

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

The Teacher-Student Relationship: The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to examine how the teacher-student relationship influences the development of trust and emotional intelligence in the elementary classroom. Although there is a great deal of research on the importance of building meaningful teacher-student relationships, very few studies provide clearly defined strategies on *how* to build trust in the classroom and *how* to help students explore and express themselves in an appropriate manner. To examine this hypothesis 45 minute interviews were conducted with two experienced teachers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), both with over 20 years in elementary education. The first participant has been a special education teacher for the past five years. The second participant is a recent retiree with 40 years of experience in teaching. 11 interview questions were posed to determine how teachers view and approach of the concept of building trust, and to explore the strategies used to foster emotional intelligence. Analysis of the interview responses indicated that teacher authenticity and predictability were the most important factors in getting students to trust and believe in their teacher. The findings also suggested the following: validating student feelings fosters trust and emotional intelligence; good classroom management is contingent on a trusting environment; and student willingness to take risks, make mistakes, and say "I don't get it!" when they don't understand a certain concept improves their learning.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. Chapter 1: Introduction	7
1.1. Introduction to the Research Study	7
1.2. Purpose of Study	7
1.3. Research Questions	9
1.4. Background of the Researcher	9
1.5. Overview of Issues and My Ideas	10
2. Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
3. Chapter 3: Methodology	15
3.1. Introduction	15
3.2. Participants	15
3.3. Procedure	17
3.4. Ethical Review Procedures	19
3.5. Limitations and Next Steps	20
4. Chapter 4: Findings	22
4.1. Introduction	22
4.1.1 Definition of Trust and Emotional Intelligence	22

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

4.1.2 Themes	23
4.2. Creating Meaningful Teacher-Student Relationships	24
4.2.1. Teacher Authenticity	24
4.2.2. Teacher Role and Presence in the Classroom	25
4.3. Building Trust in the Classroom	26
4.3.1. Mutual Respect	26
4.3.2. Teacher Predictability	28
4.4. Fostering Emotional Intelligence	29
4.4.1. Teacher Persona	29
4.4.2. Teaching Emotional Intelligence	31
4.5. Trust and Emotional Intelligence: <i>Benefits and Challenges</i>	32
4.5.1. Benefits	32
4.5.2. Challenges	35
4.6. Effective Strategies for Promoting Trust and Emotional Intelligence	37
4.6.1. Tribes	37
4.6.2. Seeking Help for Students	39
4.6.3. Story Telling	39
4.7. Classroom Management in a Trusting Environment	40

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

4.7.1. Good Classroom Management	40
4.7.2. Consistency and Structure	42
4.7.3. Managing Instructional Time to Promote Social Emotional Learning	43
4.8. The Teacher-Student Relationship and Academic Performance	44
4.8.1. Building a Trusting Learning Environment	44
4.8.2. How Trust Affects Student Learning	46
4.9. Conclusion	47
5. Chapter 5: Discussion	49
5.1. Introduction	49
5.2. Relation to the Literature Review	50
5.3. Implications	54
5.4. Conclusion	56
6. References	58
7. Appendix A: Participation and Consent Letter	60
8. Appendix B: Research and Interview Questions	62

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Research Study

In this paper, I address the *benefits of observation and getting to know students*; the importance of *collaborating expectations, consistency in the classroom and helping students manage and express their feelings appropriately*; and *the benefits of teaching coping strategies*. These are all essential factors affecting trust and emotional intelligence in the classroom, hence student success. To support my position, I draw from my personal experiences and make specific reference to previous writings and the data collected from the interviews conducted throughout this study. The main focus of my research project is to present how *developing trusting relationships and fostering emotional intelligence* in the classroom impact the teacher-student relationship and student learning.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research project is to explore the importance of the teacher-student relationship and examine its influence on the development of trust and emotional intelligence in the classroom. By gaining input from experienced exemplary educators, whom have made teacher-student relationships one of their top priorities in education, I aspire to develop a keener sense of how to approach the aspects of trust and emotional intelligence in the elementary classroom. I have had the opportunity to observe teacher-student interaction in elementary as well as secondary school classrooms during my undergraduate studies in education and have found that many teachers resort to

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

controlling their classrooms by fear versus caring. By this I mean teachers who use yelling, threatening, or sending students to the principal's office as strategies to manage and resolve classroom management issues. On a personal note, during my elementary school years I had much difficulty communicating my fears, concerns and learning difficulties to my teachers for fear of being reprimanded or seen as incompetent. I would internalise my insecurities instead of seeking help from my teachers, as their reactions were not always predictable. I did not always know what to expect from my teachers.

As someone new to the profession I want to gain a firsthand account of the strategies used in today's classrooms to promote trust and emotional intelligence. I have discussed these issues at length with experienced elementary school teachers. I have also discussed my topic with my associate teachers to get their view point on the issue in question, since they seem to be successful in building productive relationships with their students. These are teachers who strongly believe in the importance of building caring relationships with their students.

Moreover, I want to know what challenges teachers face in creating meaningful relationships with their students, and whether they are able to reach all of their students and meet their personal, emotional, social and academic needs. I also want to identify the successful strategies teachers have been using (and why) to ensure that students trust and believe in them, feel safe and confident enough to take risks and make mistakes, express their feelings appropriately and learn from their mistakes, and thrive socially and emotionally. Specific questions will be included towards the end of this paper.

1.3 Research Question

Developing trust and fostering emotional intelligence in the classroom are essential to building strong teacher-student relationships. However, developing meaningful teacher-student relationships is a major challenge for both teachers and students. How do we develop trust in our classroom? What are the benefits of fostering emotional intelligence in our students? Which strategies work well and why?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

My nurturing personality fuels my desire to address the notion of creating strong teacher-student relationships in the elementary school classroom. I always make a conscious effort to find out how the people with whom I interact feel...I always ask! As a teacher, I see myself as being a “professional mother” (Martin 1992, p.5) in the context of a nurturer. It is also important that I recognise my students’ social and emotional needs so that I can teach them the requisite skills to become model citizens. I strongly believe that helping students “improve their self-awareness and confidence, and manage their disturbing emotions and impulses [...] pays off not just in improved behaviour, but in measurable academic achievement” (Goleman & Comer, 2003).

Additionally, I have had the opportunity to write research papers addressing the relation between *emotion* and *linguistics*. These projects have inspired me to examine how emotional intelligence influences learning in the elementary classroom. Experience has taught me the importance of emotional intelligence and how great of an impact it has on how individuals perceive life and react to situations. One’s level of emotional

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

intelligence and trust in their teacher will determine how happy and successful he [or she] is in school and life in general.

In a previous graduate study program I worked on a research project entitled *The Role of Emotion in Discourse and Intonation*. Through this study I came to realise the power of emotion and how much influence it has on learning and development. Since then, it has been my desire to conduct further research on the subject of emotion and learning.

1.5 Overview of Issues and My Ideas

Developing trust and fostering emotional intelligence in the classroom are essential to building strong teacher-student relationships. Building strong relationships with children will have a positive influence on student success. However, a strong teacher-student relationship will not occur overnight since it is a work in progress. This is a major challenge for both teachers and students.

In order to develop trusting relationships with students and foster emotional intelligence in the classroom, teachers must first acknowledge that students need to believe in them. If students believe in their teacher, they will trust their teacher. Consequently, trust and belief need to be reciprocated by the teacher, who must in turn 'genuinely' care for the students. Teachers must also be prepared to not present themselves as superior beings destined to treat their students like their subjects. In other words, we must be prepared to lose the "I am the boss-Do as I say attitude."

Consequently, we as teachers need to exercise our position and authority in a student-friendly manner and be approachable at all times. Teachers should also be

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

prepared to share their own strengths, weaknesses, and personal experiences with their students in order to connect with and establish meaningful relationships with them.

Children will share who they are with us if we share who we are with them. We need to determine how to best meet our students at their level without losing control [of our classroom]...earning their respect in the process. Developing good relationships with students will help them in *all* areas of learning.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Dichtelmiller (1999) states that “When children [...] are recognised and respected, they feel good about themselves” (Dichtelmiller et al, 1999:2) .This principle holds true in the classroom as well as in other social contexts (1999:1).

According to Labaree (2000), teachers need to develop caring relationships with their students in order to develop an in-depth understanding their learning needs and abilities; “they also need to establish an emotional link to motivate the student to participate actively in the learning process”(p.229). Building genuine trustworthy relationships between teachers and students is pivotal in student capacity to learn (Raider-Roth, 2005).

Muller (2001) found that “teachers’ attitudes and actions are key in students’ academic progress” and that recent “research on teacher-caring [and] effective teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Noddings, 1996) [...] are examples of influential works emphasizing the centrality of teachers’ attitudes and actions toward students in determining whether the relationship is[...] productive”(p.243).

Watson & Ecken (2003) add that today’s educators are under constant pressure to deliver a higher standard of academic instruction in their classrooms and how “this focus on academic achievement has led many teachers, [...] to reduce their attention to students’ social and ethical growth and to building relationships with [...] their students” (Watson & Ecken, 2003). The teacher-student relationship is an integral part of *Classroom Organisation and Community*.

Kosnick and Beck (2011) stress that “classroom management is a crucial aspect of classroom life [...] and is inseparable from [all the other priorities for teaching and teacher education]” (pp.6 &53). For example, with regard to managing one’s classroom effectively, and in terms building trusting relationships with students, the following is required: “kindness on the part of teacher: acting with humour, care, and interest in students as human beings” (Kosnick and Beck, 2011:53). These factors are equally important to reducing the incidence of a build-up of animosity between teacher and student in the elementary classroom (p.53).

Mendler (2001) talks about the importance of identifying our disconnected students through observation; he provides strategies for developing personal, social, and academic relationship with children. Mendler encourages and reminds educators of the importance of teaching students to manage their feelings and provide practical strategies to create and maintain a daily climate that will help each student find positive ways to feel connected, valued, and special in the classroom. He also stresses the importance of enhancing relationships with students with difficulties by teaching those strategies that are concrete, user-friendly, and practical. (2001:1) Mendler also claims that student perception of classroom environment is dependent on “establishing a caring environment in which educators know, respect and connect with kids; [...] there is no doubt that achievement is most apt to occur in a friendly, predictable classroom atmosphere guided by a [caring and] enthusiastic teacher who “connects” with students and encourage them to create, take risks, and share ideas” (pp.1-2).

Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry (2010) suggest that if we teach our students the strategies they need to promote self-regulation of emotions, then they will develop the

emotional competence and skills that they require to succeed in their personal, social, and academic lives (p.91). Emotional Intelligence is often referred to as ‘the missing piece’ since it represents aspects of education that connect academic knowledge with a specific set of skills essential to success in schools, families, communities, workplaces, and life in general (Elias, 2003:7). Davis (2001) concludes that “for the elementary school student, the teacher wears many hats: friend, protector, mentor, disciplinarian, and gatekeeper to academic success” (p.431).

Leitão & Waugh(2007) summarizes so well:

Positive teacher-student relationships are characterised by mutual acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation (Good & Brophy, 2000; Krause, Bochner, & Duchesne, 2006; Larrivee, 2005; Noddings, 2005; Smeyers, 1999). The success of any interpersonal relationship is dependent to a large extent upon input from both parties (Pianta, 1999). In the classroom setting, it is the teacher who has the opportunity, and indeed, the responsibility, to initiate positive interpersonal relationships (Barry & King, 1993; Krause et al., 2006; McInerney & McInerney, 2006; Smeyers, 1999). The teacher who is proactive in demonstrating acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation towards his or her students not only works at initiating positive teacher-student relationships, but also increases the likelihood of building strong relationships that will endure over time (Barry & King, 1993). Teacher-student relationships greatly influence a student’s ability to adjust to school, to do well at school, and to relate to peers (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1988; Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994; Pianta, 1999; Sztejnberg et al., 2004). Teacher-student relationships have an impact on classroom management and affect learning progress (Klem & Connell, 2004; Sztejnberg et al., 2004). From a developmental perspective, the establishment of a positive teacher-student relationship aids a student’s cognitive, social and emotional growth and enhances their mental well-being (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992; Pianta, 1999; Weare, 2000). Stable teacher-student relationships impact positively on a student’s developing sense of self and promote resiliency in them (Pianta & Walsh, 1996; Rutter, 1979). Furthermore, the benefits of positive teacher-student relationships extend to teachers, contributing to an improved sense of job satisfaction (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). (Leitão et al, 2007)

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This research project was approached through careful examination of the literature available on the topic of teacher-student relationships; information gleaned from course work and practice teaching experiences in the Master of Teaching (MT) program; and through interviews with exemplary teachers with more than 20 years of experience in education whose philosophy of teaching reflects their passion for building trust and fostering social and emotional learning in the classroom. The interviews were digitally recorded (cellphone and computer) and the data was transcript. Notes were also taken to during the interview to supplement the recorded data. The data collected was analysed in keeping with the themes examined in the literature, as well as with any additional themes that arose during the interviews.

3.2 Participants

The goal of this research was to help me learn about teaching and exemplary practice. In order to collect data regarding strategies for developing meaningful teacher-student relationships, my main criteria for participants were teachers who were currently utilizing the strategies in question in their daily practice. Through interviewing participants, data were acquired with regards to current teacher practices and outlooks on the topic of teacher-student relationships, and how it influenced classroom management and academic performance. Both participants have been working in the field of education for

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

more than 20 years and have strong teaching backgrounds in the primary and junior divisions as well as Special Education (Spec. Ed).

I selected these teachers through the personal experiences I had with them. The first participant, Jade, was my Associate Teacher (AT) in one of my practice teaching placements. Through her exemplary teaching practices she built meaningful and authentic relationships with her students. She believes in her students. Having been a teacher for more than 20 years she believes that the most important step in teaching is getting to “know and understand” the students. Jan, the second participant, retired from practice in July, 2011 with 40 years of experience in the field. I worked with her in during my undergraduate studies as a student volunteer in her grades one and two classrooms. I also had the privilege of observing her work with special education students as their resource teacher during the months of May and June in 2011. She sees herself as an expert in building trusting relationships and fostering social and emotional learning in the classroom. Consequently, this is reflected in her rapport with both students and colleagues. Both interview participants are passionate about teaching and possess a love for children. This evident in their delivery and practice.

I chose to interview exemplary teachers because I believed that they could give me information on the “Why”, “When”, and “How” of developing meaningful teacher-student relationships. As a new teacher, I want to learn from exemplary practitioners in the field so that I can develop a firm basis on how to integrate trust and emotional intelligence into an engaging curriculum. The purpose of interviewing the participants was to find out about their practices, attitudes, motivations, and the benefits and

challenges in building relationships. Participants were selected based upon the following criteria:

1. They were willing to be involved with the research process and to be open about their experiences
2. They were observed by the researcher and proved to be exemplary practitioners
3. They noticed a clear trend in their practice, which indicated that trust and fostering emotional intelligence influenced classroom management and academic performance, and, as a result, engaged in and implemented strategies to development of meaningful teacher relationships

I identified these participants through the first hand experiences I had with them in their primary, junior, and special education classrooms. Their colleagues and administrators also saw them as valuable team players in the field. Both Jade and Jan have reputations for being knowledgeable in the area of teacher-student relationships.

3.3 Procedure

Information for this research project was gathered by reviewing journal articles and books (reading inventory) and online articles relating to the teacher-student relationship and social and emotional learning. Face to face interviews were conducted with two exemplary practitioners in order to collect data which accounts for the major part of this research project. The data collected provided a firsthand account of the major issues addressed in this paper. The participants were asked 11 questions relating to their practice and their experiences with building trust and fostering social and emotional

learning in their respective classrooms. Both interviews were based on the same set of questions (see Appendix B).

The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. They were digitally recorded and then transcribed in their entirety. The interview protocol was developed to guide the participants to highlight their methods and strategies, as well as the understanding that grounded their choice to focus on building good teacher-student relationships in their classroom. While the interview questions formed a basic structure, impromptu follow-up questions were also used to ensure clarity and reduce the chance for misinterpretation of the responses produced by the participants. They were also encouraged to add any insights or comments on the topic that were not addressed through the questions posed.

Upon completion of the interviews, the data collected was transcribed and carefully reviewed according to the themes and patterns which emerged in the literature review (Chapter 2). The transcript was read multiple times for clarification purposes. The literature was referred to for key concepts and relevant information, which were noted in the transcripts. Initially, 12 recurring themes were identified. They were then narrowed down to seven key themes, which are discussed in Chapters Four and Five. In this analysis, the objective was to identify exemplary practices and how these support student progress and engagement. While writing the findings, the themes were refined and quotes were selected to support and illustrate the themes. In some cases, the participants' responses were simply paraphrased. Since both interviews provided similar information, a cross-case analysis was developed to illustrate the findings by exploring parallel themes and patterns. The findings gleaned from the research and their

connection to the literature review, as well as their implications and recommendations for professional practice, are explored at length in Chapter Four (Findings) and Five (Discussion).

3.4 Ethical Review Procedures

Prior to commencing the interview process each participant was given a consent form, which they were each required to read and sign (see Appendix A). The first interview was conducted at the participant's place of work at a time that was mutually agreed upon. The second interview took place at the participant's place of residence, as per her request and availability. The face-to-face conversations were captured on digital devices and transcribed accordingly. The consent form was carefully reviewed with both participants. The topic of study was briefly discussed with the participants ahead of time to clarify the nature and purpose of the research project and interviews. The participants were encouraged to pose questions before, during, after conducting the interviews. All questions were responded to in a thorough and professional manner.

Both participants were assured of their anonymity. They were informed that they would be referred to as pseudonyms (Jade and Jan) in this study. Before conducting the interview the participants were reminded that their participation in this research project was voluntary and that they could opt-out of either individual questions, or the entire project, at any time, without consequence. The participants were offered access to the completed transcripts and were welcomed to ask the researcher to omit any data they felt did not properly represent their approach and philosophy as educators. Finally, the participants were told they would be informed of the completion of this research project

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

and that they could be provided with a copy of the project from the researcher upon request.

3.5 Limitations and Next Steps

Although a wealth of knowledge was gleaned, this research project has its limitations.

Due to time constraints I was unable to conduct a third interview. Both participants possessed very similar philosophies on the importance of good teacher-student relationships. Multiple teacher input may have provided more concrete strategies for building trust and fostering emotional intelligence in the elementary classroom.

Nevertheless consistency was found. There are many commonalities in the approach used by these two teachers who work within the same board but at different schools.

They shared similar values and points of view and their responses lined up with those of the literature in this research project. Further studies could involve a greater number of participants with varying viewpoints.

The next steps would be to gain students' perspectives about the importance of the teacher-student relationship and how it affects their learning and ability to trust their teachers. Students' input would be of great value in this study, since their needs matter most. As their teachers our role is to prepare them for the future; therefore, we need to know what they expect and require of us. We need to know what they need so that we could provide them with the requisite strategies to succeed and thrive in the classroom and ultimately in various contexts and communities.

The best and most successful teachers are those who respect, care about the wellbeing of, and believe in their students. An effective teacher is one who succeeds in

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

reaching each student. Each student is an individual with individual his [or her] own needs and experiences. Each child brings knowledge to the classroom. Students' ideas must be validated and built upon. I have learned a lot from the children whom I have taught during my practicums. I believe in encouraging students of diverse levels of ability to keep sharing their knowledge. By so doing, I will become a better teacher. Students must be provided a safe space in which they can grow, thrive, question, analyse, think critically, and take risks. My students will have choices; however, they will need boundaries. Why? Because striking a balance between choices and boundaries will provide them the safe space in which they can flourish.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Building trusting and fostering emotional intelligence is crucial to promoting authentic teacher-student relationships. “When children are recognised and respected, they feel good about themselves”(Dichtelmiller et al, 1999, p.2). It is also important to focus on the link between effective teacher-student relationships and good classroom management and how this impacts academic performance and students who experience difficulties expressing their emotions. Before discussing the structure of this chapter I will proceed to unpack the terms *trust* and *emotional intelligence*, which are key to this research project.

4.1.1 Definition of Trust and Emotional Intelligence

The most widely accepted definition for *trust* held among scholars is that “trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another” (Rousseau et al, 1998:395); therefore, trust is a willingness to rely on another to be there for you in good times and in bad times (p. 394). According to Bruno (2011), *emotional intelligence*, also referred to social and emotional learning:

[...]means “managing feelings so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively, enabling people to work together smoothly toward their common goals” (Goleman 1998:7). Emotional intelligence helps us acknowledge and learn from our feelings. We need emotional intelligence to understand others and

ourselves accurately. Rather than being ruled by unconscious biological forces, such as amygdala hijacks or the mimicry of mirror neurons, we can hone our emotional intelligence to:

1. Acknowledge and listen to our feelings by asking, “What’s going on in my body right now?” “What feelings am I picking up from others?”
2. Accept that feelings offer useful information: “What are these sensations and feelings telling me?”
3. Step back to regain perspective and identify options: “If my heart weren’t pounding, what might I do?” (Bruno 2008)

The terms emotional intelligence and social and emotional learning are used interchangeably in this project.

4.1.2 Themes

The following seven themes are addressed: *Creating Meaningful Teacher-Student Relationships*, which highlights the importance of teacher authenticity, belief in students, and self-perception; *Building Trust in the Classroom*, where the benefits and challenges are also addressed; *Fostering Emotional Intelligence*, which treats the sub-themes of teacher persona and teaching for emotional intelligence; *Trust and Emotional Intelligence: Benefits and Challenges*, which examines the benefits and challenges of developing trust and fostering social emotional learning; *Effective Strategies for Promoting Trust and Emotional Intelligence*, where explicit strategies for developing both aspects are highlighted; *Classroom Management in a Trusting Environment*, which describes what good classroom management looks like and explains how trust

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom and emotional intelligence influence and consistency influence student behavior and instructional time; and finally, *The Teacher-Student Relationship and Academic Performance*, which explains how building trust in the classroom affects student success and willingness to learn. These are all factors affecting trust and emotional intelligence in the classroom, hence student success. I draw from the data collected from face to face interviews with my teacher participants, Jade and Jan, as well as from personal experience. I also make specific reference to the literature in order to support my position.

4.2 Creating Meaningful Teacher-Student Relationships

4.2.1 Teacher Authenticity

According to Jade, the most important factor in building trusting teacher-student relationships is teacher authenticity. Children spot “phonies” very easily. If we as teachers are not truly interested in how students feel and what they say, this comes across in our actions. Once they have established that their teacher is “phony”, his [or her] praise of them is not seen as genuine...everything becomes suspect even when criticising their behaviour. If students think that their teacher is not an authentic person, it would be a challenge to get beyond a surface relationship with them.

Jan states that the comfort level of her students increased once she succeeded in building genuine relationships with them. She claims that once her students established that their lives and feelings were important to her and that she valued their points of view, presence, and contribution in class, they value her presence in return.

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

She lets them know what their roles were at the offset. She confirms the reasons why “she is here and why they are here.” She makes it clear what she expects of them and inquires about what they expect from her and from their classmates. Jan believes in her students and constantly reminds them that they all have the ability to succeed. She lets them know that “Failure is failure only when you refuse to try again”. She insists that there is no room for failure in her classroom and she follows through with this philosophy.

Jan’s goal is to foster intrinsic motivation and self-confidence in her students by genuinely caring about their overall well-being and academic success. Jade states that “if you are an authentic person, then you believe in yourself. If you believe in yourself then you will believe in others.” It is important that teachers highlight student strength and help them to build on their weakness. I have learned that if students are constantly reminded of and know what they are good at doing, they could use these positive traits to build on their weaker areas.

4.2.2 Teacher Role and Presence in the Classroom

Both participants confirm that how teachers see themselves in the classroom affects student view of them [teachers] and also influences the teacher-student relationship. Jan states that she is there to “lead and direct students on how to learn”. Sometimes they learn new concepts together, since something that might be new to her students could also be new to her. She reports:

It happens from time to time, if you are doing research on something you’ve never done before. As a leader in the room students will learn from your attitude-

if you are sloppy, and if you are aggressive with them, they are learning from you because many things we teach children are not in the curriculum. There is a lot of peripheral learning from your attitude, the way you dress, the way you speak, the way you accept defeats because you will have that in the classroom sometimes.

All in all, it is important that teachers refrain from presenting themselves as domineering practitioners with all the say in the classroom, since student feelings and opinions should be valued. As Jade states, “Don’t come off like ‘listen here I am the teacher and I am in charge’.” It is crucial that teachers present themselves positively because their attitude toward their students will in turn influence the manner in which they are viewed and treated by their students.

4.3 Building Trust in the Classroom

4.3.1 *Mutual Respect*

Jade reveals that she always talks about herself. Not a lot, but about the problems she has with her own children or the issues she faced as a student. She notes the importance of talking authentically about herself and the positive and negative challenges in her own life. Talking about her current problems and the challenges that she faced as a student reassures her students that she does not see herself as the perfect person with no flaws and all the answers.

Students need to know that their teachers have good and bad days, too.

However, students need to know that they will be respected on good as well as bad days, since teacher behaviour serves as a model for them. Jade believes that showing

respect for her students is a part of her being an authentic person. She explains that if teachers grant their students the respect that they deserve, they will in turn grant their teachers the respect that they deserve. Jan states that teachers will only gain the respect of their students when they feel respected by their teachers. She says that she gives her students the same level of respect as she gives her own children and that she loves them as much as she loves her own. She lets them know that they are just as important to her as her own children. Her students know it. And they feel it. She shares her stories and her challenges and successes with her own children with her students.

According to Jan, it is crucial that students know that they are not alone and that their teacher is not the “perfect and all-knowing being.” Both Jade and Jan point out the strong connection between building trusting teacher-student relationships and showing interest in student life. They suggest that in order to establish a culture of trust with students it is essential that teachers listen to students’ painful and silly stories with an open and unbiased mind. For example: “Do not laugh at or ridicule their stories.” (Jan) “Talk about yourself. Do not simply talk the talk, but walk the walk” (Jade).

Both participants agree that one of the most important advantages of telling their students their story and listening to their students tell their own story is to allow them the privilege of being listeners, as well as having voices. Students need to learn that life is two way street and that there is a time to listen and a time to speak. This is a very important life lesson to teach children at an early age. If students are able to tell their story and their teachers listen to instead of dismissing and ridiculing them, they will be able to voice how they feel. Once students develop trusting relationships with their teachers, they will be able to share various aspects of their lives with them.

Consequently, teachers will have a better idea of how their students feel and where they are coming from. According to Jan:

If you've got their trust in that they can tell you about themselves and you tell them about yourself then you've got the ability to control how much they talk because you know you have already let them speak. Therefore, they do not feel that you are just "shushing" them when you need them to be quiet and listen. They can recognise that 'hey she really needs me to be quiet now because [we] have talked to her at great length before'.

4.3.2 *Teacher Predictability*

Both participants stress the importance remaining calm in the most volatile situations.

For example:

It is not fair to students to lose your temper today 'with no warning' simply because you had a fight with a spouse or your child the morning before school. It is not fair to your students that you transfer your anger from a personal situation or issue unto them; they will see you as unpredictable and lose respect for you. They will not trust you. It is much better that you explain to your students that you are having a bad day 'as we all do sometimes' and that you may not be your 'normal tolerant self today'. However, you will try your best to be strong for them. By so doing, they know at least that you are hurting and they will empathise with you. (Jade)

Trust falls apart when students cannot predict teacher reaction. Students need to be able to predict teacher reaction for the majority of times. According to Jade, "If you

change your reaction- some days you're mad; some days you're not- then they don't know if this time their story is going to get you angry or make you laugh, so they tend not to take the risks anymore.”

Once trust is established, consistency will be necessary. It is therefore not simply about gaining student trust, but also being consistent in our actions and reaction in order to develop the mutual respect that is necessary to nourish and maintain a trusting teacher-student relationship. We must let our students know that we are all there to learn and that we are all are capable of making mistakes. We need to ensure them that and every contribution they make is a valid one.

4.4 Fostering Emotional Intelligence

4.4.1 *Teacher Persona*

It was interesting to find out how much of an influence teacher mood and manner of expression of feelings have on social and emotional development. Jade shared a valuable experience during her first year of teaching when she taught kindergarten. She had had guests at her house and had stayed up late...until 4:00 am. She had very little sleep but had to go in to work the following morning. She was not feeling well; she was “tired and grumpy”. She told her students that she was ill and spoke “with a very small voice the whole day.” She reports that they were the best behaved students that day. She was quiet, so they were quiet. She did not have to “shush” them. This shows a strong relation between emotional intelligence and classroom management. (Classroom management will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.) After the weekend

had passed Jade was back to her “loud, happy self”. Her students’ behaviour was loud and happy, as well.

I am amazed by the effectiveness of this strategy. It shows how we as teachers transfer our energies to our students. I have seen this strategy work in my grade six class during my final internship. My associate teacher had been ill all week, but opted to come in to work despite his ailment. He had a difficult time focusing and talked only when it was necessary. He explained to his students that he was ill and under his doctor’s care. He apologised to them for not being himself. These students are a very talkative group; however, this was the quietest and most cooperative I had seen them.

Jan confirms that fostering emotional intelligence in the elementary classroom “depends a great deal on your mood and mannerism”. She states:

If you know that you are grumpy or not feeling well on any given day you need to talk to yourself and say ‘Ok, I am grumpy today but it has nothing to do with my students so I will not yell and scream at them because I don’t feel well.’ If you are introspective about your own mood, then you need to be the same about your students’ moods. For example, when you see a child comes in and is in a bad mood or is not managing as well as he or she normally does, you need to assume your role as intuitive and understanding teacher and know that something has happened to upset that student or trigger certain behaviour.

[Students] need to know that you have difficult moments just as they do and you need to provide them with the strategies that they need to cope. If students see you using these strategies to cope with your own feelings, they will be more encouraged to trust and learn from you.

Teachers need to create a learning environment where their students learn to regulate their own behaviour. By modelling the behaviours we as teachers want our students to portray we are providing them with coping strategies. This is crucial to student social and emotional development. If we show our students that we are capable of managing our own feelings so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively, they will in turn model the behaviour in question.

4.4.2 Teaching Emotional Intelligence

Both participants agree that there are numerous benefits to allowing children to “be who they are.” They stress the importance of supporting student feelings by letting them know that everyone has the right to be upset. However, it is how they manage their feelings and emotions that matter. Jan says that “you have to provide them[students] with the steps to demonstrate their anger in an appropriate manner in the context of the classroom.” According to Jade:

If a student loses his or her temper, is happy, or is behaving out of the norm you can say ‘I totally validate your feelings! Yes, you are happy. Yes, you are mad. But we’re at school so these things need to happen...here is how you are expected to manage your feelings in this context’.

For the most part, if a child gets along well with others and is able to cope with his [or her] feelings and that of others, he has little problem expressing his [or her] feelings appropriately. However, there is a need to explicitly teach students how to cope in difficult situations and what positive behaviour looks like. Some students, more than others, need to be taught these steps through role play in a group setting. Jade stresses

the importance of the Fully Alive program offered by the TCDSB which reinforces the themes of: how to get along with friends and family; how to resolve conflict; how to love, and how to care. She adds that the program in question can be used to “explicitly teach and foster social emotional development, since students are provided with coping strategies to deal with family, friends, their emotions, and the emotion of others.” Jan also used the Fully Alive program to “promote freedom of expression of emotions and feelings”, hence to foster emotional intelligence, in her classroom. She adds:

When we’re talking about families, I am an authentic person; I am an authentic teacher, so I talk about my own family and they are far more willing to talk about their family and share their feelings and emotions.

Evidently, teaching through the Fully Alive program offers the consistency needed to build meaningful and trusting relationships, encourage student openness, and foster positive values in elementary students.

4.5 Trust and Emotional Intelligence: *Benefits and Challenges*

4.5.1 *Benefits*

Jan states that if students know that “you are rooting for them, they will want to please you and, therefore, will try their very best because they know this is one place they will be getting praise and recognition. It will encourage them to continue along a positive path.” For example, when there is one child who thinks he [or she] is being treated unfairly it transfers into all areas...it interferes with classroom management. Once good teacher-student relationships are developed throughout the classroom and, for

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

example, there is one child who may be having “an off day”, the other students appeal to their peer and assist with management issues. “They will jump in and try to help you calm down a screaming or upset kid and remind that peer that he needs to show you the same respect that you show them.” (Jan)

The data collected reveals that teachers who build trusting relationships with their students are able to address more of the curriculum requirements, since they spend less time with classroom management issues. Jan “gets more things done because they trust [her].” She allows her students to be themselves and she is her “authentic self” with them. Her students feel that “it is a more natural relationship- they do not have to prove to the other children that they are stronger or better than you.” Children who give the most problems in a class are usually those who crave attention. If we work with these children and get to know them better, and give them steps on how to control their behavior, instead of scolding them every time they misbehave, “they will see that you trust and care about them.” (Jan) Teachers who are in control of their own emotions, who are not yelling at their students almost all of time, encourage positive behaviors in their classroom. “You are constantly modeling the behavior that you want from your students”, says Jade.

Jade tries her best to avoid power struggles with students who usually misbehave in class. She shares:

The kids who are giving you a power struggle have a lot of power in the class already- that is what gives them the nerve to take you on. They already have the power of the class, so if you get into a fight with them you are overpowered. They have the class behind them. Some of them [students] will feel sorry for you, but

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

they will not get up and defend you, so building trusting relationships with *all* of your students actually helps you get your 'problem children' to behave better and not to be so attention seeking.

With regard to social and emotional development, Jade and Jan agree that if children are able to take risks in the classroom, then they are able to work independently. They can voice their opinions and do not feel shut down when they speak. They feel that their thoughts are "worth something". Once we have risk-takers and independent thinkers in the class, Jade thinks that:

[...] you have far better classroom control. If your problem students who are always seeking attention are not getting it and the other students are slowly able to voice their opinions, I think the whole class works much better... there are less problems, less off task time. The whole point of classroom management and teaching students how to manage disruptive and inappropriate social behaviors is to get the curriculum in. The curriculum gets cut in half if you are always dealing with student disruptions.

Jade suggests that social and emotional development can be taught through community building activities, trust activities, discussion of people's feelings and any kind of inclusive type of activities. For example:

You might want to start doing these activities in the month of September- you have to even go on until Thanksgiving [in early October]. And if you get a new student you might have to revisit some of those activities. You always re-address if there is a problem. Every month we have virtues of the month; we have

discussion questions where we can talk about the qualities of kindness, respect, and caring; and the virtues of love, patience, honesty, and integrity.

Teaching students these valuable character traits promotes emotional intelligence throughout the classroom. “All of these virtues can be tied into the curriculum and help create a culture of trust and respect in a classroom.” (Jan)

4.5.2 Challenges

Both participants state that one of the biggest challenges for them is having a parent who brings a negative influence into the situation. According to Jade:

There are sometimes where you have ‘over-anxious parents’ who are simply not pleased with your instruction and overall performance as a teacher. They do not understand what is happening. They do not understand the dynamics of your classroom. They are just anxious that their kids are not being treated fairly.

If children sense that their parents are not comfortable with their teacher and “show lack of respect for you as a teacher, they will react and treat you accordingly.” (Jan) It is important that we as teachers build relationships with parents, as well. However, it is not always an easy task since not all parents are open to constantly hearing about the negative aspects of their child’s behavior or academic performance. Most of the times, however, most of the parents are willing to build working relationships with teachers, especially if teachers are mindful to focus on students’ strengths and positive accomplishments more so than their weaknesses.

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

Jan acknowledges that “Everybody has their strong points.” As a result, she adopts effective strategies that reinforce her students’ strengths and strengthens their weakness. She shares:

What I have done is if I see there is a kid lacking in confidence but I see that there is one area he is strong in, I let everyone know how great he is doing. I have observed that once you have developed that kind of relationship with a kid gradually their confidence can be transferred into other areas. Point out to them very subtly and tell them that they are very good in this area so they can be good in other areas.

This is a brilliant strategy, which I intend to use throughout my practice. As a parent I would be pleased to know that my child’s teacher is making an effort to ensure that he [or she] sees himself in a positive more so than in a negative light. I would be more inclined to develop a trusting relationship with a teacher who cares about my child’s well-being and is committed to seeing my child through his [or her] challenges and successes. I would be willing to work in collaboration with the teacher in question to improve my child’s overall performance and experience in classroom.

Parent attitude also plays a crucial role in the level of success a teacher will achieve where disciplining students is concerned. Jade shares the following recent experience:

Sometimes when you are trying to explain to a child that is having a temper tantrum and you say ok I know you’re angry but this is inappropriate when you hit someone. But the child says that my mom says that I can. This is a huge challenge for me because now I have to try to get around how the child has been

socialized at home without criticizing the parenting and that sometimes is a problem because the child has been taught that if anyone messes with him, he is allowed to punch them. And, so, the child punches and you are criticizing the child for doing something that their mom says it is ok to do.

It is difficult to gain student trust and, at the same time, criticize the conflict resolution strategies that their parents have taught them. “This is where you have to be in control and watch your wording. The more times you do it the better you get. Just like everything else, practice makes perfect.” (Jade)

4.6 Effective Strategies for Promoting Trust and Emotional Intelligence

4.6.1 Tribes

Jade says that TRIBES training “is a must!” The training in question provides teachers with effective strategies to build trust and promote social-emotional learning in the elementary classroom. She uses the skills and strategies she learned in TRIBES to discuss the aspects of *feelings* and *emotions* whenever she does community building activities. Students have the opportunity to talk about how they feel when certain events occur in their life and also how they felt when sharing their personal feelings with the rest of the class, as they “brought their feelings to light”. She also incorporates role play through drama to help her students learn coping and conflict management skills, as this strategy “gives them actual words to use.” Jade stresses:

It is one thing to tell students not to use certain words when they are upset- like ‘don’t swear when you are mad’. But if you don’t provide them with other words to

say when they are upset, then they can't use different words. I have developed a strategy where I give them five words to chant to reduce the use of profanity and other words with negative connotation. For example, when I taught grade 6/7 a few years ago, the word *sucks* came in and they would say 'that sucks'. I told them that a better alternative would be 'I don't care for this'. The next day I gave out tests and they said 'Mrs. J, I don't care for this' and it became a joke. But it was a funny joke because it wasn't rude language. So, you have to give them words and role play activities that will help them learn to cope.

As a new teacher I will use these strategies in my classroom to help my students acquire the conflict management and coping skills that they require in order to explore their feelings and express their emotions appropriately. The skills and strategies promoted in TRIBES will also be infused in content areas across the curriculum.

Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry (2010) provide teachers with some more reliable strategies to create a climate of trust and emotional intelligence in the classroom. They list the following three examples: 1) avoid listening to "tattle-tale" stories; 2) ensure that consequences are fair and consistent; and 3) avoid unwarranted comparisons and allow students opportunities to improve the quality of their work (2010:92). I would also add: 4) refrain from destructive criticism of students, and 5) help them succeed, instead of watch them fail.

4.6.2. Seeking Help for Students

Both participants admit that there are times when we as teachers need to seek outside assistance for our students. There may be that one student whose needs we are not

able to meet... “That one child you may not be able to reach no matter what” (Jade). Jan adds:

Sometimes something is bothering them and they may not feel comfortable speaking with you for personal reasons. If students make the choice not to relate their feelings to you or speak to you about a problem they are dealing with, it is never a great idea to pry or probe. It is best that you suggest to them where they could get help to address whatever concerns they have. Sometimes, for some reason, they might not want to share whatever it is that is the problem.

When students recognize that we as teachers are genuine and that we care about their well-being they are more likely to take advice from us and trust that we want the best for them. They will trust that they are in good hands when we refer them to a trusted adult with whom they can share their feelings.

4.6.3 Story Telling

Never underestimate the power of a context and age appropriate story! Jan tells of how she uses storytelling in her classroom to foster social and emotional learning:

One of the strategies I used was every morning I would read a story, a basic story like *The Three Little Pigs*, those types of stories. We would look for various themes [...] like cooperation, kindness, and honesty, and we would discuss corresponding scenes. Because we are reading a story it does not reflect on anybody and you are not pointing at anybody. Then we would discuss it in a real life situation and draw on some things and compare this to a real life situation.

We haven't interfered with any one person and their issue, but everybody is addressing it and hopefully they will gather something.

Storytelling is an effective approach to teaching character development. Students can compare the themes and events in a story to real life situations. They also have the opportunity to discuss and address a wide array of character traits in a safe space. For example, we can teach them what honesty, trust, and love look like and the discussion is not directed to any one child in particular. By so doing, students are able to relate to the themes in the story and develop their own perspectives and viewpoints of what the criteria would be for a caring, honest, or an unfair person. Students can even compare and contrast viewpoints....Who do you think was the honest guy in this story? Why? Who wasn't? Why not? I highly recommend the use storytelling to promote emotional intelligence in any elementary classroom.

4.7 Classroom Management in a Trusting Environment

4.7.1 *Good Classroom Management*

There is order in the classroom that is well-managed. Children will trust us and respect our judgment if we provide them with structure and meaningful instructional resources. Jan accomplishes this by creating and placing resources that students can access at any stage of learning should they need to clarify any concepts they have learned. She likes her students to be able to go back a few lessons to review what they have learned or may need to revise. She likes to see her students "refer to things in the classroom", which include anchor charts and classroom expectations posted on the walls.

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

According to Jan, classrooms should not be cluttered with charts and postings that students are not even aware of. It is important that students know why things are on the walls and understand the purpose of these postings. Students also need to be able to access this information with ease, without interrupting the rest of the class. This happens when we as teachers establish routine in the classroom and create a learning environment where students know where to go for what they need. “Their teacher makes an effort to ensure that they have easy access to valuable resources that will inform their learning” (Jan). When teachers show this level of interest in student wellbeing and academic success, they’ll recognize that their teacher cares about their learning experience and “will behave” (Jade).

Additionally, if we as teachers know beforehand that a particular student has some behavioral challenges, Jade suggests that we try to set up the environment in a way that supports that child. She states:

For example, if I know a child does not get along with certain students I will make sure to not have them sit near each other. I will also use his friends where I could, if it is possible. Sometimes two friends get together and create chaos, but there is always somebody [who] he [or she] will respect enough... you can have him [or her] assist that someone...If that student has some strong points I will use that. I remember having a kid in my class once with behavioral problems, one of the things I did, I took the risk of putting him beside a weaker kid and asking him to help me help that kid. I was able to get his confidence up.

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

If students know that their teacher seeks out their good points and positive aspects of their behavior, they (especially the students who struggle with behavioral challenges) will see the “good in themselves and want to get better at what they are good at” (Jan).

All students, whether or not they struggle with behavioural issues- or have learning difficulties, need to know that their teacher has their best interest at heart. Students need to know that their teacher will respond to them in a fair and consistent manner. They need to know that we as teachers will be there for them in good times and in bad times. If teachers are not cognizant of the importance of building strong relationships with their students this could affect student learning and behaviour and have a negative impact on classroom management.

4.7.2 Consistency and Structure

Both participants agree that consistency and structure are both vital to student success. A classroom with very little structure affects teacher credibility. If students do not trust and believe in their teacher, there will definitely be a problem with respect and discipline in the classroom. Ki Sadewa (2008) adds that “the self-motivation of your students will diminish when they are tense or unsure of how you will react to their actions” (2008: x). Jan stresses the importance of “making your expectations of each other clear in the early stages of getting to know your students”. When there is effective collaboration and consistency in the classroom “you will have students who will go to bat for you and show accelerated progress” (Ki Sadewa, 2008). Jade adds that students are more likely to adjust their behaviour and respect and trust their teacher when certainty and consistency are present in the classroom.

During my in-school placements I experienced two well-managed classrooms where, as Cunningham and Allington (2007) state, “almost all the children were doing what they were supposed to be doing almost all the time (p.9).” One of the expectations in my grade one and grade five classes read: “*Our teacher is expected to respect all of her students; we are expected to respect our teacher and all of our classmates.*” The students and their teachers seemed committed to the expectation in question. The visual reminder of classroom expectations did more good than harm. This practice facilitated classroom management. As a result, most of the class time was spent on teaching and learning.

4.7.3 Managing Instructional Time to Promote Social Emotional Learning

There is a strong relationship between the concepts of *Classroom Management* and *Social and Emotional Learning*. Both participants claim that their numerous years of experience in education have taught them that once trusting relationships are established in the classroom, management problems diminish. Consequently, there is more time to foster academic learning and teach students the strategies they need to acquire emotional intelligence. (Jade & Jan)

According Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry (2010), David and Roger Johnson talk about the *three C's* for creating a caring and mutually trusting classroom environment, one that fosters a socially responsible community. The trio comprise of *cooperative* community, *constructive* conflict resolution, and *civic* values (pp.433-435). “When students and teachers have positive, trusting relationships, many management problems never develop. [All] efforts at building positive relationships and classroom

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

community are steps toward preventing management problems” (pp. 437-438).

Teachers must be mindful that “students who feel connected with school are happier, more self-disciplined, and less likely to engage in [destructive] behaviours; therefore, all efforts to teach social and emotional self-regulation are steps for preventing management problems” (p. 438).

4.8. The Teacher-Student Relationship and Academic Performance

4.8.1 *Building a Trusting Learning Environment*

Both participants agree that a trusting teacher-student relationship plays a major role in the academic success of high-performing as well as struggling students. Jade suggests that there are always going to be students who will learn in spite of their teacher’s instruction. She states:

These are the ones who have developed their own routines at home and school. They complete their homework and cope well with the curriculum. Their parents check their work; they eat properly and get enough sleep. If you have a great relationship with these students they are going to have an even bigger and better academic experience than they would have had in school. These are the students who will venture outside the box, undertake independent projects and help you help their struggling peers, since they want to be there for you as you have been there for them.

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

Jan adds that “children who are problematic and struggling have to feel safe in their learning environment in order to take those risks, voice their incomprehension, and ask for assistance.”

Jade shares a story about a student in her grade seven special education group who has a difficult time in some classes. She states:

He is always seeking attention, but through negative behaviour. He admitted to me that he seeks attention because he is lost, does not understand what is being taught, and is not comfortable with telling the teacher that ‘he doesn’t get’ it for fear of been ridiculed or seen as “slow.”

This was his grade five experience. However, two years later, under her instruction, she now has him in a safe and trusting environment where he can take the risk, raise his hand and say “I don’t get!” without the fear of being ridiculed. She was willing to take the time to conference with this student and listen to him voice his concerns and express the reasons why he was “acting out in class.” She continues:

He always thanks me for listening to him and believing in him. And I think that is huge. He is able to get the help that he requires in order to understand certain concepts. I become more aware of the need for me to adapt my instruction to student need...this helps them produce better quality work.

It is important to note that if there is one child who does not understand what is being taught chances are that there are other students who do not understand, as well. By taking the risk and raising his hand for clarification, this one student is contributing to helping his peers learn.

4.8.2 How Trust Affects Student Learning

Trusting teacher-student relationships facilitate the teaching and learning experience.

“You need to know what students know and do not understand before administering assessment and evaluation tasks” (Jan). According to Jade:

You need to know what they get and what they don't get before a test. You need them to listen to you. If they listen to you and follow your instructions because it's a trusting environment, you'll get more [of the] curriculum in; that's the whole point. We are here to teach them and they are here to learn. If we can't teach them and they are not learning it's a problem.

“If students are not learning under your instruction, then it is more of a teacher problem than a student problem.” (Jan)

Goleman (2005) adds that creating a safe and trusting learning environment for students and helping them “improve their self-awareness and confidence, and manage their disturbing emotions and impulses pays off in measurable academic achievement” (p. xi). Therefore, “a positive relationship with the teacher can act as an additional resource for a student, while a difficult relationship may act as an obstacle to academic success” (Davis, 2001: 432-433). Paul, one of the teachers interviewed by Kosnick and Beck (2011) confirms that if students “really have no relationship with [their teacher] - or the relationship is negative- they are not going to follow what you say” (p.54). If students do not trust their teacher, then very little learning will take place in the classroom.

Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry (2007) make reference to the concept of *Emotional and Moral Development*, honing in on the importance of helping students develop emotional competence. They stress that it is crucial that students develop an awareness of their

own emotions, the capacity to cope with negative emotions, and the ability to express their feelings in ways that are not harmful to themselves or others (2007: 91). Research reveals that “unmanaged, negative emotions take control of [student] life”, making it impossible for children to manage their lives, unless they can manage their negative emotions (Lawson, 2010). Evidently, if we teach our students the coping strategies that they need to promote self-regulation of emotions, then they will develop the trusting relationships and emotional intelligence they require to succeed in their personal, social, and academic lives (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2007, p.91).

4.9 Conclusion

If we as teachers make great effort to bond with our students, they will be motivated to bond with us. Building meaningful relationships with students promotes a successful teaching and learning environment. However, this is a work in progress. I acknowledge the importance of "genuinely" caring for my students and guiding them as they learn under my care. I commit myself to listening to and observing my students, since these strategies are crucial to knowing and understanding them.

Connecting with my students early in the school year will allow me the opportunity of knowing how and when to address their specific needs. It is my responsibility to help guide my students in the area of *conflict management* so they may acquire the coping skills they need to succeed in school and in the real world. I will allow my students to reflect on their actions and think of solutions to their problems. *Character Development/Education* will be of great priority in my classroom, and will be infused into my lessons where possible. For example, my read alouds will be carefully selected to

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

ensure that the focus is not simply about *content*. My teaching resources will reflect character traits like fairness, compassion, teamwork, and so on, which are treated on a monthly basis in most schools.

Finally, students must have a voice when establishing classroom rules and expectations, as this facilitates the classroom management process. When students are involved in creating classroom rules and expectations they will most likely follow them and be more responsible for their actions. Moreover, establishing consistency and structure in the classroom is vital to student success...Rules are posted and teacher reactions are predictable, so students know what to expect at all times. These are all essential factors affecting the development of trust and meaningful student-teacher relationships in the classroom. The student-teacher relationship must be real, since children are very instinctive and will sense whether or not you are on their side. If they have grown to mistrust their teacher, then they will react accordingly. Once trust has been established in the classroom it becomes a safe environment in which students can grow and learn and develop personally, socially, emotionally, and academically under the direction of their teacher.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to explore the importance of the teacher-student relationship and examine its influence on the development of trust and emotional intelligence in the classroom. By gaining input from experienced educators, whom have made relationship building with their students “one of their top priorities in education”, I have developed a keener sense of how to approach the aspects of trust and emotional intelligence in the elementary classroom. My participants, along with the issues raised in the literature review, have presented clearly defined strategies on *how* to build trust and *how* to help students explore and express themselves in an appropriate manner.

My research and interview experience leads me to develop deeper understanding of the importance of fostering trusting and meaningful student-teacher relationships in the classroom. Building trust and strong relationships with students is a work in progress. As a pre-service teacher it is crucial that I genuinely care for my students and guide them as they grow, develop, and learn under my care. Student observation is essential in my getting to know and understand students. When, as a teacher, I connect with them, I have a better idea of how and when to address their specific needs. I learnt that it is also my responsibility to coach my students on how to best manage conflict in the earlier years so that they learn the basic strategies that they need to succeed in school.

In anticipation of my first teaching assignment I intend to listen to and learn from the experiences of others in the field of education. I commit to keeping abreast of the works of researchers in education and utilizing the skills and strategies that I have acquired and learned through personal experience during my practice teaching placements and internship. An effective teacher is a caring and learning teacher. Consequently, as I embark on a career of lifelong learning, I must ensure that I observe and respond to the needs of my students, as I develop a repertoire of effective relationship-building strategies. I look forward to learning more through collegial experience, research in education, my own practice, and, most importantly, student response and feedback.

5.2 Relation to the Literature Review

There is a strong relationship between the between the themes discussed in the literature review and the data collected through my interviews. The literature establishes evidence that a caring teacher is by far one of the most important elements in building strong and meaningful teacher-student relationship (Leitão & Waugh, 2007; Raider-Roth, 2005). Both participants agree that if students think that their teacher is not an authentic person- one who genuinely cares about their well-being- it is a challenge to get beyond a surface relationship. Jan reported that the comfort level of her students increased once she initiated and succeeded in building genuine relationships with them. The literature supports the notion that the teacher who is pro-active in demonstrating authenticity, acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation towards his or her students not only works at initiating positive teacher-

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

student relationships, but also increases the likelihood of building strong relationships that will endure over time (Barry & King, 1993).

When students are involved in creating classroom rules and expectations and structure is established, they are more likely to follow teacher directions and take responsibility for their own actions. It is imperative that classroom rules and expectations be developed and co-created during the very first weeks of classes. Students are more likely to adjust their behaviour and respect and trust their teacher when certainty and consistency are present in the classroom.

I witnessed a well-managed classroom during my in-school placement where “almost all the children were doing what they were supposed to be doing almost all the time” (Cunningham and Allington, 2007, p.9). Classroom expectations were posted on the wall and students had access to these rules at all times. A visual reminder of expectations for student behaviour certainly does more good than harm; it enhances the learning process. Teachers and students must have clear expectations of each other. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a kind and courteous manner, as modeled by their teacher, and these expectations are made known to them (Cunningham and Allington, 2007, p.9). Clear and consistent expectations and consequences are pivotal with regard to developing structure in class. This contributes to maintaining order in the classroom, as well as establishing and maintaining a culture of trust. Students are also more responsible for their own actions.

Both participants stressed the importance of teacher fairness and consistency. Trust deteriorates when teachers react to classroom issues in an inconsistent manner. Students need to be able to predict teacher reaction for the majority of times. If we as

teachers change our reaction, then they do not know when and how to approach us with their questions and concerns. It is important for the teacher to be consistent and treat all students in the same manner. The literature suggests that if students know what is expected of them at the offset, and are involved in developing these expectations, then they will better understand what their roles and responsibilities are and will be able to anticipate teacher response in the event that expectations are not met.

Creating an environment where students learn to regulate their own behaviour by modelling the behaviour that their teacher portrays is crucial to building meaningful teacher-student relationships and student development. Students learn self-control and self-regulation through daily instruction and practice. It is important that teachers not only expect acceptable behaviour, but model this behaviour as well. When I show my students that I am capable of managing my own feelings appropriately and effectively and how it is done, they will in turn follow suit. Muller (2001) provides evidence that “teachers’ attitudes and actions are key in students’ development and academic progress” and that recent “research on teacher-caring [and] effective teachers (Ladson-Billings 1994; Delpit 1995; Noddings 1996) [...] are examples of influential works emphasizing the centrality of teachers’ attitudes and actions toward students in determining whether the relationship is[...] productive”(p.243).

As stated in the literature, it is important to “[establish] a caring environment in which educators know, respect and connect with kids. [...] There is no doubt that achievement is most apt to occur in a friendly, predictable classroom atmosphere guided by a [caring and] enthusiastic teacher who “connects” with students and encourages them to create, take risks, and share ideas” (Mendler: 2001:1-2). Both

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

participants state that if children are able to take risks in the classroom, then they are able to work independently and voice their opinions. Additionally, students do not feel shut down...they feel that their thoughts are valued. As soon as we have risk takers and independent thinkers, we will have far better classroom control. Once a safe and trusting classroom environment is established students can grow and develop personally, academically, socially and emotionally.

According to Leitão et & Waugh (2007), "Teacher-student relationships greatly influence a student's ability to adjust to school, to do well at school, and to relate to peers (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1988; Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994; Pianta, 1999; Sztejnberg et al., 2004)." Jade pointed out that if there is one child who thinks he is being treated unfairly, it transfers over to other areas and interferes with the classroom. She states that "if you have a good teacher-student relationship and you find that maybe there is somebody who is having an 'off day', the other students [with whom you] have a good relationship will appeal to their peer." "Teacher-student relationships have an impact on classroom management and affect learning progress (Klem & Connell, 2004; Sztejnberg et al., 2004)." (Leitão et al, 2007)

All students need to know that their teacher has their best interest at heart, will respond to their actions and reactions in a fair and consistent manner, and will always be there for them. If teachers are not cognizant of the importance of building strong teacher-student relationships and do not encourage trust and emotional intelligence in their classroom, this could interfere with student learning and, as a result, have a negative effect on classroom management. A good relationship between teachers and students is essential for an effective and positive classroom (Kosnick and Beck,

2011:54). What students think about how teachers see them at their best and worst moments in the classroom affects their ability to learn. In short, it is necessary to be fair to students at all times and to know and understand how they learn and feel and who they trust (Raider-Roth, 2005).

5.3 Implications

It is important to note that building trust and strong relationships with students is a work in progress. As teachers it is crucial that we "genuinely" care for our students and guide them as they grow, develop, and learn. Being skilled observers of students is essential in getting to know and understanding our students. Being proactive in building strong and meaningful relationships with our students and connecting with them on multiple levels is as beneficial to them as it is to us. According to Leitão & Waugh (2007), "Stable teacher-student relationships impact positively on a student's developing sense of self and promote resiliency in them (Pianta & Walsh, 1996; Rutter, 1979). Furthermore, "the benefits of positive teacher-student relationships extend to teachers, contributing to an improved sense of job satisfaction (Goldstein & Lake, 2000)" (Leitão et Waugh, 2007). Additionally, it is our responsibility to teach and model for our students how to best manage conflict so that they develop the multiple strategies they need to cope as they grow and learn.

Establishing structure and consistency in the classroom is vital to student success. Non-verbal clues are important in maintaining classroom routines. Students need to know and respond to such clues quickly and consistently...Non-verbal clues and prompts include: *clap, clap, clap-clap-clap* cues and *eye contact* (a stern stare).

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

This gets students to refocus and back on task in the event of instances of “socialising” instead of “working” during collaborative tasks. I used non-verbal cues as a classroom management strategy during my practice teaching placements and found them to be useful and effective. I also established consequences and was consistent in my actions and reactions. For example, my students knew ahead of time that the consequence for not following through after two ‘clap-clap’ warnings would be completing the task “alone”...And I followed through on the consequences as necessary. Establishing trust in the classroom decreases classroom management problems. Inconsistency creates a breakdown communication and hampers trust. I am prepared to establish and maintain strong relationships with my students by using strategies and techniques that work in the differentiated classroom.

We as teachers must have a keen sense of how our students feel and provide them with the attention they need to flourish, as well as the strategies they need to cope. Some of the strategies that I have learned and used during my own elementary school years include: taking [10 nice] deep breaths to help calm my anger; talking things out with peers instead of hitting another person; and going to find a teacher or trusted adult’ for help and advice if ever I felt threatened, or thought I might make some unwise decisions. I was always taught that it was acceptable to express my feelings; however, I was constantly reminded that it was the manner in which I managed and expressed my feelings that mattered.

These are all essential factors affecting the development of trust and meaningful teacher-student relationships. The student-teacher relationship must be real, since children are very instinctive and will sense whether or not we are on their side. Students

who grow to trust their teachers do their best to be their best in school. Once trust has been established in the classroom it becomes a safe space in which students grow, learn, and succeed.

5.4 Conclusion

In summary, it should be the goal of every teacher to build meaningful teacher-student relationships in the elementary classroom. Leitão & Waugh (2007) summarises well:

The pro-active teacher who demonstrates acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation towards his or her students not only works at initiating positive teacher-student relationships, but also increases the likelihood of building strong relationships that will endure over time (Barry & King, 1993).

Once trust is established, consistency is necessary. It is not simply about gaining student trust, but also being consistent in your actions and reaction in order to develop the mutual respect that is necessary to nourish and maintain a trusting teacher-student relationship.

The best and most successful teachers are those who respect, care about the wellbeing of, and believe in their students. An effective teacher appreciates all of the students in his [or her] classroom. Each student is an individual with individual needs and experiences. Each child brings knowledge to the classroom. Students' ideas need to be validated and built upon. I have learned a lot from the children whom I have taught during my practicums. I believe in encouraging students of diverse levels of ability to keep sharing their knowledge. By so doing, I will become a better teacher. Students

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

must be provided a safe space in which they can grow, thrive, question, analyse, think critically, and take risks. My students will have choices. However, they will also have boundaries.

The most successful classrooms are those in which community building is a priority. It is about building a positive environment in which students can grow and develop personally, emotionally, socially, and academically. Emotional intelligence must be fostered and nurtured and infused into the content areas across the curriculum, since. A good education is not only about academics; therefore, we as teachers must encourage the development of positive mindsets in the elementary classroom. We need to teach our students the skills and strategies they require to work collaboratively and productively with others in various group settings. Students must be able to function efficiently in the real world. In sum, developing trusting teacher-student relationships and fostering emotional intelligence in the classroom play an important role in a child's future and overall success in life.

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7. APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATION AND CONSENT LETTER FOR INTERVIEWEES



Teacher Participant Letter of Information and Consent Form

Dear _____,

This is a letter inviting you to participate in a research project regarding the teacher-student relationship. My name is Glenda Bruney and I am a Master of Teaching student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). As a part of my major research paper, I will be exploring how teachers develop trust and foster emotional intelligence in the classroom.

Your involvement in this study would include participating in a 30-45 minute, audio taped interview that will occur at a time convenient for you. This interview will include questions regarding how you build trust and foster emotional intelligence in your classroom. The audio recordings will be transcribed and the data within it analyzed. Your specific responses will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous, as pseudonyms will be used in any written report or presentation that may arise from this study. During the course of this research, only my supervisor and I will have access to this data as it will be stored in a secure place and all data will be destroyed no later than five years the conclusion of this study.

Please be assured that your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question during the interview, to stop the interview at any time or withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

The information gained from this study will help increase our knowledge regarding strategies developing trust and fostering emotional intelligence in the classroom. A summary of my research results as well as the full report (if you would like a copy) will be sent to you via e-mail. Please feel free to contact my faculty supervisor, Donna Duplak, or myself should you have any questions or require further information.

If you agree to be interviewed, please sign the attached form and return it to Glenda Bruney, either in person or by email at glenda.bruney@utoronto.ca Please retain a copy of this letter for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

Sincerely,

Glenda Bruney

Researcher

647-456-9606

glenda.bruney@utoronto.ca

Donna Duplak

Project Supervisor

416 978-0078 (W)

donna.duplak@utoronto.ca

Consent to Participate

[] I wish to participate in this OISE/UT project as outlined above.

Participant's Printed Name:

Participant's Signature:

_____ Date: _____

8. APPENDIX B: RESEARCH QUESTIONS



The Teacher-Student Relationship: *The Importance of Developing Trust and Fostering Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom*

Research Question

Developing trust and fostering emotional intelligence in the classroom are essential to building strong teacher-student relationships. However, developing meaningful teacher-student relationships is a major challenge for both teachers and students. How do we develop trust in our classroom? What are the benefits of fostering emotional intelligence in our students? Which strategies work well and why?

Sub-questions:

1. Tell me about yourself...your interests, your background in education, and so on?
2. What do you think are the most important factors in building meaningful teacher-student relationships?
3. How do you build trust in your classroom?
4. What strategies do you use in your classroom to foster social and emotional learning/development?
5. What are some of the challenges that you face, in terms of building relationships with your students?
6. What are the benefits of building trust and fostering social and emotional development in the classroom?
7. How important of a role do you think the teacher-student relationship in academic performance?
8. How do you see yourself in the classroom?
9. What does good classroom management look like?
10. As a teacher in the primary-junior division, how can I help my students explore their feelings and express them in an appropriate manner?
11. What can I do to build trust and foster emotional intelligence (social-emotional learning) in my classroom?