly, as Ms. B and Ms. M created a safe environment through rules, expectations, and the lack of shaming interactions, the students could feel more comfortable sharing themselves and their knowledge with the teachers and thus connect with their teacher. As such, there appears to be a reciprocal process between these two major themes. The result of the relationship between emotional connectedness and the safe environment is the students’ observable positive affective responses.

Figure 4-9 illustrates a more detailed depiction of the interdependent relationship among teacher-student connection, teacher-class connection, and teacher transparency. Each theme is linked to the other and can impact the other. For example, Ms. M and Ms. B’s transparency and joining with the class facilitates relationship development by the teacher’s ability to be more
authentic and genuine in interactions with their students and class, thus suggesting that the interactions were connective. Yet, on the other hand, the previous connective interactions with individual students and the class could also influence each teacher’s willingness or ability to be transparent and authentic within the classroom. Furthermore, Ms. M and Ms. B’s connections with the class as a whole may have created the space for the teacher and student to connect on an individual level. The student may have felt more comfortable having seen their teacher invest in the class and could have possibly been more open to teacher-student interactions.

In conclusion, all of the dimensions and themes that emerged from the data appear to play an integral part in the relationship development process between these culturally responsive teachers and their low-income, African American students. These teachers demonstrated their full investment in their students and their dedication to their students’ academic progress as well as their students overall development as human beings. Each taught and interacted with their classes with fluidity, making it seem almost effortless as they attentively respond to their students, respectfully redirected and re-engaged students, and demonstrated a belief in their students. The responses of their students to these teachers’ efforts were overwhelmingly positive as the students demonstrated behaviors that depicted joy, interest, contentment, and self-love. Absent from the student responses was anger, yelling, arguing, name calling, acting out and symptoms of psychological distress. Ms. M and Ms. B’s classrooms were instead filled with smiling and laughing students who engaged with one another and the academic material, stayed on-task, participated in activities, and demonstrated pride in themselves.
Figure 4-8. Model of relationship development and relationship use to facilitate learning

**Emotional Connectedness**
Teacher-student connections
Teacher-class connections
Teacher transparency

**Facilitating Conditions**
Clear procedures
Requiring respect
Non-shaming

**Student’s Affective Responses**
Joy, Interest
Contentment & Self-love
Seeking connection
Figure 4-9. The relationship among the themes of emotional connectedness
Existing research highlights the significance of the teacher-student relationship and its association with students’ academic achievement, and pro-social behaviors (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Noddings, 1992). Several qualitative studies have revealed that African American students feel the most connected to and motivated to work for teachers who show that they care for them (Howard, 2001; Irvine, 2002). Researchers have also reported that the quality of the relationship is particularly important in the education of low-income, culturally diverse students and is an aspect of culturally responsive educational practice (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). However, there is a dearth of research describing “how” culturally responsive teachers develop and use these relationships (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2003, 2005).

The theory that emerged from the findings of this study reveals a multi-faceted process by which the two master teachers created a sense of emotional connectedness and a safe environment for their students. Although aspects of this theory have been reported in previous studies of culturally responsive teaching and African American pedagogy, in this study a model of the interrelationships among the various aspects is presented. To illustrate the model, rich descriptions of “how” these two master teachers interacted with and communicated with their students and “how” their students responded were provided. The interrelationships among the various themes and the concrete illustrations of the strategies used are significant findings. The themes and sub-themes will be discussed regarding their relevance and how they relate to existing research.
Prior to discussing the findings however, the researcher would like to note that although the findings presented in this research study depict the culturally responsive practices of these master teachers, these master teachers are not perfect and they too struggle in the classroom. The work of master teachers is a very difficult, labor intensive process and these practices have been developed and refined over time.

**Teacher-Student and Teacher-Class Connections**

Though the research literature repeatedly talks about the importance of the teacher-student relationship and its connection to positive student academic outcomes, some teachers are unsure as to how caring for students can be implemented in the classroom (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). As pointed out by Weinstein and her colleagues, teachers often conceptualize caring and relationships in “warm, fuzzy terms” in which they are supposed to be only nurturing, nice, and not push the students too hard. Additionally, teachers cite numerous obstacles to such relationship building like having many students, the focus on standardized testing, and the demand to cover the curriculum as obstacles to relationship building. However, the findings of the current study demystify the relationship building process. Ms. M and Ms. B revealed that developing a relationship with students entails not only connecting with individual students but with the class as a whole. They depict multiple ways of connecting with students, and thus demonstrated flexibility in how teachers might be culturally responsive in developing their relationships.

This does not mean that already busy teachers have to add another task to their days. Ms. M and Ms. B showed that relationship building is not a separate task that a teacher does in addition to teaching. Instead their relationships with students were developed in the context of the teaching process. Thus, it is not always necessary to set aside time to “build a relationship”
with a student or the class. Instead relationships can be built through a series of positive teacher-student or teacher-class interactions that occur naturally in the classroom.

The teacher-class connections that emerged from the data of the classrooms of Ms. B and Ms. M depicted communalism, a central feature of African American culture (Boykin, 1986, 2001; Hale, 2001; Murrell, 2002). While each student was seen as an individual and relationships were built with individual students, each teacher also stressed the significance of the individual student as a member of the class as a whole. Ms. B and Ms. M conveyed that everyone was connected to everyone else in the class. Through their actions, both teachers emphasized the concept: “I am because we are; and because we are, therefore, I am” (Mbiti, 1970), a phrase that reflects the collectivistic nature of Africans. Consequently, each teacher took measures to emphasize that her class existed as a community and that she was invested in the class community. Also, because they were a community, the teacher and the students would together co-construct the norms and curriculum of the class (Lee, 2005).

These master teachers’ ability to balance attending to their individual students and the class as a whole while still implementing their lesson plans appears to be a relevant skill set of culturally responsive teachers. It relates to Lowman’s (1984, 1994) discussion of the negotiation between the task focus and the relational component in classrooms. Attending to students includes taking the time to listen carefully to the thoughts and feelings of individual students as well as assessing and responding to the emotional and cognitive states of the class as a whole. Brown (2004) noted that listening to students is a powerful way of establishing relationships with individual students. Relational Cultural theory (RCT) also asserted that feeling heard and responded to can be empowering (Spencer et al., 2004; Surrey, 1991a, 1991b). In addition to listening to the students, the teachers empathized with the students, and acknowledged and
accepted their feelings. There is an absence in the literature regarding how teachers are attentive to their class as a whole, and yet this was an area in which the teachers responded in terms of the class’s level of engagement, understanding of the material, and need to adjust lesson plans.

Given that low-income, culturally diverse students, particularly African American students, are often marginalized and discriminated against in schools settings (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Perry, 2003; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003) being truly listened to and having one’s feelings recognized are significant. Such actions can make the students feel important as the students are given the attention that they deserve. These feelings can then further motivate the students to become engaged participants in the learning process. The engagement then often leads to the students doing better academically because they care and because someone cares about them (Delpit, 2006; Hollins & Spencer, 1990). This can also be related to the importance of communalism in African American culture, as these students may care more about making their teacher proud and benefitting their group than their own gains.

One of the sub-themes that was particularly evident in the data with both teacher-student interactions and teacher-class interactions relates to the teachers’ messages about the belief in and their high expectations for their individual students and their class. This parallels the existing culturally responsive literature which has highlighted the importance of holding high expectations for African American students (Brown, 2003, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). Howard (2001) and Bondy and her colleagues (2007) have noted that caring is demonstrated when teachers expected their students to succeed and communicated their belief in their students. Unfortunately, African American students are often seen as intellectually and culturally inferior which impacts teachers’ expectations (Perry, 2003). Thus, in accordance with Merton’s (1948) self-fulfilling prophecy, these students may meet these low
expectations. However, the self-fulfilling prophecy can work in reverse, such that when high expectations are communicated, students rise to meet such expectations. Thus, believing in students and holding high expectations may serve to motivate students and help them believe in themselves as learners and capable human beings. This is crucial to their ability to achieve academically and set and reach goals.

While the expression of these expectations and beliefs in the abilities of individual students and the class were evident, the master teachers in this study went beyond merely stating these expectations. Similar to the findings noted by Delpit (1995) these teachers conveyed an intense commitment to and investment in their students. They provided their students with encouragement and support, but also challenged them to meet the teachers’ high expectations. They demonstrated a willingness to do everything in their power to help their students succeed.

This intensity and commitment to African American students may be related to the teachers’ own African heritage and the African American philosophy of education. This philosophy is rooted in the historical struggle of African Americans beginning with their enslavement and prevention from receiving an education. The philosophy highlights the importance of education in the statement “freedom for literacy and literacy for freedom” as education was linked to African Americans’ ability to view their identity as a free people (Perry, 2003). This remains relevant today, as Lee (2005) articulated that “academic achievement is intricately linked to issues of political and economic empowerment, not simply for individuals, but rather for the national African American community” (p. 55). Perry (2003) asserted that this philosophy, as well as the actions of African Americans throughout history, provides a counter-narrative which opposes society’s view of African Americans’ capabilities and dedication to education. Perry noted however that students’ belief in the significance of education can be negatively impacted
when teachers overtly or covertly express a disbelief in students’ academic capabilities. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers express and act on their beliefs in the student. It is important to note that whether a teacher is African American or not, he or she can still fully commit him or herself to their students’ success. This wholehearted investment can serve as the extra push that a student or a group of students need and appears essential for relationship development. The students’ experience of the teachers’ commitment to them and their learning can facilitate the students’ reciprocal commitment to the teacher, their relationship, and the learning process.

An area that is heavily discussed within culturally responsive pedagogy relates to the use of culturally diverse students’ existing knowledge, culture, skills, and competencies in instruction (Gay, 2000; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Murrell, 2002; Nieto, 2004a, 2004b; King, 2004; Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000). The relational aspects of culturally responsive educational practices are often relegated to the use of culturally congruent communication styles (Brown, 2003, 2004; Bondy et al., 2007; Delpit, 1995, 2004; Gay, 2000). These teachers used instructional methods and communication styles that were based in the African American cultural theme of verve and communalism including the use of dance and music, performance, storytelling, verbal expressiveness, and call and response (Boykin, 1986, 2001; Foster, 1995; Hale, 2001; Lee, 2005; Murrell, 2002; Perry, 2003). They also built upon the strong emphasis of family and kin within the African American culture (Boykin, 1986, 2001; King, 2005; Murrell, 2002). These teachers’ efforts to connect the curriculum, and school in general, to the students’ lives and knowledge bases reflects a relational component and a basis for relationship development. The use of culturally responsive pedagogical methods involves the teachers knowing their students and their students’ community. It also involves investing the time and
energy into creating culturally responsive lessons that facilitate their low-income, African American students’ achievement and overall success. Furthermore, in making these efforts these teachers affirmed their students’ culture and lived experience and conveyed a desire to make the students’ learning experience a positive one in which the students can maintain and build off their cultural identity.

A theme that does not appear to have been addressed sufficiently in the existing culturally responsive literature concerns the manner in which these teachers re-engaged students. Both Ms. M and Ms. B made efforts to re-engage students on an academic task as well as expend time and effort in re-engaging individual students who became emotionally withdrawn. These teachers conveyed that each student was an important member of the learning community and that their disengagement had an impact on the teacher and needed to be attended to and addressed. One particular interaction illustrated the manner in which culturally responsive teachers re-engaged students. This instance occurred between Ms. B and her student Donovan. Ms. B expressed her disappointment in Donovan’s description of his behavior in school that day and said, “You didn’t yell at the teacher? I don’t want to believe that… I hope I don’t hear that again.” The personalization of Ms. B’s comment appears important in that she self-disclosed how his behavior impacted her and thus demonstrated her investment in him. This relates to Relational Cultural theory’s mutual empathy and mutual empowerment in which both of the individuals are impacted by the thoughts and feelings of the other (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Spencer et al., 2004). Also, Donovan’s reaction to her comment seems significant in that it appeared that he became upset that she was disappointed in him, thus reflecting how not reaching her high expectations impacted him. However, when Donovan began to withdraw, Ms. B pursued his emotional and relational re-engagement with fervor, resulting in Donovan’s re-engagement. This series of
interactions depicts that personal and reciprocal nature of the teacher-student interactions and the impact that the relationship can have on the student.

As this example depicted, these teachers communicated that each student in the class was important and a valuable member of the class and that the students’ learning and emotional well being were significant. Feeling attended to at such a personal level and feeling important serves to connect students with their teachers and facilitate relationship development as students feel truly cared for by their teachers. This again links to how students try harder when they feel that a teacher cares about them (Delpit, 2006; Hollins & Spencer, 1990). These efforts reflect the teachers’ commitment to the students and the communalistic nature of African American culture and the phrase “I am because we are; and because we are, therefore, I am” (Mbiti, 1970).

**Being Transparent and Joining**

Concepts relating to teacher transparency have been discussed in the writings of hooks (1994) as she relates the importance of the teacher maintaining her sense of self and sharing herself with her students. This idea is integral to the theory that emerged from this study’s findings. Bondy and colleagues (2007) found that culturally responsive teachers are personal with their students, but they related this to teachers sharing information about their personal lives and using humor. However, the current findings indicate that teacher transparency goes beyond sharing personal information, and involves, as noted by hooks (1994), sharing themselves in terms of their thought processes, imperfections, and their playfulness. These teachers revealed themselves to their students so that the students did not only know facts about the teacher, but knew the teacher as human being with thoughts, feelings, and fallibilities. This relates to Relational Cultural theory’s key relational process of bringing more of oneself into the relationship through authenticity (Jordan, 2001; Jordan & Hartling, 2002).
These teachers made an effort to join with the class community instead of remaining as a separate entity. Therefore, it appeared that the teacher no longer conceptualized it as “me and my students” but as “we”. The “we” is again part of an emphasis on communalism and the belief in the interconnectedness of people (Boykin, 1986; King, 2005; Lee, 2005; Murrell, 2002). It also reflects the African-centered epistemological belief in socially constructed learning (Hale, 1986, 2001; Murrell, 2002) and how students not only learn from teachers but teachers can learn from students (hooks, 1994; Murrell, 2002). Consequently, in the act of being transparent and joining the classroom community, the teacher is presenting herself not only as a teacher, but as a relatable human being who demonstrates a desire for an authentic relationship with her students. It is important to note that the process of joining and being transparent does not necessitate eliminating the hierarchy that exists between the teacher and the student nor does it require the teacher to abandon her authority. Researchers have noted that maintaining authority is important in culturally responsive practices with African American students (Brown, 2003, 2004; Bondy et al., 2007; Delpit, 1995, 2005), as both teachers in the current study were able to do. Thus, these findings suggest that culturally responsive teachers are able to maintain a balance between being transparent while simultaneously upholding their authority.

**Facilitating Conditions for Relationship Building**

These findings indicate the significance of creating an environment and conditions that facilitated relationship development between the teacher and her low-income, African American students. These teachers made an effort to set clear expectations, required respect and order in their classrooms and did not shame their students regardless of the circumstance. In doing so, the teachers provided a safe environment in which the students could bring themselves more fully into the classroom and their learning experience, as well as become more available in their relationships.
The importance of creating a classroom environment in which culturally diverse students feel safe physically and psychologically and thus prepared and able to perform at a high level has been echoed by numerous researchers (Brown, 2003, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Weinstein et al., 2004; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). Specifically, researchers have stressed the need to communicate explicit expectations for behavior, the rationale for rules and procedures, as well as respectfully and calmly repeating requests and administering consequences (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2003; 2004; Delpit, 1995; Weinstein et al., 2004). Therefore, while the findings regarding creating safety are not new, the fact that they have emerged again from data of culturally responsive teachers indicates how crucial and vital these conditions are for student learning and relationship building between teachers and students.

Student’s Affective Responses

What has been absent in much of the previous literature regarding culturally responsive educational practices are the responses of the students. Howard (2001) interviewed students of culturally responsive teachers and the students overwhelming reported how imperative a caring relationship was between the teacher and the student. The findings of this study, however, highlight the positive responses of students to the teacher-student and teacher-class interactions, the transparency of the teachers, and the development of conditions contributing to the safe environment. Students were repeatedly observed demonstrating behaviors that depicted the positive emotions of joy, interest, contentment and love in the classrooms of these culturally responsive master teachers. Absent from these classrooms were students who were acting out, yelling at or arguing with the teacher or one another, fully disengaged, or not completing their assignments. However, these classes provide a counter-narrative to the cultural and intellectual inferiority of this group of students assumed by some (Perry, 2003) and substantiate the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices.
In conclusion, this study illustrated the significance of relationship development and its impact not only on the academic achievement of students, but on their psychological well being as well. Relationship development in the classroom between culturally responsive teachers and low-income, African American is a multi-faceted process. However, when the various facets are attended to, students demonstrate actions indicating positive emotions. Frederickson and colleagues note that positive emotions are often associated with psychological well-being (Frederickson, 1998; Frederickson & Joiner, 2002). This is particularly important given the influence of psychological well-being on students’ learning (Edwards & Mullis, 2003; Sciarra & Seirup, 2008) and the research showing that culturally diverse students often experiences symptoms of psychological distress in school (Choi, Meininger, & Roberts, 2006; Fisher et al., 2001; Wong et al., 2003).

**Limitations**

There are some limitations inherent in the study’s design and methodology. These limitations can be grouped into four main areas: the method of data collection, selection of setting, selection of participants and method of data analysis. First, the sole form of data collection used in the study was that of videotaped observations of master teachers. This limits the research to only what was observed, with little information about the purpose, intentionality, or awareness of the teachers’ or students’ sequences of behavior. Moreover, it limited the opportunity for member checking to increase credibility. It also precluded the methodological triangulation of the data with other data sources, thus limiting the trustworthiness of the study. Furthermore, data were not collected assessing the students’ psychological well-being prior to and following their time with the master teachers, thus the master teachers’ impact on the students’ psychological well-being can only be inferred from what is observed in the students’ behavior.
Additionally, as noted by qualitative researchers using videotaped data and visual methods, the data obtained was limited by the angle and perspective of the camera and to whatever fell in the scope of the video camera’s lens (Mason, 2002; Ratcliff, 2003). Sound was also limited by the proximity of the teacher and the students to the microphone and thus some conversations were indecipherable. Additionally, the presence of the camera in the classrooms may have impacted both the behaviors of the teachers and the students. However, because of the continuous filming over a period of days, the novelty and noted presence of the video camera may have decreased over time.

The videotapes analyzed for this study depicted interactions between master teachers and their low-income, African American elementary school students. Consequently, the findings are specific to elementary aged students. While the researcher selected two different classroom contexts with different aged low-income, African American elementary students to provide breadth to the findings, this could also be viewed as a limitation. There were differences in the organizational context between Ms. M’s classroom and Ms. B’s classroom. As mentioned, Ms. M’s class was videotaped during their mathematics period, and thus, per state requirements, there was specific material that required coverage and particular goals and objectives that Ms. M had to ensure that her students met. In contrast, Ms. B’s class was part of an afterschool program in which there may have been more flexibility in terms of topics to be covered and goals and objectives to be met. Moreover, there was a developmental difference between the students in the two classes, with Ms. B’s class consisting of first through third graders, and Ms. M’s class consisting of fifth grade students. These differences in structure and student development may have influenced the teachers’ dispositions towards the students and the differences in the teacher-student and teacher class interactions. It is also important to note that Ms. B was recorded
teaching students who voluntarily participated in the afterschool program. Consequently, the students participating in the afterschool program may have certain qualities that were uncharacteristic of the school population as a whole thus limiting the transferability of the findings. However, transferability is not the sole focus of qualitative inquiry (Glesne, 1999) and the findings of the current study can be confirmed through replication of the current study in similar settings and/or similarly aged students.

Another limitation involves the selection of the teacher participants. Both teachers were African American teachers teaching African American students; thus it cannot be determined whether sharing similar cultural values and experiences impacted how these teachers developed and used the relationships to facilitate learning. Moreover, as both teachers were women, it is difficult to ascertain the significance of the role of gender within the relational processes. Also, Ms. M was selected by a Center for Learning’s professional development project because of the empirically documented mathematical gains of her students. However, Ms. B, taped for Foster and colleagues’ (2003, 2005) research project, was identified and nominated as a master teacher by principals and administrators for her ability to teach low-income, culturally diverse students. The nomination process did not indicate that it involved providing empirical evidence substantiating the effectiveness of the Ms. B prior to her selection. Nonetheless, the low-income, African American students of Ms. B who participated in the after-school program did show empirically documented academic gains in math and reading as well as improvement in student engagement and behavioral outcomes (Foster et al., 2003, 2005). Finally, although measures were taken by the researcher to limit researcher biases through the use of theoretical memos, peer debriefing, and triangulation of the interpretive process, the researcher was the primary investigator, and thus her subjectivity and bias in all likelihood influence the data analysis
process. For example, the researcher was not looking for negative processes of relationship development that may have been present nor did she look for practices that actually perpetuate educational hegemony.

**Implications**

**Implications for Theory**

As indicated in the discussion of the findings, many of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study data have been cited in previous literature regarding culturally responsive educational practices. Moreover, aspects of certain existing theories, such as Relational Cultural theory (RCT) and culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM), correspond with the emergent theory. However, the unique features of the theory that emerged from this study’s findings are the combination of various themes and sub-themes about relationship development as well as the inclusion of students’ affective responses. Thus, this theory provides a more comprehensive model of culturally responsive relationship development that teachers engage in with their low-income, African American students. To illustrate how this theory provides greater information about this subject, the similarities and differences between this emergent theory and Relational Cultural theory and culturally responsive classroom management will be described.

Relational Cultural theory (RCT) was considered initially as a possible theoretical perspective for teacher-student relationship development for this study. However, it was eliminated because of its focus on outcomes of growth fostering relationships and limited information concerning relational processes. Moreover, it was not created for use in the context of a classroom. The findings of the current study further illuminate the limitations of the theory and its application to culturally responsive relationship development between teachers and students. Nonetheless, certain aspects of RCT’s key relational processes such as mutual empathy,
mutual empowerment, and authenticity are similar to processes depicted in the current theory. These processes are reflected in facets of the themes and sub-themes of attending to the individual, encouraging student voice, and transparency which are parts of the emergent theory. These similarities include (a) teachers giving students the opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts and responding empathically (Jordan & Hartling, 2002); (b) teachers acknowledging students’ experiences and needs and allowing these to impact the relationship and the teacher (Spencer et al., 2004); (c) teachers encouraging students’ voice and authenticity (Spencer et al., 2004); (d) teachers increasing their own authenticity by bringing more of themselves into their relationships with students (Jordan, 2001; Jordan & Hartling, 2002); and (e) student responses of joy, interest, contentment, love, and seeking relationships which parallel RCT’s increased zest, empowerment, self-worth, clarity, and connection (Miller, 1986a, 1986b).

As noted, the fact that RCT was developed for use within counseling precludes it from addressing the many intricacies occurring within the classroom context. In particular it fails to address an important aspect of the current theory which involves the teacher-class interactions and the importance of the classroom community. Furthermore, RCT does not seem to reflect the intense belief of the teachers in student capabilities nor the level of investment in ensuring the success of students. Finally, because of its development for use in counseling, RCT cannot and does not address how relationship development and the use of relationships in facilitating learning are so closely intertwined. Consequently, although the new theory parallels some of the relational processes of RCT, the new theory appears to more thoroughly describe the complex process of relationship development between culturally responsive teachers and their low-income, African American students.
While RCT was not developed specifically for use in the school context, the theory of culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) was created as a framework in which teachers could relate to and manage their culturally diverse students in a more culturally responsive manner (Brown, 2003, 2004; Weinstein, 2003, 2004). As a result, CRCM does stress listening, believing in students and holding high expectations, the creation of a learning community, the use of familiar communication styles, respectful guidance of behavior, and creating a safe learning environment (Brown, 2003, 2004; Bondy et al., 2007; Weinstein et al., 2003, 2004). However, CRCM differs in that it does not address many of the other key components of the emergent theory. CRCM, as its name suggests was created to help teachers understand behaviors in a cultural context and manage their classrooms in more culturally responsive, effect ways (Weinstein et al., 2003). As it has developed further it incorporates more relational aspects (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2003, 2004) but it views relationship development as one piece of culturally responsive relations with students. It conceptualizes the creation of relationships as separate from holding high expectations and culturally congruent communication. In contrast, the theory emerging in this study conceptualizes believing in students, holding high standards, and using familiar communication styles as integral parts of relationship development. These are vital processes used by culturally responsive teachers in developing and using their relationships in their instruction of their low-income, African American students and thus these relationships cannot be developed without them.

Another key difference is CRCM’s focus on relations between the teacher and individual students. CRCM emphasizes the importance of daily interactions and communications between the teacher and their individual students (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2004). They do not acknowledge the importance of teacher-whole class interactions and their role in relationship
development. The nature of the classroom context provides teachers with a multitude of opportunities to positively interact with the class as a whole. The findings of this study indicated that teachers often conveyed their pride in the students and commitment to the students’ success through teacher-class interactions. However, CRCM does not emphasize culturally responsive teachers’ investment and efforts to ensure student success, nor does it discuss teachers’ efforts to praise and encourage their students. In addition, CRCM only briefly talks about the teachers’ self-disclosure, and this self-disclosure is described in terms of the teacher sharing facts and information about him or herself. The new theory’s theme of teacher transparency focuses more on how the teacher shares her thoughts, feelings, playfulness, and imperfections. Thus, the teachers did not disclose personal information, but instead shared who they were with the students as a participant in the learning community and as a human being. Finally, CRCM differs from the emergent theory in that the new theory discusses the student’s responses to the culturally responsive relational practices of their teachers. Therefore, while CRCM is a helpful theory, the theory emerging from this study highlights several important areas that were not addressed by CRCM.

As indicated in the comparisons between existing theories, the new theory offers a more in-depth model for how culturally responsive teachers develop and use their relationships with their low-income, African American students to facilitate student learning. The new theory highlights the multilevel process of relationship development and shows the reciprocal nature between creating teacher-student and teacher-whole class emotional connectedness and creating classroom conditions and norms that facilitate relationship development. Moreover, it clarifies how emotional connectedness is integral not only to the relationship development between the teacher and individual students, but in the teachers’ interactions with their class as a whole and in
the teachers’ willingness to be transparent with their students. The theory also suggests causal
links between teacher-student connectedness, the creation of a safe learning environment and
students’ positive affective responses.

Rather than being conceptualized as a step by step framework in which each component
must be mechanically followed, the theory depicts a model which emphasizes key components
for relationship development between culturally responsive teachers and their students. Although
the two teachers in the study had very different styles of interacting with their students (one
being very stern and business like, the other being more nurturing) the same messages were
conveyed and the students’ affective responses appeared to be the same. Furthermore with regard
to emotional connectedness, one teacher interacted more frequently with individual students,
while the other interacted more frequently with the class as a whole. Consequently, if one
envisions emotional connectedness as three intersecting circles of teacher-class connection,
teacher-student connection, and transparency (see Figure 5-1), each circle can be vary in size
based on the teacher. What appears critical is that all three components are present and
intentionally cultivated by the teacher. Finally, it must be noted that this theory remains tentative
d further research is needed. Nonetheless, this theory implies a need for a more expansive
conceptualization of culturally responsive relationship development, and it adds to the existing
theoretical base regarding effective teaching practices with low-income, African American
students.

**Implications for Practice**

The findings of the current study on the key aspects of teacher student relationship
development also have implications for school counselors and for teachers. In particular, these
findings suggest implications for the preparation of school counselors and the preparation of
teachers, as well as implications for current counselor and teacher practice.
Implications for school counseling practice

The findings of the study indicate some important implications for school counseling practice. Equipped with a better understanding of how culturally responsive teachers develop and use relationships to facilitate students’ learning, school counselors can advocate for the implementation of such practices in their schools. School counselors need to advocate for their low-income, culturally diverse students who are underachieving and may be experiencing psychological distress in schools. They need to advocate for a learning environment which is conducive to the success of all students, which as the research indicates, could be facilitated by more culturally responsive practices. Consequently, this may include communicating with the administrators at the school regarding culturally diverse students’ experiences and the need to make changes in educational practices and the curriculum. The advocacy may also need to occur at a district, city or state level as well given that some district-wide and state-wide policies relegate the curriculum and procedures that propagate Eurocentric based education.

As mentioned in the professional counseling literature, one of the most influential ways that school counselors can influence the school experiences of low-income, culturally diverse students is through their role as consultant (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007b; Bemak, 2000). The findings of the study emphasize and describe the relational component of culturally responsive educational practices with low-income, African American students. Given school counselors’ relational expertise and multicultural training, it is imperative that they collaboratively consult with teachers regarding these findings concerning culturally responsive relationship development. Of importance is that the school counselor partner with the teacher as a co-expert. To gain buy-in from the teacher, the school counselor must acknowledge the teacher’s expertise and the value of the teacher’s knowledge base in the process of presenting that they have something to offer from a relational standpoint. Through such a relationship, both the school
Figure 5-1. Variability among the themes of emotional connectedness. A) More teacher-student connection. B) More teacher-class connection.
counselor and the teacher can combine their expertise to create culturally responsive classrooms in which all students can succeed.

In addition to the need for school counselors to collaboratively consult with individual teachers, school counselors can also serve as a consultant by creating professional development initiatives centering on culturally responsive educational practices. Although many teachers recognize the discrepancies in achievement and want to do something to minimize such discrepancies, many teachers may not be aware of how the cultural context of their classrooms may be impacting culturally diverse students. Therefore, school counselors could begin by creating a faculty-wide guided reading initiative in which to raise the faculty’s awareness about the Eurocentric basis of U.S. education and the potential for cultural discontinuity. Using books such as Ladson Billings’ (1994) *The Dream Keepers* or Hale’s (2001) *Learning While Black*, the faculty could be put into smaller groups and the school counselor could facilitate discussions about the teachers’ reactions.

The reading groups could be supplemented by the school counselor leading or co-leading with a master teacher an interactive school-wide professional development series on educational hegemony and culturally responsive educational practices. Pertinent topics to cover in such a professional development series include: (a) hegemony and its potential impact on culturally diverse students’ school experiences; (b) raising teachers consciousness and cultural awareness through experiential activities, cultural immersion experiences, and cultural panels; and (c) concrete information regarding culturally responsive instruction and pedagogy, as well as this study’s findings regard culturally responsive relationship development processes with low-income, African American students.
Given that large group professional development activities do not always create an environment where teachers feel comfortable opening up regarding their own ideas and questions, small group professional development initiatives are also necessary. School counselors could serve as the group facilitator for small groups in which teachers could have a more intimate and safe environment in which biases and assumptions regarding low-income, culturally diverse students could be explored. In these groups, school counselors could initiate opportunities in which teachers examined and reflected on their own relational and instructional practices and their outcomes. Additionally, such a small group could also strengthen collaboration among the teachers as well as with the school counselor on ways to be more culturally responsive relationally and instructionally.

**Implications for school counselor preparation**

The professional school counseling literature heavily stresses the need for school counselors to be involved in decreasing the existing discrepancies in achievement between low-income, culturally diverse students and their more affluent White peers (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007b; Brown & Trusty, 2005; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Lee, 2005). Yet, some school counselor education programs fail to present material regarding some of the systemic influences on these discrepancies. Specifically, there is a need to promote school counselors’ cultural awareness regarding the Eurocentric basis of U.S. educational practices and how such practices may be at odds with low-income, culturally diverse students’ home cultures. They also need to be informed of how these experiences of cultural discontinuity may be linked to these students’ academic underachievement and psychological distress.

In addition to a better understanding of the context of the problem, school counselors need training regarding the educational practices that minimize cultural discontinuity and students’ experiences of psychological distress. School counselors need a basic knowledge of
culturally responsive educational practices and how these practices have been linked to increased academic achievement and psychological well-being. Because these practices are anchored in instruction, school counselors may conceptualize these practices as solely the purview of teachers and teacher educators. However, the current findings, along with the findings of other researchers indicate a strong relational component in culturally responsive practices (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2003, 2005; Weinstein et al., 2004). Consequently, given their interpersonal relationship training, school counselors have competencies that can be used in conjunction with teacher’s expertise in curriculum and instruction. Furthermore, the findings of this study are particularly important because they provide school counselors with specific content knowledge regarding how culturally responsive teachers develop relationships with their low-income, African American students in the context of the classroom.

School counselor training also needs to further ground school counselor trainee’s identity within the American School Counselor Association’s National Model. Many school counselor trainees might conceptualize their responsibilities as a school counselor as providing direct services to students. The roles of leader, advocate, and consultant may be perceived as secondary and thus not areas of focus. However, the ASCA model (2003) clearly emphasizes school counselors’ responsibilities for leadership, advocacy and consultative roles as foundational to their school’s academic mission. Consequently, school counselor training must stress these roles in their preparation programs and demonstrate how these roles ensure the academic, personal/social, and career development of all students. Moreover, counselor education programs must highlight how these roles are becoming increasingly important given the fact that such a large percentage of culturally diverse students are underachieving (Planty et al., 2008) and that many of these students may be experiencing psychological distress in schools (Choi et al., 2003;
Fisher et al., 2001; Wong et al., 2006). While direct services, may be of assistance to some students, school counselors who also focus on being a leader, advocate and consultant may be able to make a bigger impact on culturally diverse students’ underachievement and school experiences.

In addition to emphasizing their broadened responsibilities and roles, school counselors must be further equipped to perform these roles. Some of school counselors’ hesitancies in implementing these roles may be due to the fact that they do not feel they have the necessary skills to serve as a leader, consultant, or advocate in the school. Consequently, school counselor training should include additional leadership training. To facilitate such training school counselor preparation programs could partner with educational leadership preparation programs. The integration of leadership training would provide school counselors with a skill set that would equip them to be more capable of initiating systemic, school wide change efforts and professional development initiatives centered on culturally responsive educational practices.

Similarly, even though the consultation role within professional school counseling is not a new one, many school counselors may not feel comfortable providing consultation services to teachers within their schools. There is a fear that teachers will resist listening to their suggestions and perceive that the school counselor is attempting to take on the role of the expert in the teacher’s classroom. School counselor training programs must therefore facilitate school counselors’ acquisition of collaborative consultation skills. In particular, training needs to stress the reciprocal nature of collaborative consultation and teach school counselors how to develop a collaborative consultative relationship with teachers. Additional course assignments focused on consultation and its implementation should be added to school counselor courses and a counselor-teacher consultation requirement should be included in students’ practicum and
internship experiences. Such a requirement would re-emphasize the importance of the consultative role as well as give students an opportunity to develop their skills as a consultant while still receiving supervision. With such increased consultation skills and content knowledge regarding culturally responsive relationship development, school counselors will be more equipped to collaboratively consult with teachers to positively impact low-income, culturally diverse students’ academic achievement and experiences in the classroom.

There is also a need for school counselor education programs to partner with teacher education programs. Such a partnership could be powerful in multiple ways. First it will model for school counselor trainees, as well as pre-service teachers, the importance of these two professions collaborating. Each profession has an expertise and skill set that could benefit the other and their integrated expertise could powerfully impact the achievement of low-income, culturally diverse students.

Second, counselor educators, as well as school counselor trainees must obtain a better understanding of the ways that master teachers develop relationships with their students. There are intricacies to teaching and to all that a teacher manages within a school day. As emphasized in the finding of the current study, relationship building within the context of a classroom can be very different from relationship development that may occur within a school counselor’s office. Often, in states that require teaching experience for school counselors it is assumed that the counselors learn the specific relational complexities of classrooms. However, there is a growing trend for school counselors to go directly into counselor preparation programs without gaining teaching experience. Moreover, it is not always guaranteed that teacher preparation programs address relational processes. Consequently, it is important that school counselors grasp that it is not possible for teachers to give each student individual attention for long periods of time.
Instead within the context of the classroom, as the findings suggest, relationships often develop based on a series of distinctive teacher-student or teacher-class interactions.

Given this study’s findings which emphasized group cohesion and creating a sense of communalism in the classroom, it is important that school counselor trainees not only receive content regarding the significance of such an atmosphere, but that they experience it themselves. As a result, counselor educators must also model some of the whole class relationship building processes implemented by master teachers, so that the school counselor trainees actually feel the impact of the processes in their classrooms. This understanding of the context will help school counselors more easily collaborate with teachers concerning feasible culturally responsive relationship practices that can be implemented within their classrooms.

**Implications for teacher preparation and practice**

Although this study was conducted to facilitate school counselors’ understanding of culturally responsive relational practices so as to enhance their ability to collaboratively consult with teachers, the findings of the current study also have implications for teacher preparation and teaching practice. As mentioned in the implications for counselor preparation and practice, there is a need for a partnership between counselor education and teacher education. Such a partnership would enhance both teachers and school counselors understanding of each others professions as well as facilitate collaborative efforts between the two. This partnership is important for teacher training because counselor education has already developed means in which to enhance counselors’ self-awareness and multicultural competencies. Teacher education can use counselor education as a basis for increasing the cultural awareness of pre-service teachers. The importance of cultural competency and multicultural awareness is evident throughout the findings of the current study. In order for teachers to truly believe in their students and hold high standards for their students, they need to explore their biases and
assumptions regarding low-income, culturally diverse populations. To facilitate developing the teachers’ increased awareness and the skills in working responsively with culturally diverse students, there should be increased multicultural coursework required for teacher certification. Such coursework would provide teachers with more training regarding culturally responsive educational practices and their implementation.

The findings of this study also indicate implications for teacher practice. There is clearly much to be learned from master teachers and their ability to implement culturally responsive educational practices and build relationships with their students. Consequently, school districts need to identify culturally responsive master teachers and compensate them for mentoring new teachers. As part of this mentorship, the new teachers need to be given the opportunity to observe master teachers during the school day to learn from their instruction methods and relational practices. Such mentorship would give new teachers concrete examples of culturally responsive educational practices and the chance to discuss these practices and their implementation with teachers who have successfully done so. Similarly, schools should invest in hiring an extra staff person, perhaps a former master teacher, who could serve as a consultant regarding the culturally responsive pedagogical practices and lesson plans. This person could work alongside the school counselor who collaboratively consults with teachers concerning culturally responsive relationship development. In addition, to be culturally responsive, teachers need an understanding of their students’ culture, their students’ families, and their students’ community. Living in the community in which one teaches could facilitate this understanding, thus housing or financial grants should be given to encourage teachers to live in the communities in which they teach. Lastly, schools should require that teachers and other school personnel participate in professional development activities which center on increasing teachers’ cultural awareness and
the development and implementation of culturally responsive educational practices within their classrooms.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In addition to the implications for practice and theory, the results of this study suggest implications for research. Using video tapes of culturally responsive master teachers, the researcher was able to gain an abundance of data regarding the relationship building processes of these teachers with their low-income, African American students. The analysis of the videotapes was enhanced by the software program Studiocode. This software simplifies the qualitative data analysis process of videos by allowing researchers to code instances within the video of certain behaviors. This gives the researchers the capability of viewing all of the instances within a code such that the instances can be compared and contrasted, as well as more richly defining the code itself. Moreover, one could also use this software to examine frequencies of behaviors by counting instances of behaviors, the total time of certain behaviors, and the percentage of total time of the video. This basic data can be exported to statistical programs and statistical analysis can be conducted. Given the numerous capabilities of the software and the wealth of data that video tapes can provide researchers in education and in counseling, the Studiocode software appears to have the potential to facilitate future qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method research surrounding culturally responsive teachers and beyond.

The theory that was developed by the researcher provides a model that describes how two culturally responsive teachers developed and used their relationships to facilitate learning. The study examined the relational process of these teachers with their low-income, African American students in the context of a fifth grade math class and an afterschool program for first through third graders. As a result, future research should be conducted to determine whether the themes and sub-themes of the theory can be applied to other teachers engaged in teaching low-income,
African American students in other contexts. In particular, it is important that counseling researchers investigate the relational and interactional processes of culturally responsive elementary school teachers across academic subjects and secondary teachers teaching across class periods of different students. Such studies may reveal whether the relational practices vary based on the age level of the student or the academic subject matter. Also, given the large percentage of White or Latino teachers and the fact that the current study examined the relational processes of two African American teachers, a similar study needs to be conducted examining how culturally responsive White, Latino, Native American, and/or Asian-American teachers develop and use relationships with their low-income, African American students to see if the findings differ. Similarly, future research should examine the relational practices of culturally responsive teachers with other culturally diverse student groups as well as with English language learners.

As discussed, culturally responsive educational practices have been linked to increases in culturally diverse students’ academic achievement and decreases in problematic classroom behaviors (Foster et al., 2003, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993). However, teachers are often determined to be effective and culturally responsive based upon peer or administrator nomination. Teachers’ effectiveness with culturally diverse populations has been substantiated through students’ scores on achievement tests as well as teacher-reports or parent-reports of students’ performance and behavior (Foster et al., 2003, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pransky & Bailey, 2002). Such assessments indirectly suggest a teachers’ cultural responsiveness but do not quantitatively measure the teachers’ culturally responsive educational practices. Therefore, there is a need to develop and validate a classroom based observation rubric which teachers could use to self-assess the extent to which they feel that
they are engaging in culturally responsive practices in their classrooms. A rubric could serve as a professional development tool for teachers and a medium through which school counselors could consult with teachers.

Qualitative research, including the current study, suggests that culturally responsive practices may impact students’ psychological well-being (Cummins, 1996; Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). To further verify these findings, a line of inquiry specifically examining the psychological impact of culturally responsive teachers on their culturally diverse students is still needed. First, a quantitative study is needed to measure and compare the psychological wellness of culturally diverse students of teachers who have been identified as culturally responsive and those who have not. It would be important that in such a study utilize culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate instruments to assess the psychological wellness of the students. Second, a phenomenological study could be conducted investigating the experiences of culturally diverse students in the classrooms of culturally responsive teachers. Thus, in-depth interviews could be conducted with a number the students focusing specifically on the students’ psychological experiences in the classroom of these teachers.

Additionally, given the research suggesting that culturally responsive teachers can have a positive psychological impact on culturally diverse students, there is a need to identify in what ways these teachers are doing so. Thus, a quantitative study could be conducted by counseling researchers to develop and validate an instrument that identifies and assesses the psychological interventions of culturally responsive teachers. Such an instrument could provide further understanding of what these teachers are doing in their classrooms that positively affects their culturally diverse students’ psychological outcomes.
In addition to the need for future research that continues to examine culturally responsive teachers, culturally responsive educational practices, and their impacts on student outcomes, there is also a need to investigate how to facilitate school counselors’ partnerships with classroom teachers regarding teaching practices. Though called to serve as a leader in the academic mission of their schools (ASCA, 2003), school counselors may lack the confidence to do so. Thus, the researcher and a colleague (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008) noted a need to investigate ways to successfully promote school counselors leadership skills. In particular, it was suggested that researchers evaluate existing leadership training initiatives that have been incorporated into school counselor education programs. The identification and implementation of evidence-based leadership training practices in school counseling programs could better equip school counselors to make an impact on instruction as well as the academic and psychological outcomes for low-income, culturally diverse students.

An intervention study could also be conducted to examine ways to facilitate collaborative partnerships between school counselors and teachers. These partnerships are important in order to integrate the school counselors’ relational expertise with the teachers’ instructional expertise; both of which are influential in the learning process. For example, a mixed methods study could be conducted investigating the outcomes of an intervention in which school counselors and teachers were required to work collaboratively on the creation and implementation culturally responsive educational practices. Using pre and post-test surveys and an interview schedule, researchers could explore how the school counselor and teacher viewed the school counselor’s role. Additionally, researchers could assess the school counselors’ confidence and self-efficacy in serving as a collaborative consultant, as well as assessing the teacher’s feelings of comfort and confidence regarding the consultation and implementation of culturally responsive practices.
Moreover, student outcomes could also be measured to assess the impact of the collaborative consultation on students’ academic achievement.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study have yielded a multi-faceted theoretical model that describes how culturally responsive master teachers develop relationships with their low-income, African American students and use these relationships to facilitate the learning process. The model depicts how teacher transparency, their connecting interactions with individual students and the class as a whole, and their facilitation of a safe learning environment appear to be linked to students’ positive affective responses. These findings are particularly important given the documented underachievement of these students and the fact that some low-income, African American students experiences in school can even cause them psychological distress. Thus, with a better understanding of this relationship development process, school counselors can more effectively consult with teachers to help them develop strong relationships with their low-income, African American students that may facilitate the students academic and personal success.
APPENDIX
VIDEO RATING SHEET

Video: (type the video you have analyzed here, i.e. Ms.B 10-30-01, 10-31-01 or 11-01-01 OR Ms. M 8-14, 8-15, or 8-17)

**Teacher Behaviors**
What kind of behaviors do you see the teacher doing that facilitates relationship development? Include both verbals and non-verbals. (The columns expand as you type so type as much as you need.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minute segment on video (may be multiple)</th>
<th>Description of Teacher Behavior</th>
<th>Your thought process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Student Engagement/Disengagement Behaviors**
What behaviors (including verbals and nonverbals) do you see the students doing that would indicate engagement or disengagement and/or establishment of teacher/student relationship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minute segment on video (may be multiple)</th>
<th>Description of Student Behavior</th>
<th>Your thought process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### Teacher Student Interaction
What behaviors do you notice in both the teacher and the student with regard to interactions between them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minute segment on video (may be multiple)</th>
<th>Description of Student Behavior</th>
<th>Your thought process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Miscellaneous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minute segment on video (may be multiple)</th>
<th>Description of Student Behavior</th>
<th>Your thought process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Overall Observations/Thoughts/Comments:
LIST OF REFERENCES


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Blaire Elizabeth Cholewa pursued her Bachelors of Arts in psychology and religious studies from the University of Virginia, graduating with distinction in 2003. After graduating from the University of Virginia, Blaire spent a year as an Americorps volunteer, living and working in a boy’s group home in Baltimore, Maryland. Her experiences in the boy’s group home led her to pursue graduate studies in the Department of Counselor Education at the University of Florida where she was granted direct entry into the Ph.D program and given an Alumni Fellowship. In 2006, Blaire received her Master of Education and Specialist in Education degrees in school counseling and guidance while also completing the coursework to qualify for licensure in mental health counseling. Blaire decided to pursue her doctorate in mental health counseling; consequently her dual training has provided her clinical experiences in Alachua County Public Schools as well as CDS Behavioral Health and the Alachua County Crisis Center. Her research agenda is focused on improving the school experiences of low-income, culturally diverse youth and their families. She has published her research in *Professional School Counseling* and presented her research in professional conferences including the American Counseling Association (ACA), National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) and the Southern Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (SACES).