

EXPLORING TEACHER INFLUENCE ON THE LIVES OF STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN A RURAL MIDWESTERN COMMUNITY

Christopher M. Knoell¹, Sherry R. Crow
University of Nebraska Kearney, USA

Abstract. Background. Student achievement and adequate yearly progress (AYP) have practitioners and researchers alike searching for strategies that will sustainable student academic growth. One area of study that may inform practitioners is furthering an understanding of student-teacher relationships for students of differing abilities and in different types of schools and situations. **Purpose.** The purpose of this study was to compare and contrast the level of teacher influence perceived by fifth grade students from poverty and affluent schools in a rural midwestern community. **Method.** Research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, with data collected from 24 semi-structured student interviews. **Results.** Results indicated similarities between the perceptions of teacher influence for students in poverty and affluent schools on school-related issues, as well as differences in perceptions of overall teacher influence on their lives, especially on non-school related issues. **Conclusions.** An implication of the study is that students in poverty tend to have weaker foundational relationships with parents and lack trust of adults in general, and therefore may not have the emotional and psychological building blocks to naturally form strong relationships with teachers. Recommendations include concentrated efforts in mentoring students of poverty, as well as promoting experiences with influential adults in order to build stronger positive relationships both in and out of school.

Keywords: student-teacher relationships, teacher influence, poverty and affluent schools, mentoring.

Since its inception in 2002, No Child Left Behind has schools and practitioners searching for strategies that will produce substantial and sustainable student academic growth. Instead of taking a “silver bullet” approach, these researchers advocate for what many studies have

¹ Address for correspondence: University of Nebraska Kearney, College of Education B164, Kearney, NE 68849; phone: 308-627-5180; fax: 308-865-8097; e-mail: knoellcm@unk.edu.

posited (Lee, 2007; Soar & Soar, 1979) and many successful teachers have always known: strong and positive student-teacher relationships (S-T Relationships) influence students toward success.

One area of study that may inform practitioners for improving student achievement is furthering an understanding of the dynamics, similarities, and differences of S-T Relationships for students in different types of schools and situations. The purpose of this study was to explore teacher influence on the lives of students from two diverse elementary schools in a rural midwestern community in order to better understand the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship in diverse settings.

Importance of Student-Teacher Relationships

Relationships, positive or negative, have profound effects on quality of life. Landsford, Antonucci, Akiyama, and Takahashi (2005) found that well-being is directly tied to personal relationships. This well-being was accomplished “by providing love, intimacy, reassurance of worth, tangible assistance, and guidance” (p. 1). Conversely, Lansford et al. (2005) reported that the lack of positive relationships results in negative effects including depression, anxiety, and poor health in general.

The effects of the S-T Relationship have also been a topic of study. The APA Work Group of the Board of Educational Affairs (1997) produced *Learner-centered Psychological Principles: A Framework for School Reform and Redesign*, which included 14 fundamental principles about learners and learning. Principle 11 – The Social Influence on Learning stated, “Learning is influenced by social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others.” Similarly, McCombs and Whisler (1997) offered, “learning occurs best in an environment that contains positive interpersonal relationships and interactions and in which the learner feels appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and admired” (p. 10).

Creating Success in Classrooms

S-T Relationships have proven to be an important factor in student success in the classroom. Pianta (1994) attests that S-T Relationships are influential on students’ success in school; and Lee (2007) found that the trust developed between the student and the teacher can contribute to students’ academic performance. Likewise, Birch and Ladd

(1998) reported that the S-T Relationship can influence students' future paths toward academic success and was positively linked with children's academic performance. Noddings (1988) posited that students make learning a higher priority and work harder for teachers whom they care about and perceive as also valuing their learning; and Crow (2009) found that positive "anchor relationships," including educators, were a common factor in the lives of fifth grade students who were identified as intrinsically motivated to seek information. Lastly, Miller (2000) found that the S-T Relationship plays an important role in helping reduce the chances of future bad outcomes, i.e., dropping out of school.

Positive outcomes from strong S-T Relationships are not limited solely to student achievement. Griggs, Gagnon, Huelsman, Kidder-Ashley, and Ballard (2009) suggest that S-T Relationships may reduce the risk of negative behavioral outcomes; and Howes, Hamilton and Matheson (1994) reported that S-T Relationships influence students' relationships with peers in their classrooms. As the result of their meta-analysis, Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering (2003) proposed there are fewer disruptions in classrooms with strong S-T Relationships. Finally, Doll, Spies, LeClair, Kurien, and Foley (2010) attest that "when students feel valued and respected by their teachers, they are more committed to learning and are able to cope better with adverse events in their lives." (p. 205).

In addition to these benefits, the value of the S-T Relationship has also been studied in specific populations and cultures. Foundationally, different cultures put different degrees of importance on the S-T Relationship. Jacob and Lefgren (2007) found that in high-poverty schools, requests for specific teachers are based more on a teacher's ability to improve student achievement than on student satisfaction, whereas in low-poverty schools the opposite was found to be true. Hudley, Daoudd, Hershberger, Wright-Castro, and Polanco (2003) revealed that individuals of different cultures value different elements of the student-relationship and also act within the relationship differently based upon their perceived-level of satisfaction with the relationship.

While these studies have established the importance and benefits of S-T Relationships, focus on more specific and diverse settings is warranted. The purpose of this study was to explore teacher influence on the lives of students from two diverse elementary schools in a rural

midwestern community. The specific research questions in the present study were:

1. How much influence do teachers have on the lives of students in two diverse school settings?
2. Do the students from affluent schools differ from students in poverty schools in areas of teacher influence? If so, which areas?
3. Why and how, in the student's descriptions, were the different areas of their lives influenced?

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study were fifth grade students recruited from two elementary schools in a rural midwestern community. Pseudonyms have been used for the names of two schools throughout this study. The community is home to roughly 30,000 people. The population is over 92% Caucasian, with the rest being mainly of Hispanic backgrounds, as well as some African-American and of Asian descent. The median household income in 2010 was just over \$47,000 dollars, with 15.5% of the population below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau, 2010). The two elementary schools in the study were within the same Class A school district. Classrooms within the district reported a student-to-teacher ratio of 25-1 within the elementary schools. Of the 382 teachers employed by the district, 51% had earned Master's degrees and 98% were teaching within their endorsement area. Overall, the district reported a population with 4% identified as English Language Learners (ELL), 14% received special education services, and 32% as receiving free/reduced lunches. The district also reported a mobility rate of 9% and a dropout rate of 1.6%.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of School Sites*

Birch Elementary (n=257)		Maple Elementary (n=258)
Percentage	Characteristic	Percentage
81.71	Poverty	10.80
20.75	English Language Learner	0.78
15.77	Mobility	3.10

The two schools identified within the school district, though almost identical in number of students (approximately 260 students each), had unique and different populations with regard to the socioeconomic level of students who attended, mobility rates, and ELL populations (see Table 1). Each school had two fifth grade classrooms from which students were chosen to participate. Students eligible for the study had completed their entire scholastic career, kindergarten through fifth grade. This requirement ensured that participants were truly in and of their school's culture.

The diversity represented by the unique populations of each building provided a lens through which to explore the S-T Relationship. For the purposes of this study, *poverty schools* are defined as having more than 75% of students receive free or reduced priced lunch (U.S. Department of Education, 1998) and *affluent schools* are defined as having 10% or fewer of the students receive free or reduced price lunch (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Birch Elementary qualified as a poverty school and Maple Elementary is designated as an affluent school. Mobility rates and the number of students served as English-language learners were also individual characteristics to be considered, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of S-T Relationships in both locations.

Measures

The instrument used to collect data in the present study, the *Teacher Influence Questions*, was used in the student interviews. There were 11 questions:

1. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on who you are as a person?
2. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on the choices you make (in school)?
3. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on your learning?
4. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on how hard you work on your schoolwork?
5. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on who you have as friends?

6. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on how you relate to adults?

7. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on how well you behave?

8. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on the choices you make outside of school?

9. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on how well or how much you study?

10. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on your home life or family relationships?

11. Does (enter your teacher name), or your relationship with him/her have an effect on what you do with your free-time outside of school?

Since this instrument was used for the first time no validity or reliability indexes are available.

Procedure

The above instrument was used to gather data in semi-structured interviews with 12 fifth grade students from each of the two schools studied for a total of 24 student interviews. The individual student responses to *Teacher Influence Questions* were then transformed into quantitative data for a better understanding of the number of occurrences of specific student responses within the qualitative data. Student responses for each of the *Teacher Influence Questions* that included “yes” and corroborating details was marked with a (Y), while each response that included a “no” and corroborating details was marked as (N). Then, the number of (Y) and (N) for each column were totaled, converted to percentages and reported by school.

RESULTS

The findings of the current research included both analysis of students initial answers to the interview items, as well as their follow-up explanations.

Comparison and contrast. Analysis of the student responses from the two schools revealed some similarities and differences. In broad terms, student responses were categorized as similar (majority of the

students from both schools answered the same way; or the responses were equally split at each school) or different (majority of the responses from one school were “yes” and responses from the other school were “no”; or a majority of the responses from one school were “yes” or “no” and the other school were equally split). This basic analysis shows that student responses were similar in both schools for six of the items, including Item 3 – *your learning?* [majority yes], Item 4 – *how hard you work on your schoolwork?* [majority yes], Item 5 – *who you have as friends?* [majority no], Item 7 – *how well you behave?* [majority yes], Item 9 – *how much or how well you study?* [majority yes], and Item 10 – *your home life or family relationships?* [majority no]. In similar fashion, the student responses from the two schools were designated as different on five items: Item 1 – *who you are as a person?* [Birch majority no, Maple majority yes], Item 2 – *the choices you make (in school)?* [Birch even split, Maple majority yes], Item 6 – *the way in which you relate to other adults?* [Birch majority no, Maple majority yes], Item 8 – *the choices you make outside of school?* [Birch Majority no, Maple majority yes]; and, Item 11 – *what you do with your free-time outside of school?* [Birch majority no, Maple majority yes] (see Table 2).

Overall influence. Of the 132 total possible responses to the items at each school, over two-thirds (68%) of the affluent Maple Elementary students felt that their teachers had an effect on their lives, as compared to less than half (43%) of the Birch Elementary students. And though on many items, the majority of the fifth graders at both schools did not perceive their teacher’s influence on their lives outside of school, it is important to note that more students from the affluent school than the poverty school answered “yes” and supported their response on ten of the eleven items. The only item that had more “yes” responses and validation by Birch Elementary was Item 4 – *how hard you work on your school work?*; and this was by a slight margin of one response (see Table 2).

Statistical differences. Using the data from Table 2 and Birch Elementary as the control group, effect size, or the magnitude of the difference between the average number of “yes” responses between schools was calculated using Cohen D (Cohen, 1969) and found to be 1.22.

Additionally, the Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Signed Ranks test was applied to the data from Table 2. It was found that Maple Elementary had significantly more yeses than Birch Elementary, $T(N=11) = 1, p < .01$.

Table 2. Number of Supported “Yes” or “No” Responses (and Corresponding Percentages), by School, to the Qualitative Questions for the Semi-Structured Fifth Grader Interviews

Interview Prompt: Does (enter teacher name), or your relationship with her/him, have an effect on:	Birch Elementary (n=12)		Maple Elementary (n=12)		Fisher Exact Probability Test
	<i>Responded YES (N%)</i>	<i>Responded NO (N%)</i>	<i>Responded YES (N%)</i>	<i>Responded NO (N%)</i>	
1. who you are as a person?	4 (33%)	8 (67%)	8 (67%)	4 (33%)	n/s
2. the choices you make (in school)?	6 (50%)	6 (50%)	8 (67%)	4 (33%)	n/s
3. your learning?	8 (67%)	4 (33%)	11 (92%)	1 (8%)	n/s
4. how hard you work on your schoolwork?	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	8 (67%)	4 (33%)	n/s
5. who you have as friends?	2 (17%)	10 (83%)	4 (33%)	8 (67%)	n/s
6. the ways in which you relate to other adults?	4 (33%)	8 (67%)	7 (58%)	5 (42%)	n/s
7. how well you behave?	8 (67%)	4 (33%)	11 (92%)	1 (8%)	n/s
8. the choices you make outside of school?	2 (17%)	10 (83%)	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	< .01
9. how much or how well you study?	8 (67%)	4 (33%)	10 (83%)	2 (17%)	n/s
10. your home life or family relationships?	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	5 (42%)	7 (58%)	n/s
11. what you do with your free-time outside of school?	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	9 (75%)	3 (25%)	< .025
Overall Totals	57 (43%)	75 (57%)	90 (68%)	42 (32%)	--

Next, the number of “yes” responses for each item were analyzed using the Fisher Exact Probability test. This analysis indicated that for

Item 8 (*the choices you make outside of school?*), Maple had significantly more yeses than Birch ($p < .01$) and for Item 11 (*what you do with your free-time outside of school?*), Maple also had significantly more yeses than Birch ($p < .025$).

Students' Follow-up Explanations

Analysis of the students' explanations to their initial yes/no responses to the *Teacher Influence Questions* produced two themes that focused on the similarities and the differences between the two schools.

Similarities between schools. Sub-themes emerged with regard to some similarities between the students in the two schools, which included the influence teachers had on students' choice of friends, their behaviors, and their learning at school.

Friend selection. The majority of both sets of students saw very little teacher influence on whom they chose as friends at school. Few fifth graders from either school, 16.6% from Birch Elementary and 33.3% from Maple Elementary, responded "yes," when asked about teacher influence on Item 5 – *who you have as friends?* The vast majority of students interviewed in both schools responding with a definitive "no." Those who did respond "yes," from both schools responded strongly to this question. They perceived that their teachers had encouraged them to avoid negative influences and make better choices of friends. A boy attending Birch shared that his teacher helped him come to the following conclusion, "If I hang out with bad people I'd be bad and pretty much get expelled from school." Another Birch student stated, "Sometimes she says that this person could be a bad influence and I think you shouldn't be hanging out with (them)." A Maple fifth grader said, "Well, she knows who is a good person to have as a friend and who isn't." While a majority of students did not perceive that their teacher had much influence on their choice of friends in school, the strong responses from the few who did indicates that the teachers did influence some students in this area of life.

Behaviors in school. Some interesting results were revealed on Item 7 – *how well you behave?* The majority of the students from both schools, 67% from Birch Elementary and nearly 92% from Maple Elementary, indicated that their teachers influence their behaviors in school through

either the encouragement of good behavior or through the threat or handing out of consequences. One Birch student was motivated both by his teacher and her encouragement to pursue the school's character recognition award stating, "She encourages... and wants me to get a key (award)." Another Birch student shared his teacher's subtle and not-so-subtle clues, "If it's bad he'll look at me kind of weird and then sometimes he'll send me to think time... or he'll cough; he'll be like, 'Ahem.' A Maple student showed his appreciation of his teacher's efforts stating, "Yeah, because he tells us that what we need to do right, and what we don't do right." And though not all students saw an influence, overall the students seemed to convey that they appreciated their teachers' concern for their behaviors.

Learning. Three other items dealt with the students' perceptions of the effect that their teachers have on different aspects of their learning, which included Item 3 – *on your learning?*; Item 4 – *how hard you work on your schoolwork?*; and Item 9 – *how much or how well you study?* Overall, the majority of the students interviewed from both schools responded "yes" to each item and provided validation though a follow-up example or story (learning: Birch 67%, Maple 92%; hard work: Birch 75%, Maple 67%; study: Birch 67%, Maple 83%). Again, students perceived that their teachers influenced them most via encouragement. One Birch student shared some of the specific encouragement that he received from his teacher, "Just work hard... so I get really focused on my work and I don't pay attention to other people. I just pay attention to my work and get it done." Another Birch student best summed this teacher's motivation for the encouragement stating, "She wants us to work hard so our grades go up." A Maple student expressed some ways in which she was encouraged by her teacher, "Yeah, she... like in a sense made me push myself so I could actually try hard." Finally, a young man from Maple shared how the encouragement affected him in a very personal way stating, "She influences me to learn more, do my best, and not fail."

Differences between schools. The differences noted from student interviews included the effect that teachers had on how students spent their time outside of school, as well as on the choices students made outside of school hours.

Use of time outside of school. Some interesting differences between Birch Elementary (poverty school) and Maple Elementary (affluent school)

were revealed with regard to the effect their teachers had on what the fifth graders do with their time outside of school. The first difference was the responses to Item 11 – *what you do with your free time outside of school (extra-curricular activities)?* The contrasting results provide a glimpse into differences in the perceived carryover effect of their teachers on their lives outside of school. A closer review of the responses of the Maple students shows that eight of the nine who felt that their teacher affected what they do with their free-time outside of school were encouraged to engage in activities that included school work or studying first, and then fun. Some quotations that backed this sentiment included, “She encourages us to get our homework done before we play with other things at home.” Though the Maple teachers encouraged their students to use their time for school, the teachers were not *all work and no play*, as this student shared, “He tells us to study... and he motivates us to play sports. Get active with your body. Don’t just sit around on the couch.” Conversely, only three of twelve (25%) of the Birch students perceived the carryover effect.

Choices outside of school. Another difference found between the students from the affluent and poverty schools was on the effect teachers had on Item 8 – *on the choices you make outside of school?* Again, very few, two out of the 12 (17%), of the Birch fifth graders saw an effect from their teacher on their choices outside of school, while nine of their 12 counterparts (75%) at the more affluent school affirmed and could validate the effect. The teacher influence outside of school was explained by one Maple student’s response, “When I’m inside school she helps me make better choices, and so I just think of her being there when I’m trying to make a good choice (outside of school).” Another Maple student shared the importance of his teacher’s opinion of him, “Yeah... because someone might know him and tell him how I would be, and then that’d reflect on how he thinks of me as a student.”

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data collected from the student interviews indicate both similarities and differences between the answers given by students from the poverty and affluent schools. Students in both schools noted the importance of teacher encouragement in good behaviors at school.

Marzano et al. (2003) supports this finding, reporting that strong S-T Relationships can be a major factor to decreased disruptions in classrooms. Additionally, students in both schools conveyed that their teachers had an influence on their learning. These implications are in direct alignment with the work of Jensen (2006) who stated that the relationships built by teachers with students “form the single strongest access to student goals, socialization, motivation, and academic performance” (p. 20). Marzano et al. (2003) also supports this sentiment, going so far as to state that strong S-T Relationships are “critical to the success” (p. 64) of the other factors for effective classroom management, which ultimately affect student success.

Analysis of the data also exposed some important differences between the schools with regard to the influence teachers had on their lives *in general*. Overall, the effect size, or the magnitude of the difference between the schools for the number of student responses proposing teacher influence was substantial (1.22). Additionally, the students of poverty reported a significantly lower number of yeses to influence in their lives than their counterparts in the affluent school (see Wilcoxon test in the Results section). This apparent lack of teacher influence on the lives of the students in the poverty school could point to potential problems in these students’ academic future, especially since the trend appears to be forming for the students in this study at such a young age. Balfanz and Legters, (2004) reported poverty as the strongest correlate to students dropping out of high school. Fortunately, there is hope. According to Lee and Burkum (2003), strong S-T Relationships indeed are a key to student success in school. Students who have positive bonds with teachers and others in the school setting are more likely to graduate from high school.

Another important difference dealt with specific student choices and behaviors *outside of school*. On the questions dealing with their teacher’s influence on choices and behaviors outside of school, only five of the 24 (21%) Birch Elementary student responses reported that the teacher was influential, while 18 of the 24 (75%) Maple Elementary responses reported similarly (see Table 2).

Why this discrepancy in the area of teacher influence on poverty versus affluent students, and particularly the lack of influence outside of

school? One reason posited is the lack of experience and education of the teachers themselves. Machtinger (2007) found that high poverty schools generally employ teachers who are less experienced and more often teaching out of their licensure. However, an analysis of the experience and education of the teachers of the students in this study for all six of their years in elementary school (excluding kindergarten) did not reveal a notable discrepancy between the teachers in the poverty school and those in the affluent school. In fact, while all four current teachers in the study were teaching within their licensure, the two teachers at Birch (poverty school) had taught for a combined 37 years and one held a master’s degree, while their two colleagues at Maple (affluent school) had taught for fewer years – a combined 31 – and neither held a master’s degree (see Table 3 for a comparison of all teachers who taught in each of the two schools).

Table 3. *Experience/Education of Teachers of the Participants for their School Careers (Excluding Kindergarten, 2005-2006 through 2010-2011)*

	Average Years of Experience of Teachers	Percent of Teachers in school with Master’s Degrees
Birch Elementary (poverty school)	19.39	49.76%
Maple Elementary (affluent school)	16.44	56.96%

From: Nebraska Department of Education – 2010-2011 State of the Schools Report; A Report of Nebraska Public Schools. *Nebraska Department of Education*. Retrieved December 13, 2012 from http://reportcard.education.ne.gov/Default_State.aspx

Perhaps it is the uniqueness of this particular rural community that explains why the experience and education for the teachers in the two different schools are so similar. Where many schools of poverty, especially in urban areas, do indeed find it necessary to hire under-qualified or newly-qualified teachers, the school district in this midwestern community has several factors that converge to provide more-than-adequate numbers of qualified applicants. First, the local university, established over 100 years ago, has provided a constant flow of high quality teacher candidates as well as providing the opportunity for those teacher candidates to earn an advanced degree. Relatedly, the

community itself has been highly ranked as a desirable community in which to live (NuWire Investments, 2012); thereby drawing still more teachers who wish to live in the community. This sustainable resource of teachers has enabled all schools in the district, both affluent and poverty, access to qualified and competent teacher candidates for years.

So, if the experience and education of the teachers themselves is not the reason for the lack of teacher influence in the lives of poverty students both generally, and specifically outside of school, then what is? The answer may have its roots in the nature of the students' first attachments to their parents and early caregivers, prior to even being admitted to school. Poverty, and its accompanying side effects, can be damaging to the socioemotional, physical, and cognitive well-being of children (Klebanov & Brooks-Gunn, 2006). Bradley et al. (1994) reported that 40 percent of three-year-olds living in chronic poverty had deficiencies in functioning, such as emotional unresponsiveness and language deficits. And when compared to their more affluent counterparts, children of poverty more often struggle to develop any strong relationships, instead forming more stress-ridden attachments with parents, caregivers, and teachers (Evans & English, 2002). The issue seems to continue to develop into the high school years, when low-achieving students often report a sense of alienation from their schools, believing that their teachers do not like or talk down to them (Mouton & Hawkins, 1996). It is precisely this lack of trust and inability to build relationships stemming from these problematic early attachments that indeed may have contributed to the low degree to which the teachers in the poverty school influenced their students as compared to their more affluent counterparts.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An implication of the discrepancy between perceived teacher influence on poverty versus affluent students is that students from poverty schools need more mentoring from teachers as well as other trusted influential adults in terms of the choices that they make with their time and behaviors both in and outside of school. Explicit mentoring has been shown to help students make better choices outside of school, which may ultimately affect their schoolwork and relationships

at school (Jekielek, Moore, & Hair, 2002). A concentrated effort on the part of teachers and administrators to get to know students and their families, both in and out of school, should yield stronger teacher-student relationships and better student learning. Helping students establish relationships and build positive connections with other influential adults outside of school – such as librarians, police, and government officials – through field trips and special invited presentations will also help bridge the gap. Vital mentoring programs, for example Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, bring community volunteers together with at risk students to fulfill the vision of “helping change kids’ perspectives and giving them the opportunity to reach their potential” (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The need for ongoing professional development through which teachers learn the latest research-based methods of instruction, or the newest technologies, is important for improving teaching. However, teachers are wise to not overlook the importance of cultivating S-T Relationships in their classrooms, especially with students of poverty. “Kids raised in poverty are more likely to lack – and need – a caring, dependable adult in their lives, and often it’s teachers to whom children look for that support” (Jensen, 2009, p. 11). Student-teacher relationships are built through purposeful and continual effort, primarily through mentoring on the part of the teacher. It is in the relationship between teacher and student where learning can take root and begin to grow; and the degree to which a teacher invests in that relationship not only affects learning outcomes and student behavior in the classroom, but also potentially impacts each student’s future success.

References

- APA Work Group of the Board of Educational Affairs (1997, November). *Learner-centered Psychological Principles: A framework for School Reform and Redesign* (rev. ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Balfanz, R., Legters, N. (2004). *Locating the Dropout Crisis*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools.

- Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. (2011). *Start Something*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.9iilI3NGKhK6F/b.5962335/k.BE16/Home.htm>.
- Birch, S. H., Ladd, G. W. (1998). Children's interpersonal behaviors and the teacher-child relationship. *Developmental Psychology*, 34, 934–946.
- Bradley, R. H., Whiteside-Mansell, L., Mundfrom, D. J., Casey, P. H., Kelleher, K. J., Pope, S. K. (1994). Early indications of resilience and their relation to experiences in the home environments of low birthweight, premature children living in poverty. *Child Development*, 65 (2), 346–360.
- Cohen, J. (1969). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. New York: Academic Press.
- Crow, S. R. (2009). Relationships that foster intrinsic motivation for information seeking. *School Libraries Worldwide*, 15 (2), 91–112.
- Doll, B., Spies, R. A., LeClair, C. M., Kurien, S. A., Foley, B. P. (2010). Student perceptions of classroom learning environments: development of the ClassMaps survey. *School Psychology Review*, 39 (2), 203–218.
- Evans, G. W., English, K. (2002). The environment of poverty: Multiple stressor exposure, psychophysiological stress, and socioemotional adjustment. *Child Development*, 73 (4), 1238–1248.
- Griggs, M., Gagnon, S., Huelsman, T. J., Kidder-Ashley, P., Ballard, M. (2009). Student-teacher relationships matter: Moderating influences between temperament and preschool social competence. *Psychology in the Schools*, 46 (6), 553–567.
- Howes, C., Hamilton, C. E., Matheson, C. C. (1994). Children's relationships with peers: Differential associations with aspects of the teacher-child relationship. *Child Development*, 65, 253–263.
- Hudley, C., Daoudd, A., Hershberger, R. Wright-Castro, R., Polanco, T. (2003, April). *Student engagement, school climate, and future expectations in high school*. Paper presented at the 2003 biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Tampa, FL. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED475590).
- Jacob, B. A., Lefgren, L. (2007). In low-income schools, parents want teachers who teach. *Education Next*, 7 (3), 59–64.
- Jekielek, S., Moore, K. A., Hair, E. (2002). *Mentoring programs and youth development: A synthesis*. Washington, DC: Child Trend.
- Jensen, E. (2009). *Teaching with poverty in mind: What being poor does to kids' brains and what schools can do about it*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Klebanov, P., Brooks-Gunn, J. (2006, December). Cumulative, human capital, and psychological risk in the context of early intervention: Links with IQ at ages 3, 5, and 8. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1094, 63–82.
- Landsford, J. E., Antonucci, T. C., Akiyama, H., Takahashi, K. (2005). A quantitative and qualitative approach to social relationships and well-being in the United States and Japan. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 36 (1), 1–22.

- Lee, S. J. (2007). The relations between the student-teacher trust relationship and school success in the case of Korean middle schools. *Educational Studies, 33* (2), 209–216.
- Lee, V. E., Burkum, D. T. (2003). Dropping out of high school: The role of school organization and structure. *American Educational Research Journal, 40*, 353–393.
- Machtinger, H. (2007). What do we know about high poverty schools? Summary of the high poverty schools conference at UNC-Chapel Hill. *The High School Journal, 90* (3), 1–8.
- Marzano, R., Marzano, J., Pickering, D. (2003). *Classroom management that works*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- McCombs, B., Whisler, J. (1997). *The learner-centered classroom and schools: Strategies for enhancing student motivation and achievement*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, S. R. (2000). *Falling off track: How teacher-student relationships predict early high school failure rates*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED441907).
- Mouton, S. G., Hawkins, J. (1996). School attachment perspectives of low-attached high school students. *Educational Psychology, 16* (3), 29–304.
- Nebraska Department of Education. (2011). *2010-2011 state of the schools report; A report of Nebraska public schools*. Retrieved from http://reportcard.education.ne.gov/Default_State.aspx.
- Noddings, N. (1988). Schools face crisis in caring. *Education Week, 8* (14), 32.
- NuWire Investments. (2012). Ratings, rankings, and reviews for Kearney, Nebraska. Retrieved from <http://best-places.nuwireinvestor.com>.
- Pianta, R. C. (1994). Patterns of relationships between children and kindergarten teachers. *Journal of School Psychology, 32*, 115–131.
- Soar, R. R., Soar, R. M. (1979). Emotional climate and management. In P. L. Peterson, H. J. Walberg (Eds.), *Research on teaching: Concepts, findings, and implications* (p. 97–119). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.
- U. S. Department of Education. (1994). *What do student grades mean? Differences across schools*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/OR/ResearchRpts/grades.html>.
- U. S. Department of Education. (1998). *School poverty and academic performance: NAEP achievement in high-poverty schools – A special evaluation report for the national assessment of Title I*. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/schoolpoverty/index.html>.
- United States Census Bureau. (2010). *State and County QuickFacts*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>.

MOKYTOJŲ ĮTAKA ĮVAIRIŲ PRADINIŲ MOKYKLŲ MOKINIŲ GYVENIMUI VIDURIO VAKARŲ (JAV) KAIMO BENDRUOMENĖJE

Christopher M. Knoell, Sherry R. Crow
Nebraskos universitetas (Kearney), JAV

Santrauka. Įvadas. Praktikai ir mokslininkai mokinių pažangumo ir adekvataus ankstyvo progreso (AAP) srityje ieško strategijų, kaip palaikyti tinkamą mokinių akademinę pažangą. Viena iš sričių, kurioje praktikai galėtų gauti daugiau informacijos, – mokytojų ir mokinių santykiai skirtingo tipo mokyklose ir situacijose arba tais atvejais, kai mokinių gebėjimai yra skirtingi. **Tikslas.** Šio tyrimo tikslas – palyginti, kokį poveikį mokytojai turi skurdžiai ir turtingai gyvenančių vaikų mokyklų penktos klasės mokiniams Vidurio Vakarų (JAV) kaimo bendruomenėje. **Metodas.** Tyrimas atliktas taikant mišraus metodo požiūrį. Duomenys surinkti naudojant pusiau struktūruotus interviu, apklausti 24 mokiniai. **Rezultatai.** Rezultatai atskleidė panašų skurdžiai ir turtingai gyvenančių mokinių požiūrį į mokytojo įtaką. Požiūris skyrėsi atsakant, kiek apskritai mokytojas turi įtakos vaikų gyvenimui, ypač su mokykla nesusijusiose srityse. **Išvados.** Vaikai, augantys skurde, linkę pasižymėti silpnais baziniais ryšiais su tėvais ir stokoja pasitikėjimo suaugusiaisiais apskritai. Todėl šie vaikai gali neturėti emocinių ir psichologinių pagrindų, kurie leistų natūraliai suformuoti stiprius ryšius su mokytojais. Rekomenduotina teikti intensyvios mentorystės paslaugas mokiniams, gyvenantiems skurde, sudaryti jiems sąlygas daugiau bendrauti su suaugusiaisiais, kad stiprėtų teigiami ryšiai mokykloje ir už jos ribų.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: mokinių ir mokytojų santykiai, mokytojų įtaka, skurdžiai ir turtingai gyvenančių vaikų mokyklos, mentorystė.

*Received: 1 April, 2013
Accepted: 7 October, 2013*