CREATING A POSITIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY OF

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF BUILDING

STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

by

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests roughly one in four children experience one or more instances of trauma, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), before they turn 18; this has been associated with difficulty in behavior and academic performance within the classroom. Without intervention, the negative outcomes associated with ACEs such as higher risk of suicide, homelessness, and unemployment, may continue to impact these children through adulthood. This case study explores teachers' reflection on the strategies they use to foster a positive classroom environment, in particular how they build relationships with students experiencing various types of trauma. Building relationships is particularly important as an instructional practice, since research has shown that positive relationships with adults can offset some of the negative effects of ACEs (Arincorayan, Applewhite, Garrido, Cashio, & Bryant, 2017). The researcher conducted interviews with two elementary teachers in a school with a range of documented instances of childhood trauma within the student population. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed; specifically, the transcriptions were analyzed for teachers' reported strategies for building classroom environments and teacher-student relationships, references to suspected or perceived student trauma, and connections to an assessment instrument used by school administrators to assess classroom environment across the state. The findings indicated the teachers in the case study consider their students' backgrounds when thinking about instruction and students' performance inside the classroom. Although the

teachers emphasized students' home lives and pasts, they reported feeling influential when shaping students' experiences within the classroom, highlighting their belief that teachers are a main determining factor in students' success. This study contributes to the literature by presenting rich descriptions of how teachers build their classroom environments to support all students, especially students living with trauma.

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PURPOSE AND FRAME OF THE STUDY

Background

Our education system is ever-changing. As new policies and leaders come to the forefront, new ideas are implemented and practiced. With this ever-changing system comes a continuous "catching-up" process. By the time teachers are trained with these new practices and have begun implementing them in their classrooms, the process is starting over again.

Part of a newer wave of educational reform is focusing on trauma-informed practices within schools. Researchers have started connecting the statistics between childhood traumas and negative outcomes later in life. As much of the research calls for intervention for students affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), many schools have begun trying out different programs, hoping to better serve these students. The basis of many programs calls for stable, positive teacher-student relationships.

While this initiative of implementing various programs is honorable, students cannot afford to wait until they are graduating from high school before this wave of educational reform has reached their districts and schools. Teachers make informed decisions every day that benefit their students. By learning from teachers about the successful strategies they use, and exploring literature that shows effective teaching methodology, teachers can be empowered to create optimal conditions for their students sooner rather than later. This notion of using beneficial existing strategies does not

indicate that reform is not welcome, rather that teachers and students simply do not have the time to wait for it.

Teachers have the power to be a forefront for change. While the educational bureaucracy is continuously evolving outside the classroom, one fact that exists inside the classroom is teachers' everyday opportunity to make a difference in students' lives. While teachers cannot become licensed psychologists, doctors, counselors, or policy-makers all in one package, their expertise does allow them to be experts on the inner-workings of classrooms. Being vigilant by constantly reflecting and weighing their decisions can ensure they are making the best possible choices for their students.

Research Question, Goals of the Study, and Hypotheses

These notions lead to an essential question: what are teachers doing right *now* to construct positive classroom environments and to develop positive relationships with their students? To answer this, a starting point is to listen to the experts who are in the classroom every day: teachers. By listening to teachers and learning from their experiences, much can be learned about what strategies are effective in a real-life classroom. An additional step is to consult the current literature that focuses on creating a positive classroom environment.

This case study presents several goals. A main goal aims to explore the best-practices, or proven successful strategies, currently being used by teachers to build their classroom environments. Another equally important goal of this case study is to discover how teachers' classroom environments create an atmosphere that fosters positive teacher-student relationships. By exploring teachers' experiences, the researcher aims to draw

connections between self-reported strategies used by the teachers and suggested best-practices according to current literature.

In addition, this study aims to use the Danielson Framework for Teaching (DFT) as a comparative tool. The DFT is an assessment instrument used by principals or other administration to assess the classroom environment. The researcher will explore how the reported techniques and strategies used in the classroom may or may not align with the categories listed on the DFT. The reported techniques being used in the classroom that are not listed on the DFT would be possible revisions that could be considered for the DFT with more future research.

Finally, along with noting teachers' triumphs in the classroom, a subsidiary goal of the study is to explore reported challenges as well. By observing the perceived struggles teachers face within the classroom, this creates a goal for growth within the education system. If teachers feel unsupported in a certain aspect, perhaps these areas can be a focus for probable topics of professional development or policy development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What Problem Exists?

With all the joyous experiences life brings, negative occurrences are part of life as well. Unfortunately for many people, these negative occurrences happen during developmentally vulnerable times in life. These instances are more widely known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). According to the definition listed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, ACEs are defined as "stressful or traumatic events, including abuse and neglect," as well as "household dysfunction such as witnessing domestic violence or growing up with family members who have substance use disorders" ("Adverse childhood," 2017, para. 2). The CDC-Kaiser ACE Study reported that roughly 26% of participants had experienced at least one ACE, as recorded using the ACE Questionnaire; almost 13% of participants reported four or more ACEs (Merrick et al., 2017). Questions on the ACE Questionnaire inquire about various occurrences of trauma occurring before the age of 18, such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. The questionnaire also asks about witnessing violence and experiencing neglect. Some questions seek information specific to observations of parents, such as divorce, incarceration, and alcohol/drug use disorders ("Adverse Childhood," 2017).

Why Is It a Problem?

One can empathize or imagine a child's fear and tension in the moments these situations occur, but what about the aftermath? Along with this understanding, this should leave society wondering how this impacts the child in the future; after all, these children affected by ACEs will grow up to have a role in society. Numerous negative outcomes of ACEs have been documented, including lower overall well-being (Balistreri, 2015), higher risk of homelessness (Roos et al., 2013), possible early alcohol initiation (Rothman, Bernstein, & Strunin, 2010), and higher risk of unemployment (Liu et al., 2013). This brief list is one piece of a larger body of negative associations occurring during adulthood that is linked to ACEs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists some outcomes more extensively in Figure 1.

As the number of ACEs increases so does the risk for the following*:

- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Depression
- Fetal death
- Health-related quality of life
- Illicit drug use
- Ischemic heart disease
- Liver disease
- Poor work performance
- Financial stress
- Risk for intimate partner violence
- Multiple sexual partners
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Smoking
- Suicide attempts
- Unintended pregnancies
- Early initiation of smoking
- Early initiation of sexual activity
- Adolescent pregnancy
- Risk for sexual violence
- Poor academic achievement

Image Source: ("About the cdc-kaiser ace study," 2016)

Figure 1: Risks Related to ACEs

The prominence of health-related issues connected to ACEs illustrates how far-reaching the impact of one childhood experience can go. As stated in Figure 1, more ACEs *increase* the risk of such outcomes. Not only could these outcomes decrease the

overall well-being of the person going through this experience, but could indirectly affect family members and loved ones. Alcohol and drug use disorders, as well as suicide attempts are examples of topics listed from the ACE Questionnaire. It would be plausible to state that this cycle could continue for the children of adults who might be experiencing negative outcomes of ACEs.

Diseases affecting certain organs or bodily functions seem more concrete and easier to comprehend because the diagnoses can be seen on x-rays or blood tests. However, some of the ACEs contributing to negative outcomes are harder for outsiders to comprehend because these results are psychological. Cristobal-Narvaez et al. (2016) found that "self-reported and interview-based abuse and neglect were associated with psychotic-like and paranoid symptoms" (p. 1) and "increased reactivity to stress in the flow of daily life" (p. 11). Psychosis and paranoia are not visually apparent on the body like a bruise or a cast, nor are they easily "healed." People experiencing these mental health issues may have trouble interacting within society. Because of the absence of a physical marker such as with external injuries, people may make assumptions about the supposed seriousness of those experiencing paranoia or psychosis.

The physical, mental, and emotional outcomes that could result from ACEs create more than a difficult problem for the person affected; these negative outcomes combined with the magnitude of people affected create a public health crisis. In addition to traumas such as neglect and abuse that are listed as a part of ACEs, many other traumas exist that are not listed within this criterion to consider: surviving natural disasters, escaping war-ridden areas, death of loved ones, surviving a mass shooting, etc. As previously mentioned, while about 26% of people may have experienced one ACE listed specifically

from the ACE Questionnaire, there are more traumas that can cause detriment to peoples'

lives. No one lives in a bubble completely separated from the rest of society. Whether

directly or indirectly, these issues inadvertently create more problems for humanity as a

whole. This leads to wondering—what can be offered as a remedy?

Why is This a Problem in the Classroom?

By definition, these traumatic experiences occur before the age of 18, when most

students are enrolled in the public-school system. The estimates from the Merrick et al.

(2017) study suggest that roughly one in four students will experience an ACE before or

during their time in school. This prevalence could mean teachers may have 25% of their

students sitting in classrooms that may have experienced, or could currently be

experiencing trauma. Teachers do not always have background knowledge of this

information. Sometimes a school counselor or case worker may provide insight, but there

may also be situations when a child's current or past situation has not been reported.

The nature of traumatic experiences can produce changes in children's brains that

affect their ability to have good decision-making and social interaction skills (Terrasi &

de Galarce, 2017). Many of the outcomes are due to physiological changes that occur to

the body because of the stress from these traumas. For instance, a recent study showed "a

history of childhood stress was significantly related to chronic low levels of cortisol"

(Kalmakis, Meyer, Chiodo, & Leung, 2015, p. 449). Because cortisol is a hormone that

regulates important functions within our bodies, such as handling stress, it makes sense

that lower levels of cortisol could be problematic. When traumas are repeated, this

"impacts the prefrontal cortex of the brain. All the student thinks about is navigating the

threat, unable to think about other things, much less focus on learning" (Nealy-Oparah & Scruggs-Hussein, 2018, p. 13).

This makes it difficult for these children to perform in a classroom. They are expected to follow behavioral expectations and accomplish academic achievements, all while processing possible trauma. Students who have experienced trauma may also react more intensely than others. As Wright (2013) states:

> A door slamming, a physical education teacher screaming instructions in the gymnasium, an unexpected announcement over the intercom, the shame of poor performance on an assignment, or a chaotic transition from the cafeteria, for example, may be enough to trigger terror in the child already living in fear. While, for most, these stimuli retreat into the background of life, each could represent the beginning of the next awful episode for those who expect to be victimized (p. 40).

Teachers may observe undesirable responses from students every day, and may not realize these responses are part of students' instinctual "fight, flight, or freeze" responses. In a situation when a student may not react as planned, teachers are faced with a choice of how to react. A teacher's choice in this scenario can make all the difference. For instance, if a child reacts to a poor grade by ripping up his paper, the teacher's first response may be frustration or anger. Another alternative may be to exercise extreme patience. What the teacher decides to act on, anger or patience, may make an enormous difference in this child's day.

What is a Possible Solution?

Although research supports the notion that ACEs are linked with negative outcomes later on in life, not every person who experiences trauma as a child will experience the same outcomes to the same degree. Some people may not experience any noticeable or life-impairing effects at all. This poses the question: why not? One possible solution is a child's ability to build resilience in the aftermath of trauma. It has been

shown that relationships with competent adults can lead children to improve their lives after experiencing trauma (Arincorayan et. al, 2017). Healthy adults who can model resiliency themselves would be ideal role models. Furthermore, "resilience-enhancing relationships are not limited to primary caregivers. Extra-familial adults, such as teachers, coaches, clergy and mental health workers, have proven to be effective mentors that can serve as a protective factor for vulnerable children" (Arincorayan et al., 2017, p. 26). Specifically, teachers may have the best opportunity to be a critical adult role model for affected students because of the simple fact that school hours usually operate for six to seven hours per day, five days a week. Teachers may see some students during the week more than students see their parents or guardians, owing to time schedules.

In some worst-case scenarios, it is possible children may rarely hear positivity or be given an opportunity to think of how their lives can be made better. Teachers could offer this positive relationship in children's lives. Teachers could make a difference for students traveling down a difficult pathway by providing a light at the end of the tunnel.

How Would Teachers be Able to Help Build Resilience?

This process of building resilience in students is not an overnight magic trick or something that can be accomplished in one day. In order for teachers to help build resilience in students, they would need to develop strong, trusting relationships first. Building these relationships with students takes time. As Fay and Funk (1995) state:

> Human beings will perform for the person they love." If a person loves himself, he will do it for himself. If he does not have that high self-esteem or belief in self, he will have to do it for someone else until the time comes that he does love himself. (p. 20)

Fay and Funk's notion of belief in self is relatable to the classroom; students may not have developed this belief in self, and may perceive everything as too difficult. More

often than not, teachers may not even know the personal details of children's lives at home. They will only know details if a counselor, parent, or the child divulges this information. Therefore, it is not prudent to focus relationship-building strategies with only specific students that are known to have a rough past, but to build relationships with every child in the classroom. Hopefully, this could encourage students to build belief in themselves and foster their own resilience.

Not only is this decision to focus on building teacher-student relationships meaningful for students who may have been affected by trauma, this act can assist all students with receiving a better education. John Hattie's work with meta-analyses of thousands of educational studies has given the educational world important data about effect sizes, or magnitude of impact, of educational decisions in the classroom. For example, Fisher, Frey, and Hattie (2017) state that teacher-student relationships have an effect size of 0.72. This means that teacher-student relationships can enhance learning by a great deal since any effect size greater than 0.40 is considered a high effect size.

A study on the practice of looping showed benefits of stronger teacher-student relationships; looping is a term used to describe the instance when a teacher stays with the same class for two years in a row (Barshay, 2018b). Barshay's 2018 article describes how students who had the same teacher for several years in a row performed higher on achievement tests than students who received instruction using a different method, called platooning; platooning is a phrase referring to the practice of different teachers specializing in just a few subjects, and rotating amongst the students. With the platooning method, students would be spending less time with each teacher. This simple comparison highlights the idea that teacher-student relationships can boost students' achievement.

This process is important not just for classrooms, but schoolwide as well. For example, a middle-school principal used the ideas and importance of building resilience, and assigned all staff members a homeroom with the exact same group of students, multiple years in a row (Harvey, 2007). Similar to the looping strategy, this plan would enable teachers to develop trusting relationships with students. A schoolwide initiative such as this shows the importance of fostering teacher-student relationships through careful planning and preparation.

How Can Teachers Create an Atmosphere to Promote Strong Teacher-Student Relationships?

Every choice a teacher makes can affect the classroom environment, including how relationships will be built. In order for the classroom to be a positive atmosphere for students to feel safe and respected, a teacher's classroom management must be conducive to fostering these relationships. Wong, Wong, and Seroyer (2009) write, "Effective teaching is all about teacher-student relationships. The easiest way to build relationships with students is to use a well-managed classroom where students are on task, allowing you to spend one-on-one time with them" (p. 68). This logic is sound; it makes sense that teachers will only be able to build relationships in a setting that is calm and under-control. The original research Wong et al. use to support this claim that classroom management is so pertinent is based on a meta-analysis that reviewed over 11,000 pieces of research. The meta-analysis also revealed classroom management is more important in student learning than demographics of the school district (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). A comparison such as this is vital to remember; while some influence from

demographics does exist, a direct influence such as classroom management can still be a more telling determining factor in student learning.

What Influences Teachers' Decision-Making Within the Classroom?

This information creates a pathway of "if we know..." and "then we must…" logic. If we know that building resilience is needed to assist students in persevering through adverse childhood conditions, then we must help them build resilience. If we know that building resilience is dependent upon building strong teacher-student relationships, then teachers must build strong relationships with their students. If we know building strong teacher-student relationships relies heavily on classroom management, then we must make sure teachers have confidence and effectiveness in their classroom management. How is this done?

Developed in the late 1980's, the Danielson Framework for Teaching (DFT) came about as a tool based on criteria used to augment teachers' skills in the classroom (Adams, Danielson, & Moilanen, 2009). Four domains make up the DFT: Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation), Domain 2 (The Classroom Environment), Domain 3 (Instruction), and Domain 4 (Professional Responsibilities). The main criteria of Domain 2 are:

- 2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport
- 2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning
- 2c: Managing Classroom Procedures
- 2d: Managing Student Behavior
- 2e: Organizing Physical Space (Danielson, 2013)

Each component utilizes a rubric containing measures that indicate a ranking of "unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, or distinguished." Many administrators use the DFT as a mandatory evaluation tool for teachers. According to The Danielson Group, the DFT is

used as the "single model, or one of several approved models, in over 20 states" ("Charlotte Danielson," 2017, para. 3). Simply by analyzing the list of criteria from Domain 2 of the DFT, the compiled traits would indicate an emphatic classroom environment. To achieve building a positive classroom environment, teachers use a wide array of methods.

What Classroom Management Strategies Might Teachers Use?

Classroom management refers to the overall efficiency of the day-to-day flow of the classroom. Classroom management was reported as having a 0.52 effect size, which is higher than the average 0.40 (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2017). The reasoning for this could be illustrated by imagining how a classroom would operate without structure or any expectations. Efficiency of even one factor, such as a daily schedule, can make a difference in how much students accomplish in one day. This example along with the effect size could indicate the importance of using effective strategies to manage a classroom.

A well-known management technique used by many teachers is Love and Logic; this strategy operates on respect for students, giving students a chance to make choices, preventing behaviors from occurring, and using empathy when providing consequences (Fay & Funk, 1995). For example, if a student was choosing not to work during class, the teacher might respond by calmly saying, "You can either choose to do it do it now or choose to do it during recess. It is completely up to you." This demonstrates respect for the student by staying calm, shows the student is in charge of the choice, and may prevent further idle time in the classroom.

Some programs focus on classroom and schoolwide management. Positive

Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a program that focuses on preventing

behaviors in the classroom through use of "systematic teaching of those behavioral

expectations" (Carter & Pool, 2012, p. 315). Regular maintenance of a working system

makes more sense than trying to repair it after it is broken. For instance, teaching students

the expectations for standing in the lunch line could ensure they are successful during this

transition. This process of teaching expectations for behavior would be logical, especially

for students who may have a difficult time reacting rationally due to increased stress or

coping with trauma. If expectations are in place, this could alleviate the possibility of an

unstructured time that may lead to stress.

The perception in which teachers view their level of control in the classroom

could also be an indicator of how they make decisions, and which decisions they decide

to make. "The concept of locus of control" is defined as "the general belief of a person

about the extent to which the consequences of events are under his/her own control"

(Bedel, 2012, p. 3052). Two main types, external or internal, would be a determining

factor. If teachers believe more wholeheartedly that outside factors influence events,

known as having an external locus of control, this may lead them to give up more easily.

On the other hand, if teachers with an internal locus of control believe events are more

heavily influenced by the decisions they make, this may lead them to try harder or make

more careful decisions in the classroom.

What Does Existing Literature Say About Current Trauma-Informed Practices?

Many schools across the country have realized the need for trauma-informed

instruction. It is important to note what sets these schools or programs apart from other

schools. One important aspect is the disposition of the school culture. Nealy-Oparah and Scruggs-Hussein (2018) write, "The foundation of being a trauma-informed (TI) leader is transformational 'inside-out' work that heals and develops social-emotional intelligence. How can we teach what we do not embody?" (p. 14). This speaks strongly to the need for all school staff to "embody" this culture. Nealy-Oparah and Scruggs-Hussein go on to explain that teachers need to recognize common triggers for students with trauma, such as unpredictability, transitions, sensory overload, disrespect, and confrontation. Schools should also recognize the need for safety, positive interactions, and targeted support (Cavanaugh, 2016).

Many of the attributes that are supportive of a TI program are in close alignment of Domain 2 of the DFT. If teachers focus on creating a positive classroom environment, then many of these triggers could be eradicated from the classroom, with safety and stability being brought to the forefront. As with any teaching tool, training is expected; however, with the DFT as a tool currently in use in many places, the transition to making classrooms more trauma-informed could be smoother.

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher conducted the research using an instrumental case study, since multiple cases within the same site were analyzed. To keep the confidentiality of participants and the participating school, the researcher assigned pseudonyms. "Roberts Elementary," a local Title I school, was contacted purposefully for several reasons; first, the relevance of the school's recent shift to trauma-informed practices, the second, for the existing partnership with the university teacher education program. As a part of Roberts shifting toward trauma-informed practices, the school recently finished its second year of implementing Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS). The co-investigator contacted the principal via email and obtained approval. Following this, the school district was contacted by the principal investigator, and the case study was approved by the district's institutional review board. This study was also approved by the Boise State University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The principal asked three teachers from upper elementary grades to participate. The researcher requested this grade level range because of personal preference and experience working with this age group in her own professional career. Research also shows a trending decline in achievement scores in fourth grade (Barshay, 2018a). The researcher hoped to learn more about teacher-student relationship building amongst these grade levels partially because of this trending decline in achievement.

After the teachers were selected, the principal then forwarded the recruitment email (Appendix A) containing the survey (Appendix B) link to the teachers being invited to participate. The survey asked basic questions about the teachers' position and years of service. The information from the survey showed that both teachers have over nine years of teaching experience.

Once teachers replied to the survey, the researcher scheduled individual meetings to interview the participants. Due to unforeseen scheduling conflicts, one of the teachers was not able to be interviewed. Interviews with the other two teachers took place in May 2018. For confidentiality, each teacher was assigned a pseudonym. Upon meeting, participants read and signed a consent form (Appendix C) informing them of the purpose of the study, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and compensation. The researcher then read the interview script (Appendix D). Following that, the researcher began the interview using questions from the interview protocol (Appendix E). The instrument (interview protocol) used in this study was co-constructed by the principal investigator and co-investigator. Questions were written with the intent of learning about the teachers' classroom environment and their interactions with students.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for accuracy. The researcher followed along with the interview protocol, only asking questions that were not previously planned when needing clarification or more details about something the participant brought up. The researcher was mindful of the timing of the interview, and ended each interview after approximately one hour since that was the agreed upon time limit originally proposed. After each interview was finished, the researcher transcribed

the data, listened to the recording again while reading the transcription to check for accuracy, then erased the recordings.

To analyze the data, the researcher reflected by writing a series of memos corresponding to each interview. The first memo was written immediately after the interview for the researcher to record first impressions of what stood out during the interview, summarize the main points of what was discussed, and to write down any personal thoughts or connections the researcher discovered.

The next step in the analyzing process was to code the interviews. Each interview was coded three times. The first time the transcription of each interview was coded was for a basic question-answer response. The researcher highlighted and noted the question asked, then highlighted main ideas of what the participant said in response. Then, the researcher created a summary of the interview by writing a short paragraph that summarized the participants' answer for each question from the interview.

The second coding of the interview was specific to references of reported or perceived trauma. As the researcher read through the transcript and came across a reference of trauma, she assigned a different color to each category, then used the same color code for the next interview. Traumas from the ACE Questionnaire were recognized, such as incarceration, homelessness, drug use, etc. Other traumas not specific to the ACE Questionnaire were also recognized, like living in poverty or transitioning from a refugee camp. After each interview was coded for mentions of trauma, the researcher wrote another memo to summarize the main points and record any reflections.

The third coding of the transcripts was conducted to look for connections of Domain 2 of the DFT. Each criteria of Domain 2 was assigned a color. The researcher

began with criteria 2a (Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport), and read through the transcription to highlight any indications of this criteria. The same process was repeated with criteria 2b through 2e, as listed in Figure 3. Another memo was written to summarize and reflect on the reported uses of each criteria. At this point, the researcher also analyzed the transcriptions to see what was referenced or inferred that did not match Domain 2. A section in the researcher's memo was included to reflect on the importance of this contrast. After the coding and initial memos were complete, the researcher noted the major recurring themes that were similar from each interview. The major themes that recurred the most were expanded upon and supported in the Findings, Discussion, and Implications sections.

Researcher Perspective

Personal experiences of my own were major motivators behind exploring classroom environment and relationship-building as the main topics of my thesis. For starters, learning about trauma-informed instruction toward the end of my graduate studies motivated me to amend the original topic of my thesis; I wanted to pursue a more comprehensive understanding of how to better assist students experiencing trauma.

When I started learning more about how trauma affects children, I was stunned at the outcomes that can develop during adulthood. This led me to reflect on the first three years of my certified teaching experience. I believe I witnessed the possible manifestation of trauma in some of my students. One student in particular had reportedly experienced 6 out of 10 ACEs. Looking back, there were many times I wish I would have reacted differently to his needs. I lost count of the instances I had with students during those first

few years that could have been handled better, had I developed better bonds with these students or more consistent classroom procedures.

I saw the most current school year as an opportunity for me to honestly reflect and improve my teaching. I read and reread several books on classroom management, reflected on my novice mistakes, and took detailed notes on how I wanted to build my classroom environment. When creating my Professional Learning Plan, as mandated by my school district, the personal goal I chose was to work toward a rating of "distinguished" in Domain 2a (Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport). By doing this, I became more mindful of how I reacted to students, planned community building, and modeled respect. Not only did I reach this goal according to results from my principal, but in my opinion, my classroom became a cohesive community.

I summarized my personal experience, feedback from my students and their families, and my colleagues, and absorbed all of this as information that the strategies I chose to employ this year were more efficient than the ones I had used in years prior. Although I felt successful this year, I know there is always room for improvement. The experience of conducting the research for my thesis not only solidified my understanding of what it takes to have a positive classroom environment, but gave me even more ideas on how to make it better in years to follow.

FINDINGS

My analysis of the data uncovered four central themes: consistency, awareness of student backgrounds, internal locus of control, and empathy as motivation.

Consistency

Both of the teachers highlighted the importance of consistency in various aspects. They related this consistency as a vital part of their classroom environment. Through analysis after the coding process, the code of consistency was diverged into three sub-codes:

- Consistent structure on the level of the classroom

- Consistent reinforcement of expectations on the level of the school

- Consistent interactions on the level of the adult

Both participants spoke of consistency in relation to the structure of the classroom. Procedures are an essential part of this structure. Procedures may refer to how students walk into the room every morning, turn in their work, or get help from the teacher. Procedures were a highly mentioned topic, as each teacher used the term "procedure" at least 20 times throughout the interview. They underscored the need to practice the procedures often, especially after long breaks from school. Both teachers attributed the reduction in behavioral issues over time to the consistent use of carefully designed and practiced procedures. When asked what advice they would give to a new

teacher with the same grade and population of students, creating and practicing

procedures emerged as a topic of importance.

"A new teacher, **get your procedures in place** and **teach those procedures just like**

you were teaching a math lesson, something that **they absolutely have to learn**

to be able to move on." -Natalie

"I would say to you for starters, find out what the most important things for you are in

your classroom. **Envision what every procedure looks like**. What does it look

like when they come into the classroom from recess? …**practice those**

procedures in your mind. Have that idea in your mind, and then **teach that to**

the kids. **Model it to the kids**." -Janelle

Natalie and Janelle communicate how procedures need to be taught in detail,

much like an academic lesson. Janelle relays how teachers should visualize the

procedures in order for them to be very specific. The use of consistent daily routines and

procedures are essential factors in the structure of the classroom.

Natalie and Janelle shared consistency with their descriptions of procedures

within the structure of the classroom, but also consistent reinforcement of expectations on

the level of the school. As part of their PBIS program, expectations for behavior are the

same throughout the school, with several predetermined "positions" in place to help

students be successful for transitioning or being ready for a lesson. For example, Position

1 is a sitting position (whether at a desk or on the floor) where students are expected to

follow these prompts: "Hands to self, legs tucked in, eyes on speaker, take your turn, sit

on your seat-not your feet." The benefits expressed by both teachers were similar. Janelle

expressed, "It's been really helpful because now it's just a **consistent common language**

between all classrooms." Janelle emphasizes the benefit of having the same "language" in all classrooms. To put it into perspective, imagine if in each classroom students went to use a different behavioral expectation or system; this could create a struggle for students to not only memorize each system, but act accordingly.

In addition to consistent procedures and schoolwide expectations, another vital message of consistency came from the consistent interactions on the level of the adult. The way Natalie and Janelle conveyed their own reactions and conduct in the classroom shows this regularity. They both highlighted examples of acting in a predictable way toward students.

"We **don't want there to be any surprises**. We always want them to **know what to expect**. **That consistency to know** that: **my teacher will always be happy**, **my teacher will not be mad at me**, I can always ask for help. I think they need those securities in place." -Natalie

"They know my expectations. They know what the plan is for the day. There's not a lot of surprises. **There's not surprises with me. I never get mad.**" -Janelle

Both teachers happened to mirror each other's answers. They referred to not having surprises as well as not acting angrily toward students. The consistency of the adult in the classroom provides much needed stability for students.

Awareness of Students' Backgrounds

The next theme arising from the data was the perceived influence of students' backgrounds. The necessity of procedures seemed closely linked when speaking of students' home lives or past experiences. Both Natalie and Janelle expressed the

importance of putting procedures in place because of a possible lack of structure outside of school.

"**Knowing what to expect I think is really important** for all kids, but **especially kids that are coming out of a lack of structure at home or outside of school**, which a lot of our kids are coming from." -Natalie

"You realize that **your procedures that used to work for you in a typical school aren't going to work here**. Preventing behaviors was a lot easier at those other schools. **But here, it became more important**. Building that bond, that relationship became so much more important than at those schools that I worked at where they had a safe adult who they knew cared about them outside of school." -Natalie

"**They're constantly testing their boundaries** because they don't know. **They're always in fight or flight mode**. And so **assuring them constantly**: this is your room, this is your house, you're safe and you are loved…**I think that the modeling, the procedures, clear expectations, a lot of Love and Logic**, I think is how I get that to happen." -Janelle

Natalie and Janelle stress the importance of making sure students know what to expect, or giving them assurances. They also relate a possible lack of structure to the extreme necessity of creating procedures or preventing behaviors. Janelle references her use of Love and Logic in her classroom to aid creating her classroom environment.

Discussion of students' backgrounds and home lives also brought up concerns about students living in poverty. The relationship between students' demographics and fulfillment of their needs was a concern.

"Many of our kids are **stuck in the cycle of poverty** and what worries me the most is
how do we break that cycle? I only have them for the short period of time. **How
can we, as a school, make sure that we can break that cycle?**" -Natalie

"If you were to look at my classroom, **I've got about four kids that come from solid
homes**…**I was a poverty kid**. I came from a tough home…And I think I want to
treat the kids how I want to be treated, and **I wanted that so badly as a kid**." -
Janelle

Natalie repeats references to the cycle of poverty, and breaking the cycle.
Janelle's personal relation to students living in poverty gives her a different perspective
on what students may be experiencing.

In addition to the topic of poverty, the research also brought to light other
reported traumas students may be facing. Natalie and Janelle both reported about half of
their students as either "new to the country," or transitioning from refugee camps. Natalie
recalled a student telling the story of some of her family being killed back in their home
country; Natalie also reported this student showing a scar she received from a wound
during that instance. Other concerns were suspected drug use in the home, parent
incarceration, and students not receiving an adequate amount of sleep or food at home.
There were also concerns expressed that students might be observing behavior or be
receiving treatment at home that is not considered respectful.

"What I learned now as a mom, is that **the power that parents have is far greater than
a teacher**…I always just worry. I worry every day that they go home, because **I
know that whatever I do as a teacher can quickly be undone by a parent**." -
Janelle

"If I could wave my magic wand I would make sure that all of these kids went home and

    sat around the dinner table and **had food on the table** and had that time together

    and **had parents who had time to ask them about their school day and could**

    focus on their kids." -Natalie

The focus on home life was woven throughout each interview. Janelle's point of view shows a concern about the contrast between treatment given at school versus suspected treatment by parents at home. Natalie also worries about students not having the opportunity to spend time with their families at home.

Internal Locus of Control

While both teachers expressed students' living conditions and backgrounds as a concern, there was also an emergence of a sense of personal responsibility for outcomes occurring within the classroom. Natalie and Janelle brought up their own feelings of responsibility several times throughout the interviews.

"If something is going wrong in the classroom, **it usually has to do with what I'm doing**."-Natalie

"The only way that **my classroom can be successful, is if I'm successful**." -Janelle

"I think **90% of the behavior problems in the classroom can be solved by what the**

    teacher is doing, or **what the teacher is not doing** just as much." -Natalie

"Every year will be better. That's **my goal**. I feel like every year **my teaching will get**

    better. **My management will get better**." -Janelle

Both teachers share a personal sense of responsibility by acknowledging their actions and choices are what makes the students successful. Natalie conveys her opinion

that what happens in the classroom has a lot to do with her own actions. Janelle emphasizes her feeling of responsibility by sharing her hope for the future that her teaching will continue to improve.

Empathy as Motivation

Janelle and Natalie shared a common perception of what helps guide some of their choices as a teacher. Becoming a parent was described as a common influence. They described how their empathy for parents evolved after they became parents themselves.

"It gives you a whole **new perspective on those instant reactions that you have as a teacher.** When something happens, you react to it. **How would I want the teacher to respond to my child** going through this?" -Natalie

"My heart hurts for parents. I get it. It's got to hurt so bad when you hear that your kid's not working at grade level or your kid's getting picked on. **I'm a better communicator with parents**." -Janelle

"**Reaching out and working together** is probably...that's my biggest mistake. If I could go back and change anything it would probably be those first couple of years… I wish I could go back and change that parent factor." -Natalie

"**We're a team**. We are a triangle. We have you, your kid is part of this team, and I am part of this team, but we need each other for this to be a stable equilateral triangle. We have to. And I said that, I didn't really understand the meaning behind it. And so I think across the board, **my empathy for parents has changed dramatically**." -Janelle

Perspective as a parent is a commonality between Janelle and Natalie. Natalie stressed the importance of reacting to her students in a way that she would want her own

child's teacher to react. Janelle expresses how her empathy has shifted; because of this, her communication has improved. This shared empathy for parents seems to be a common motivating factor.

DISCUSSION

The findings are important to comprehend as they lead to several possible conclusions about building a successful classroom environment. These conclusions also indicate what might be the optimal conditions to build positive teacher-student relationships. The first connection I made was between the teachers' perception of students' backgrounds and how that knowledge seemed to influence the teachers' instructional decisions. Before explaining this, it is also necessary to note that descriptions of students' lives come from observations. While this information may be reported by teachers, it is difficult to know exactly what goes on outside of school. That being said, there is a reasonable amount of deduction that can occur based on these observations.

Natalie and Janelle described their perceptions of students' home lives vividly, and voiced concerns about a possible lack of structure at home. They often used these details as a transition to connect the reasoning of their management decisions, such as having firm routines and procedures. The models of consistency in the classroom could offer support to students by relieving the possibility of the unknown. As stated in the literature, children affected by trauma often display a hyper fight, flight, or freeze reaction; being aware of triggers such as unpredictability or transitions are essential for preventing undesirable reactions from students (Cavanaugh, 2016). The implementation of the PBIS program initiated by this school ensures students know the expectation for

what to do during instruction, as well as transitions within and outside of the classroom. By employing a similar schedule every day and using pre-planned listening or transition positions, it would make sense that students might feel a sense of stability in their daily routine while at school. Natalie and Janelle's choices when building their classroom environments align closely with awareness of their students' needs, especially students living with trauma. By having the combined levels of consistency from the structure of the classroom, expectations of the school, and controlled reactions of the teacher, this surrounds the students with stability and alleviates some events that may trigger students.

The emphasis on reacting predictably toward students also stands out as an important factor in building a positive classroom space, as well as helping foster student relationships. Even with the detailed procedures in place, the routines and consistency created from these procedures would be meaningless if students experienced unpredictable behavior from their teacher. The intense fight, flight, or freeze reactions referenced previously emphasize this example. It might not matter if the routine or daily procedures within the classroom were the same if the teacher reacts poorly by showing anger or frustration toward students. Therefore, the need for consistency in classroom procedures *and* teacher reactions are equally as important. The findings showed staying calm and not having "surprises" were deemed important by both teachers. This illustrates how having calm and caring adults available as role models to students could help in building resilience (Arincorayan et al., 2017). Demonstrating this consistency as the adult role model in the classroom could help students see a positive example of how to handle day-to-day tasks, including interacting with others or handling conflicts.

The interviews were detailed with reports from both teachers that were matched to Domain 2 of the DFT during the coding process. Both Natalie and Janelle brought up an example or anecdote related to almost every aspect of the main five criteria of Domain 2, aligning with descriptors of proficiency according to the DFT rubric; for example, the way in which both teachers describe their controlled reactions with students show "general caring and respect." In addition, the use of PBIS positions helps transitions "occur smoothly, with little loss of instructional time" (Adams, Danielson, & Moilanen, 2009, p. 66-72). While I am not a trained evaluator, and I was not able to physically observe Natalie and Janelle teaching, making connections between their reports and the DFT was still telling. The connection between the rubric and the interviews reinforces the idea that both teachers conveyed examples of best practices of building their classroom environment and relationship building.

Owing to time restraints, it is important to note not all criteria of the DFT were discussed with equal detail, but this is attributed to time constraints and structure of the interview protocol. For example, more questions were oriented toward the topic of "creating an environment of respect and rapport" rather than "organizing physical spaces."

Even with the most detailed rubrics or criteria, not everything teachers do or say may align perfectly with these preset notions. Teachers can perform wise actions within their classrooms that are not always listed as a set of criteria. Perhaps even more telling than connections to the DFT were findings that were *not* on the DFT. Natalie and Janelle's understanding of their own role and importance in the classroom speaks volumes. More current literature updating the meta-analyses of Fisher, Frey, and Hattie

has shown that collective teacher efficacy has an effect size of 1.57 (Hattie, 2018). This phrase refers to the "collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities" (Donohoo, 2016, para. 1). This effect size is more than double the effect size of teacher-student relationships! This does not mean teacher-student relationships are not important; rather, this shows the extreme magnitude of collective teacher efficacy.

While this concept is not stated in Domain 2 of the DFT, its ideals are more aligned with the overall theme of Domain 4, Professionalism. The teachers' shared belief that the teacher is responsible for what occurs within the classroom is vital. If they understand their importance and maintain an internal locus of control (Bedel, 2012), this could allow them to take advantage of best-practices to help students be more successful. If teachers do not see themselves as being in control, it is possible they might not embrace the opportunities that would benefit students. While it is difficult to obtain the measure of collective teacher efficacy from the entire school, Natalie and Janelle's reports indicate a possible perspective.

The combination of the four main themes (consistency, awareness of student backgrounds, internal locus of control, and empathy as motivation) comprise the unique elements that influence the classroom environment of both of these teachers. Arguably, without one of the factors, their classrooms could be drastically different. What use would a set of consistent schoolwide expectations offer if a teacher felt, overall, they had no real control over how students behaved? The many working pieces of a classroom environment are like cogs in a machine. They have to be designed specifically to work

together to achieve a desired output. In this case, if teachers lack one component in their

classroom environment, it may be difficult for the classroom to "run" smoothly.

LIMITATIONS

This study presented various limitations. Time constraints in the process of this study presented a limitation; not only with the number of participants, but also the frequency and duration of the interviews. While the interviews with the two experienced teachers produced copious details of building classroom environment and teacher-student relationships, it is important to acknowledge that *only* two interviews were conducted. A third interview was originally intended, but the participant's schedule did not coincide with the available timeline. A larger sample of teachers may have produced more themes or ideas about building classroom environments. The ideas and themes resulting from the interviews are not the only methods available for building a positive classroom environment.

Only one interview was conducted with each participant, and the interviews lasted approximately one hour each. Had the timeline allowed, the researcher would have liked to interview the participants several times. More interviews with the same participant could have led to more detailed follow up questions and responses, and possibly more insight into the process of building a successful classroom environment.

The instrument, or interview protocol, used in this study was constricted to ten questions with the intent of being able to finish the interview within one session. Had more time been available, the interview protocol may have been more detailed to cover more aspects of classroom environment. The actual questions used from the interview

protocol also varied due to the nature of the conversation. A greater or fewer number of follow-up questions from the instrument were used depending on the detail of the answers given by the participant. The participants' responses may have also created a variance in the path of questioning.

As with any interview, the responses participants are reported from their point of view and perceptions. The information reported may be unintentionally biased or inaccurate. The timeframe of this study did not allow for research or observations within the classroom during school hours to give the option for a second point of view from the researcher. Had more time allowed, this may have provided more information about the inner workings of the classroom.

The perspective of the researcher may also result in unintentional bias. Because the researcher has personal interest in this topic, this may result in focus on certain aspects of the study over others.

Finally, the aspect of comparing the participants' reports of their classrooms to Domain 2 of the DFT may be incomplete. Owing to time constraints, the instrument did not address every criteria and sub criteria of Domain 2, as shown in Figure 3. Therefore, the absence of reported criteria or sub criteria does not necessarily mean the teacher does not use this attribute in their teaching, rather they were not given an opportunity by the researcher to address it.

IMPLICATIONS

A great deal of the information provided by both teachers in this study aligns with current literature and data that supports the following key components to building a positive classroom environment: classroom management, teacher-student relationships, and collective teacher efficacy. Natalie and Janelle reported strong elements of effective classroom management, such as consistency with procedures and expectations. Their knowledge of students' lives helps them build trusting teacher-student relationships by creating a safe space. The common belief from both teachers that their choices are pertinent in the classroom show a glimpse of this school's collective teacher efficacy. If effect sizes were used as a measure of importance for the implications of this study, it would support the idea that Natalie and Janelle use best practices in their classrooms to create a stable and positive classroom environment.

Perhaps the next steps of extending this research would be to continue work with more teachers to not only hear their perspectives of the techniques they use in their classrooms, but to observe them firsthand. By finding out which strategies teachers employ and following up in the classroom, it is possible more deductions can be made about how to improve education. Specifically, improvements can be made that ensure teachers are fully equipped to build positive classroom environments.

If intervening in the negative outcomes of adverse childhood experiences is important, teachers should be supported as much as possible. First, they should be

educated fully about childhood trauma and possible outcomes. Second, they also need

professional development to prepare for creating ideal environments for students. Lastly,

teachers need support from their school districts and administration. Part of this line of

thinking involves higher education; if preservice teachers are taught the newest methods

and most current data dealing with childhood trauma, this may prepare them to help all

students more efficiently.

This study also implies the need for a shift in the lens through which teachers

view their own efficiency. What teachers do in the classroom is extremely important, but

their actions are guided by what guides them. Currently, the DFT could be considered a

lens we use to evaluate teaching. While the DFT contains very detailed criteria of several

vital components, it does not include specific references to collective teacher efficacy.

Domain 4 (Showing Professionalism) begins to scratch the surface; however, the criteria

are more attuned to what a teacher *does* rather than what she believes. Domain 4 could in

fact be the "drawing board" for building collective teacher efficacy into this framework.

If revised, Domain 4 could include teacher disposition to address this component. After

all, collective efficacy teeters on the combined dispositions of all teachers within a

school. This process also hinges upon acknowledging that dispositions are cultivated on a

wider scale—preservice training, the environment of the school, and even the district. It

all starts with a shared mindset from all parties in the education system to believe they

have the power to make a difference.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letter

Greetings,

My name is Lisa Strader and I am a graduate student at Boise State University. I am conducting research on teacher/student relationship building in the classroom under the supervision of Dr. Esther Enright.

I am emailing to ask if you would be willing to participate in interviews as part of my thesis: "Creating a Positive Classroom Environment: A Case Study of Teachers' Reflections on Domain Two from the Danielson Framework for Teaching." This project will include a brief survey and one interview session, approximately one hour in length, for this research project. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed for accuracy. As a teacher myself, I understand the daily sacrifice of your personal time. To show my appreciation, I am offering a $25 Visa gift card for your completed participation in this study. Participation is completely voluntary and your identity will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

If you are willing to contribute to this project, please click on the link for the survey and additional information: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8C96G6N

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (lisastrader@u.boisestate.edu) or Dr. Esther Enright (estherenright@boisestate.edu).

If you wish to contact the Boise State Institutional Review Board, you may do so via phone at 208.426.5401, fax at 208.426.2055, or email at humansubjects@boisestate.edu.

Thank you for your time! I look forward to learning from you.
Lisa Strader,

Graduate Student
Boise State University

APPENDIX B

Survey

1. Which of the following best describes your current teaching position?
    a. Preschool/Kindergarten
    b. First grade
    c. Second grade
    d. Third grade
    e. Fourth grade
    f. Fifth grade
    g. Sixth grade
    h. Resource or extended resource
    i. Other
2. How long have you been teaching this specific grade/specified area?
3. How many total years of teaching experience do you have?
4. Would you be willing to participate in an interview lasting approximately one hour in exchange for a $25 Visa gift card?
    a. Yes
    b. No
5. If you are interested in participating in an interview for this study, please provide your contact information below:
    a. Name
    b. What is a day/time during the week you'd be available?
    c. Email address
    d. Phone number

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent: Teacher Participants

        Study Title: Creating a Positive Classroom Environment: A Case Study of Teachers' Reflections of Domain Two from the Danielson Framework for Teaching

        Principal Investigator: Lisa Strader
        Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Esther Enright
        IRB Oversight: Boise State University, College of Education
        Date of Project: April - August 2018

        This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

➢ **PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**
        The purpose of this study is to gain insight of teachers' perspectives on creating a positive classroom environment. To do this, teachers will be interviewed during one session lasting approximately one hour in length. The goal of this session will be to gather contextual information about their classroom and teaching style. This information will be used to gauge how teachers make decisions in the classroom.

➢ **PROCEDURES**
        If you agree to be in the study, your interview will be audio recorded. I am asking for your consent as the teacher, because data, in the form of interview recordings and researcher notes, will be collected from the interviews and used in the research study. These activities will be used as sources of data in the examination of how teachers make decisions about relationship building while they teach.

➢ **RISKS**
        There is minimal risk; however, it is possible that some participants may feel mild discomfort in analyzing their own teaching or discussing their choices made during interviews.

➢ **BENEFITS**
        You will receive a $25 Visa gift card for your participation in the whole project. Also, you may benefit by contributing to a study that will deepen our understanding of teacher decision-making and how it relates to creating a positive classroom environment.

➢ **EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Boise State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your real name will not be used in any written reports or publications that result from this research, unless you have given explicit permission for us to do this. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is complete and then destroyed.

➢ **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

You will receive a $25 Visa gift card for your participation.

➢ **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

➢ **QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you should first contact the principal investigator at lisastrader@u.boisestate.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Boise State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the board office between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday, by calling (208) 426-5401 or by writing: Institutional Review Board, Office of Research Compliance, Boise State University, 1910 University Dr., Boise, ID 83725-1138.

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time. I have received a copy of this form.

_____   _____   _____

Printed Name of Study Participant   **Signature** of Study Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

APPENDIX D

Interview Script

Investigator will read consent form out loud, obtain verbal consent, and collect the signed consent form.

For interview:
Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.

The purpose of this interview is to understand what factors influence your decision-making within your classroom. Specifically, I want to understand what decisions you make when you are working on creating your classroom environment.

I understand teachers play a vital role in the creation of the classroom environment. Because of this, teachers also have important insight into interactions with students that contribute to the classroom environment. Therefore, I have chosen to interview teachers for this project. I believe your ideas and opinions are important to better understanding how teachers build relationships with students. I would like to hear about your challenges and triumphs within the classroom, and how you think about your interactions with students.

I would like to remind you that to protect the privacy of participants, such as yourself, I will be using pseudonyms in my data collection and thesis paper. I will not collect any student names or other information.

The interview will take approximately one hour, and I will audio-record the discussion to ensure that it is accurately recorded. You will be able to end the interview at any time and can choose not to answer questions without having to offer a reason. I want you to feel comfortable during this conversation. There are no right or wrong answers, just tell me what honestly comes to mind.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Can I get a record of your verbal consent to participate?

Thank you.

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

(After reading the Interview Script, obtaining verbal consent to begin, and answering any questions from the participant)

Questions:
1. **To begin, tell me about your students this year. [You can use first names if you want; I'll assign them pseudonyms when I transcribe our conversation to protect their privacy.]**
   o **What are you the most proud of about your students?**
   o **What worries you the most about your students?**

2. **Tell me about your classroom, especially about the classroom environment.**

3. **How did you go about building your classroom environment?**
   o **How/where did you learn to do that?**
   o What factors led you to understand that about your students/classroom/environment?
   o **Can you provide an example?**
   o **How do you feel that has worked for you and your students?**
   o **Why do you feel that strategy has worked or not worked?**
   o **What challenges are you still trying to overcome? What makes those so difficult?**
   o **Can you tell me more about your class rules or expectations? What led you to decide on those rules?**
   o **How might you describe the classroom environment from a student's point of view?**
   o What would I (the student) be expected to do as a part of this environment?

4. **How would you say your classroom environment has changed throughout the school year?**
   o What was _____ like originally?
   o Would you describe this as a purposeful change, or something that developed over time? How so?

5. **Pretend I am a brand new teacher and will be teaching the same grade with a similar population of students to yours. What advice would you give me about creating a classroom environment?**
   o What do you mean by that?
   o Can you provide an example?
   o How so?

6. **As a new teacher, if you wanted me to be prepared to handle this task on my own, what challenges should I prepare for when building my own classroom environment?**
    - What challenges did you face when building that environment?
    - Can you provide an example?
    - How did you handle that challenge?
    - How satisfied do you feel with how it's turned out?

7. **Sometimes, as teachers, when we reflect on things that have happened in the classroom, we may find ourselves thinking of alternative outcomes.**
    - **Can you tell me about an interaction this week (or recently) you had with a student, or an interaction between students that you intervened in, that sticks out in your mind?**
      - What happened when…?
      - How did the student respond?
      - What were they doing?
      - What was the purpose of their interaction?
      - How did they interact?
      - If you could change something about their interaction, would you? How so? Why?
    - **Are there other incidents or interactions with students that weigh on your thoughts as you reflect on them?**
      - Why do you think that moment stands out for you?

8. **How would you say your classroom environment has changed over the course of your career?**
    - What was _____ like originally?
    - What do you think influenced these changes?

9. **Pretend you can wave a magic wand and change any factor that influences your classroom environment. What is the one thing you'd change first?**
    - Why would this be your choice?
    - What/how do you think that will change things?

10. **Is there anything we haven't discussed that you'd like to raise and share?**