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Minimizing Student in Crisis Incidents Through the Cultivation of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

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Minimizing Student in Crisis Incidents Through the Cultivation of Positive
Teacher-Student Relationships

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A Literature Review Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education

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Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Review of the Literature	7
School-Wide Approaches to Behavior.....	8
Social and Emotional Learning.....	9
Mindfulness.....	11
Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports.....	12
Restorative Practices.....	14
Barriers to Creating Positive Teacher-Student Relationships.....	15
Teacher Perceptions.....	15
Teacher Preparation and Competence.....	16
Improved Student Outcomes as a Result of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships.....	20
Social and Emotional Development.....	22
Educator Role.....	23
Application	26
Conclusion	29
References	32

Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the effects of positive teacher-student relationships on reducing challenging behaviors of students with emotional and behavioral disorders as well as “in crisis” occurrences. Teachers are often ill-prepared for managing challenging behaviors as well as supporting the emotional and social needs of students. In order for teachers to support students, they must first increase their own emotional literacy and receive explicit instruction on managing challenging student behaviors. Various social and emotional learning programs exist which focus on building positive teacher-student relationships through the emphasis on a positive culture and climate within a school system.

Keywords: emotional and behavioral disorder, adverse childhood experiences, social and emotional learning, mindfulness, positive behavior intervention supports, teacher-student relationships

Minimizing Student in Crisis Incidents Through the Cultivation of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Much of the attention currently given to improving students' academic achievement addresses issues of curriculum, instructional strategies, and interventions or services for struggling learners (Epstein, Atkins, Cullinan, Kutash, & Weaver, 2008). Even after addressing these issues, barriers still remain for some students. New approaches to learning go beyond explicitly academic interventions to take on the learning challenges posed by problematic student behavior and the ways schools deal with it (Epstein et al., 2008). According to Epstein, et al, approaches aimed at improving school and classroom environments, including reducing the negative effects of disruptive or distracting behaviors, can enhance the chances that effective teaching and learning will occur, both for the students exhibiting problem behaviors and for their classmates. Deficits or advancements in academic learning, physical or mental disabilities, various medical and mental health conditions, adverse childhood experiences, or trauma, such as abuse, poverty, or family structure are just a few examples of various areas which students require support from school personnel. When addressing students with special needs, Murray (2002) defines students with high incidence disabilities defined as the large number of students who receive special education services for learning disabilities, and emotional and behavioral disabilities. Students with high incidence disabilities also have a heightened risk of experiencing social, behavioral, and emotional problems. These students are also more likely to experience delinquency, behavioral and conduct problems, anxiety, and poor social skills (Murray, 2002). Externalizing behavior problems (EBP), including aggression, noncompliance, inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity represent the most frequent concerns cited in

children's mental health, primary care, and educational settings (Graziano, Slavec, Ros, Garb, Hart, & Garcia, 2015) Increasingly, educators are experiencing students in crisis or students who exhibit emotional or physical escalations which can not only be a stressful time for the students and staff, but also may potentially pose a safety risk for the individual student, peers, and staff. How an educator responds and supports a student in these times of crisis has an impact on the level of immediate escalation as well and the likelihood of, and severity of, future times of crisis. It is likely that the challenges presented by students with learning and behavior problems, in both general education and special education classrooms, results in receiving differential rates of desired teacher instructional variables over time, based in part on the ongoing reciprocal influences of teacher and students on each other (Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2018) Teachers often lack knowledge of specific social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive disorders of potential students. They are then unprepared for managing individual needs such as challenging student behaviors. Schools have often taken broad approaches to positive student outcomes through school-wide social and emotional learning initiatives and programs, changes in curriculum, and professional learning opportunities for staff. These initiatives are generally research-based and effective for the general population of students, but rely on consistency and fidelity of implementation by all staff. When a teacher cultivates compassion and empathy, students begin to regard the teacher as someone who understands and cares. They can often begin to see the world in a new light (McKinney & Berube, 2018).

This review of literature defined and provided a brief history of students in crisis and how educators and administrators can implement both classroom and school-wide systems which proactively support students with emotional and behavioral disorders who experience "in crisis"

incidents as well as ensuring the emotional and physical well-being of all students and staff. It will also examine the positive implications teacher-student relationships have on overall student outcomes. As defined by Mihales, Morse, Allsopp, & McHatton, relationship refers to the interaction between adults and students, where the adult does what is best for the welfare of the student, taking into account the student's developmental level and associated needs.

Review of the Literature

The Association of Children's Mental Health states that a crisis situation exists any time that your child is no longer safe to himself or others or when there is a need for immediate action or intervention. It is usually a time when all of your energies are being demanded in order to care a child. (ACMH, n.d.). There are many factors that can lead to a student demonstrating behaviors which are challenging for the student to overcome, teachers to manage, and have an impact on relationships with both adults and peers. Students with emotional and/or behavior disorders struggle to regulate their emotional responses to adverse situations and this may be exhibited through challenging behavioral situations within the school setting. Unfortunately, students with emotional and behavioral disorders appear to be underserved in K-12 schools. Some students within a school population meet eligibility criteria for receiving services for emotional and behavior disorders or engage in problematic behaviors such as oppositional defiant- and conduct disorder-related behaviors and demonstrate frequent patterns of antisocial behaviors (Mihalas, et al, 2009). According to Minahan, a student struggling with a mental health disorder may impair their ability to perceive people's actions accurately, stay regulated when stressed, or cope with typical classroom interactions (Minahan, 2019). Many children have adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) which also impact their ability to manage emotions as well as build positive adult and peer relationships. Adverse childhood experiences can have a lasting, negative effect on a child's health and well-being (Sacks, Murphey, & Moore, 2014). Adverse situations that could trigger a mental health crisis in any child could include an economic hardship, divorce or breakup of parents or guardians, incarceration of a parent or

guardian, death of a loved one, loss of residence, the various forms of abuse, or being witness to violence (ACMH, n.d.). These incidents can also be referred to as events of trauma.

Within the classroom setting, students with emotional and behavioral disorders exhibit a wide variety of challenging behaviors, both internalizing and externalizing, which can interfere with their abilities to be successful in school, leading to academic deficits and vice versa; academic deficits leading to challenging behaviors (Sutherland et al., 2008; Mihalas, et al, 2009). Students with emotional and behavioral disorders have significant mental health needs that often encompass other difficulties such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD), cognitive learning disorders, or childhood trauma to name a few (Mihalas et al., 2009). To succeed in school, students with mental health challenges tend to need a steady diet of positive interactions with their teachers. Otherwise they may become uncomfortable, uncooperative, or withdrawn and may not be able to access the curriculum, sustain effort, engage in tasks, or even attend school at all (Minahan, 2019)

School-Wide Approaches to Behavior

Limited knowledge and training in classroom management as well as ineffective school discipline policies can lead to misconceptions about behavior and the use of unsuccessful and even harmful practices, such as unintended reinforcement of the challenging behaviors resulting in a cycle of negative interactions. Unfortunately, schools often manage challenging behaviors through the use of by punitive practices (Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2009). The entire faculty should learn some essential skills in meeting the mental health needs of students (Minahan, 2019). Minahan states that all faculty need to know how to interact positively and

effectively with struggling students so they can feel safe and connected to their classrooms and schools. Effective interaction strategies are essential for students' success, and we need to prioritize them just as we do with other essential accommodations.

Effective learning-centered classrooms are not without dedicated teachers who encourage affirmation and positive relationships within the classroom and, at the same time, empower students to develop and achieve to their full potential (Nichols, 2006). Learning-centered schools also become those where upper-level administrators empower teachers and local administrators to make decisions in an effort to create the best classroom learning environments possible. While empowering those at the local level, administrators would do well to promote a building-level environment that encourages teachers' and support staffs' self-worth by encouraging an affirming, supportive building environment (Nichols, 2006). Classroom management practices, especially the management of challenging behaviors, is a difficult task for many classroom teachers; which often results in loss of instructional time. Identifying and describing students' challenging behaviors, so that practitioners and researchers are using similar terms to describe similar behaviors, is key to designing interventions for effective school and classroom behavior management (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013). To move toward establishing a strong school culture for learning, schools must emphasize strong teacher-student relationships, high academic and behavioral expectations for all students, and offer an attractive school building (Parker, p. 35, 2019).

Social and Emotional Learning. Educators, parents, and the public recognize the need for a broad educational agenda to not only improve academic performance but also to enhance

students' social-emotional competence, character, health, and civic engagement. (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) According to Jennings & Greenberg (2009), the procosical model proposes that teacher-child relationships, classroom management, and social and emotional learning are all part of a healthy classroom climate. A healthy classroom climate directly contributes to children's social, emotional, and academic outcomes. Improvements in classroom climate may reinforce a teacher's enjoyment of teaching, efficacy, and commitment to the profession, therefore creating a positive outlook that may prevent teacher burnout (Jennings, 2014). An emphasis on social emotional learning programs within schools has not only improved teacher perceptions of the job, but has led to a reduction of school-wide problem behaviors. Such evidence-based emotional learning and intervention programs facilitate social and emotional learning through self-awareness, awareness of others, and the ability to make responsible decisions; such as supporting emotional literacy, self-control, social competence, interpersonal relations and problem-solving (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). While the findings of various studies have confirmed the effectiveness of social-emotional learning programs, an emphasis is put upon an individual teacher's ability to effectively and consistently implement such programs. Generally speaking, these programs are aimed at teaching these skills to students and lack the explicit training required to promote social and emotional literacy amongst teachers (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This statement suggests that teachers are often under-prepared to effectively utilize social and emotional learning programs. The classroom environment must be conducive to social and emotional growth of all individuals; both students and adults through the facilitation of interpersonal problem solving and conflict resolution (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In their study, Greenberg & Jennings hypothesize that teachers need the knowledge of social and

emotional learning and the needs of students at different ages to develop effective and caring classroom management and to better understand the relations between emotions, cognition, and behavior. According to the prosocial theoretical model, teachers who are more socially and emotionally competent have more supportive relationships with their students, engage in more effective classroom management strategies, and more effectively teach the social and emotional curricula.

Mindfulness. Mindfulness refers to the ability to view one's thoughts and feelings from a larger perspective and involves two primary mechanisms: self-regulation of attention and nonjudgmental awareness of experience. Regulation of attention promotes awareness of one's emotional, cognitive, and physical experience as it occurs moment to moment. Self-regulated learners are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their academic achievement (Stanulis & Manning, 2002). Nonjudgmental awareness, characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance of that experience, can increase coping by decreasing reactivity (Jennings, 2014). Mindfulness is associated with overall positive well-being which suggests that mindfulness may promote resilience in response to stress. (Jenning, 2014) As a result, mindfulness may serve as a means for educators to minimize the negative effects of work-related stress and may promote the intrapersonal dimensions of social and emotional curriculum, self-awareness, and self-management (Jennings, 2014). It has been found that mindfulness has the largest effect size on reducing disruptive behavior (Stanulis & Manning, 2002). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers gain a deeper understanding of their own mindfulness in order to appropriately manage challenging situations, act as a role model of

self-regulation, adequately practice interpersonal relationships with adults and students, as well as serve as an advocate for students with emotional or behavioral disorders.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). A common school-wide approach to creating a positive school climate and culture is Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS was developed as a result of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1997. PBIS is a set of intervention practices and organization systems for establishing the social culture and intensive behavior supports needed to achieve academic and social success for all students (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010). A primary focus of School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) is the reduction of problem behaviors that result in office discipline referrals, disruption, and reduced academic engagement (Horner et al., 2010). Horner, et al, state that an increasing body of evidence supports the finding that implementation of SWPBIS is associated with reductions of problem behaviors. Prevention and early intervention for behavior problems are important factors in ensuring positive school outcomes for children. PBIS serves in this capacity as a preventative measure which provides much needed intervention to students before they reach a crisis state (Tillery et al., 2009). Recent research indicates that the primary prevention elements of SWPBIS can be implemented with high fidelity in typical school settings (Horner et al., 2010).

PBIS focuses on positively-stated expectations and lessons taught through explicit teaching. Students learn and revisit expectations throughout the school year by the demonstration of skills in various settings; especially settings which have been found to be areas in which behaviors are more prevalent. PBIS utilizes applied behavior analysis, inclusive ethics, system change, and collaboration amongst stakeholders to enhance student learning through it's

proactive, system-level support (Andreou, McIntosh, Ross, & Kahn, 2015). There is an emphasis on the use of data, and examining it regularly, to make informed decisions regarding the success and fidelity of system practices, progress-monitoring student behaviors, the selection and implementation of intervention support as well as determining patterns in order to make modifications to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the system (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012; Andreaou et al., 2015). PBIS supports the research correlating supportive relationships between positive school and classroom-wide culture and individual student success (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

The framework of PBIS offers three tiers of support based upon student level of performance in which each tier consists of specific practices and systems features used to guide implementation (Horner et al., 2017). The general student population, ideally 80-85 percent of all students, will require only universally effective Tier 1 strategies consisting primarily of access to general education curriculum as well as preventative, universal supports. Within the Tier 1 system of supports are clearly defined behavioral expectations as well as acknowledgement in the form of positive reinforcement. Students requiring additional services and more specific instruction and feedback fall within the Tier 2 and Tier 3 systems of support. These students require more explicit teaching of behavioral expectations within the multiple settings of the school. Preventative secondary measures include check and connect, check-in/check-out, First Step to Success, and think time (Horner et al., 2010).

Educators must be even more intentional and strategic in the interventions implemented and monitored for students in the Tier 3 level of support. Consideration of student needs (academically, emotionally, socially, and mentally) both in school and in the home environment,

are vital in choosing strategies that will best meet the needs of individual students. In order to ensure the effectiveness and fidelity of the implementation of PBIS, a districtwide approach to training in RTI and PBIS targeted specifically toward teachers' needs is necessary to ensure that the teachers are ready to face the challenge of school-wide prevention and intervention (Tilley et al., 2009).

Restorative Practices. Restorative practice is a constructivist, learning-based approach to pedagogy towards conflict and wrongdoing that distinguishes between simply managing behaviors and building, supporting, and strengthening relationships (Passarella, 2017). Restorative practices represent an attempt to reform discipline and improve relationships among stakeholders while minimizing punitive disciplinary measures (Passarella, 2017). It emphasizes those involved in an incident work together to come to a mutual resolution of the problem and determine how to maintain a positive outlook moving forward. Restorative practice encourages ownership of wrong-doing, recognition of how others are affected in the situation, and repairing the harm resulting from the wrong-doing. A school-wide approach establishes common values and norms, promotes a sense of belonging to the school community, and builds trusting relationships, leaving fewer students in crisis (Passarella, 2017). Restorative practice encourages a non-judgemental approach rather than attempting to simply punish as a result of the wrong-doing (Hansberry, 2016; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). Whole-school implementation seeks to prevent problems by cultivating, in students and teachers, the skills to deal with behavioral and interpersonal issues before they escalate (Passarella, 2017). As staff manage student behaviors, they should consider taking the perspective that many behaviors do not warrant punitive punishment, but rather can be viewed for an opportunity for teachable moments

for students to understand the repercussions of their actions and identify potential solutions to repair the incident or prevent the same incident in the future (Passarella, 2017).

Barriers to Creating Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Teacher Perceptions General education teachers sometimes believe that their classrooms are inappropriate places for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Yet general educators tend to make limited accommodations and/or are resistant to changes in tasks, materials, and teaching formats (Sutherland et al., 2008). The first federally funded, large scale research identifying teacher characteristics contributing to desired student outcomes was conducted in the 1970s (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Often times, the behavior of students with emotional or behavioral disorders can be misunderstood or perceived as being disrespectful or disruptive because the student disabilities are often invisible or undiagnosed (Minahan, 2019). The literature supports the effect that teacher perception of students has on classroom climate, teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, and frequency of negative behaviors occurring. In a study by Tillery, Verjas, Meyers, & Collins examining teacher perceptions of student behavior and interventions, teachers regarded themselves as the primary influence on student behavior and regarded their actions, inactions, and interactions with students being the determining factors in negative behaviors emerging. The effects of school climate and peer influences were considered as well (Tillery et al., 2009). Teachers can view students and specific incidents from various perspectives. It has been confirmed that there is an association between teachers' perceptions of the relationship they hold with students and both teacher and student negative behaviors (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002). A study by Stuhlman & Pianta examined the narratives of teachers regarding specific students in relationship to the teachers' behavior in

the classroom towards the students. It was found that teachers behaved more negatively toward a child when their relationship narratives about the child were more negative. Likewise, teachers behaved in a positive manner toward a student when they perceived a more positive relationship through the narratives. Not surprisingly, these findings support that teachers and students hold a dynamic relationship in which both the teacher and students beliefs and expectations of the other are reflected in their behavioral interactions. It also suggests that teachers' emotional responses toward children is reflected by the student behavior (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002). Teachers can consider individual stages of development, pathology such as disorders or syndromes a child may have, and home environment when approaching the management of student behaviors (Tillery et al., 2009). If the teacher understands that a child's difficult behavior and emotional reactivity results from problems at home, she may show greater empathy and be better positioned to help the child self-regulate rather than resort to punitive or coercive methods (Jennings, 2014).

Teacher Preparation and Competence. Challenging behavior in schools has an impact on both students and teachers. Managing challenging behavior and enabling a safe learning environment can go a long way towards reducing the stress levels of teachers and learners alike and fostering meaningful learning (Epstein et al., 2008). When teachers feel inadequately prepared to address challenging behavior in their classrooms, behaviors initially deemed "minor" could escalate to levels with significant consequences (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016). Student deficits in learning and behavior can make it difficult for educators to provide these students with adequate and effective instruction within the general education setting while also considering the varying needs of all peers (Sutherland et al., 2008). It has been found that teacher preparation programs have fallen short in preparing would-be teachers for, not only, the social and emotional

needs of their future students, but also the emotional regulation and classroom management required of individuals to manage and cope with everyday classroom situations and challenging student behaviors. It was found that pre-service teachers were anxious about managing behavior in their own classrooms (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016). Overall, both general education and special education teachers lack the preparation and skills to meet the extensive needs of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Mihalas, et al, 2009). Current teacher preparation programs and professional development activities typically enfold discussions or information about the importance of relationships within broader preservice training. Research has shown that marginally exposing educators to information does not have statistically nor practically meaningful effects on teachers' uptake and use of specific practices (Cook et al., 2018). Instead, educators need to receive professional development that emphasizes the adoption and use of intentional, practical strategies they can implement to establish and maintain positive relationships with their students (Cook et al., 2018).

Teachers are tasked with providing scaffolding of support to meet every students needs; regardless if a student exhibits challenging behaviors. With pre-service teachers, it is important that we begin preparation for managing challenging behavior with helping them identify their own strengths and weaknesses and help them understand that they play a role in escalation (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016). Teachers who are inexperienced, unprepared, or unequipped to manage the social and emotional needs of students as well as job stress may also find that they begin to struggle with their own emotional regulation; which can lead to a higher likelihood of negative perceptions of themselves, the job, and the students (Jennings, 2014). Emotionally exhausted teachers are at risk of becoming cynical and callous and may eventually feel they have

little to offer or gain from continuing, and so drop out of the teaching workforce. Others may stay- although unhappily- coping by maintaining a rigid classroom climate enforced by hostile and sometimes harsh measures bitterly working at a suboptimal level of performance until retirement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). As previously mentioned, high levels of emotional distress may lead to burnout and a downward spiral of deteriorating teacher performance and child behavior (Jennings, 2014). Burnout takes a serious toll on teachers, students, schools, districts, and communities. Burned-out teachers and the learning environments they create can have harmful effects on students, especially those who are at risk of mental health problems (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Socially and emotionally competent teachers set the tone of the classroom by developing supportive and encouraging relationships with their students, designing lessons that build on student strengths and abilities, establishing and implementing behavioral guidelines in ways that promote intrinsic motivation, coaching students through conflict situations, encouraging cooperation among students, and acting as a role model for respectful and appropriate communication and exhibitions of prosocial behavior (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). They, socially and emotionally competent teachers, recognize their emotions, emotional patterns, and tendencies and know how to generate and use emotions such as joy and enthusiasm to motivate learning in themselves and others. They have a realistic understanding of their capabilities and recognize their emotional strengths and weaknesses (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). When teachers lack the social and emotional competence to effectively manage their classrooms, they experience emotional exhaustion, which eventually leads to the tendency toward depersonalization, a hostile attitude towards students (Jennings, 2014). Not all teachers are

created equal. Some teachers are more naturally equipped with the ability to manage stress and de-escalate students in challenging, “in crisis” situations. Behavioral and academic challenges can also have a negative impact on student-teacher interactions. Both general and special educators must understand the effect behavior plays on instruction and overall teacher-student interactions (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016). As a result, students with challenging behaviors are managed through means that keep the students away from the learning environment (Mihalas et al., 2009) and opportunities to learn and apply coping, self-regulation, and relationship-building skills. As teacher frustration towards the challenging behaviors mounts, teachers may respond in a manner which further escalates the student behaviors and compounds the problem. Teachers need to recognize behaviors that present the greatest challenge to them and how their own responses to the situation play a role in the escalation or de-escalation of behavior (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016).

If students engage in problem behavior, the likelihood that others interacting in that environment will respond in predictable ways increases. The implication for educators is to understand that they cannot make children behave. Instead educators, can embed effective instruction and support strategies within classroom environments to increase prosocial behavior (Sutherland et al., 2008). Often times, practices in place in the school setting serve to encourage negative relationships among teachers and students; leading to a lack of motivation among students (Nichols, 2006). As stated previously, students thrive in a learning environment rich in affirmation and as well as promotes individual choice, self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and student empowerment (Nichols, 2006).

Aggressive behaviors coupled with teacher lack of preparedness for managing challenging behaviors increases the likelihood of students experiencing negative teacher-student relationships. Resistance and negativity toward low-performing and at-risk students, including students with emotional and behavioral disorders, may in part be due to general education teachers' reports that they feel unprepared to teach and manage students with disabilities (Mihalas et al., 2009). Without teacher education that emphasizes the needs of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, the efficacy of relationship building with these students will be compromised (Mihalas et al., 2009). Rather than reprimanding a student for challenging behavior, a well-informed teacher might find ways to help the student self-regulate. To do this, the teacher must understand how emotional regulation develops and how to support its development (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers' social and emotional characteristics may play a critical role in teacher and classroom quality. They suggest that mindfulness and self-compassion are important contributors to social and emotional competence. They also suggest that, by supporting teachers' well-being and social and emotional competence, we may improve their performance and improve classroom quality (Jennings, 2014).

Improved Student Outcomes as a Result of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Findings across multiple disciplines all point to the importance of relationships as a core construct of human well-being than can be targeted via intervention (Cook, Coco, Zhang, Duong, Renshaw, & Frank, 2018)). Unfortunately, educators are under more pressure to attain higher academic standards and increase student test scores resulting in less time spent building relationships with students. More educator and student stress combined with weaker teacher-student relationships can lead to negative outcomes for both students and educators.

According to the American Psychological Association, students who have close, positive and supportive relationships with teachers will attain higher levels of academic achievement than those students with more conflict in their relationships and make school a happier place (APA, n.d.). Positive teacher–student relationships help develop students’ emotional connection and sense of safety that serves to enhance engagement in academic pursuits and serves as a buffer against risk (Cook et al., 2018). Socially supportive relationships can have powerful and lasting effects on the lives of children and youth (Murray, 2002). Students who are unable to relate to others in a meaningful way are incapable of learning at their full potential and so this basic human need for connection must be met (Townsend, 2017). Likewise, students with inadequate relationships with teachers may develop a dislike for school and become disengaged (Parker, 2019, p. 20). Negative relationships with caregivers and teachers are known risk factors for mental and behavioral health problems (Cook et al., 2018). Overall, students are willing to engage in successful school behaviors and even strive toward high levels of achievement when there is a level of trust, respect, and communication (Mihalas et al., 2009). No single intervention strategy is likely to affect all of behavior or adjustment areas for all students, socially supportive relationships with adults have been shown to influence a broad range of social, behavioral, emotional, and academic outcomes including; depression, anxiety, self esteem, delinquency, social competence, achievement motivation, academic performance, involvement with drugs and alcohol, and decisions related to staying in or dropping out of school (Murray, 2002). The emotional support of a classroom is enhanced when teachers take the time to communicate with students that they care about their well-being (Mihalas et al., 2009). In response to Global Teacher Prize winner Andria Zafiakou’s belief that building relationships is

the most important thing a teacher can do; Jarmy argues that strong links between teachers and pupils not only make school a happier place, but [teacher-student relationships] have been proven to boost results (Jarmy, 2018).

Research has found it imperative that teachers cultivate student relationships through the discovery of student interests as well as individual student strengths and weaknesses. Educators who deliberately put forth the effort to build relationships of trust and respect leave a lasting impression on their students. Teachers who value relationships have an understanding that without meaningful relationships, lifetime learning may remain out of reach for some students (McKinney & Berube, 2018). Adult-child relationships are multi-dimensional. At one time, an adult serves in multiple roles including a teacher, a caretaker, disciplinarian, and a secure base for the child (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002). For some students, it may be difficult to trust and build relationships with adults as a result of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Teachers may serve in the role as the only adult in the children's lives who provides them with emotional, behavioral, and cognitive support and overall values and skills that they require to be successful.

Social and emotional development. A correlation has been found between positive teacher-student relationships and overall student outcomes, which is supported by the results of various studies including Hattie's meta-analysis of teacher practices in relation to the influence on student achievement. Findings have indicated that students having a feeling of being connected and a sense of belonging results in greater mental health such as social and school competence, perseverance, motivation, self-confidence, and self-efficacy as well as lower average levels of stress (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Nichols, 2006; Vandenbroucke, Spilt, Verschueren, Piccinin, & Baeyens, 2018). The relationship that a child has with his or her

teacher in the early elementary grades is also associated with a child's ability to develop appropriate relationships with peers and future teachers (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002) while problematic relationships between teachers and kindergarten students with challenging behaviors are correlated with both academic performance and challenging behaviors in the eighth grade (Sutherland et al., 2008). The same can be said for student motivation. Teacher-student relationships serve as a backbone for student success through increased student motivation, engagement, and ultimate student success (Townsend, 2017). A project by Nichols suggests that the source of motivation is internal to one's self, but student motivation is best supported by a classroom in which teacher-student relationships are promoted (Nichols, 2006). According to the self-system and self-determination theories, three physiological needs must be met in order for students to become motivated. Students' needs of relatedness, competency, and autonomy. Teachers can meet these needs taking an interest in the students, providing structure, and providing opportunities for students to make their own choices. When student needs are met, their engagement will increase; as will test performance and overall grades (Roora, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011).

Educator role. The verbal environment structured by the teacher plays a powerful role in establishing norms for what is acceptable in the classroom. Children take cues from their teacher and peers in developing and reflecting appraisals of others (Stanulis & Manning, 2002). Teachers provide modeling that is influential. According to Stanulis & Manning, when teachers act a certain way toward a child over time, other pupils often observe and imitate the teacher's behavior. Gradually, this treatment is reinforced as a cultural norm in the classroom. A reflective classroom teacher assumes conscious and deliberate responsibility for her modeling

(Stanulis & Manning, 2002). There appears to be an association over time between both teacher and student behavior that results in changes in the behavior of both. Combine these social transactions with the developmental association between learning and behavior problems, and a complex web of associated factors emerges. Interventions targeting multiple levels of classroom contexts necessary to result in any significant change in developmental outcomes (Sutherland et al., 2008). If teachers want to build productive relationships with all of their students, it is critical for them to understand how mental health disabilities can affect how children read social cues and interpret the words spoken to them. Minahan states that it's neither difficult nor time consuming to learn about the reasons behind some common behavioral patterns. Nor is it time-consuming to write up and adopt some interaction strategy accommodations tailored to their needs. However, the benefits are considerable (Minahan, 2019). These strategies can make it much easier to build a comfortable learning environment where all students can learn and thrive (Minahan, 2019) McKinney and Berube offer strategies to teachers for creating meaningful relationships with students. Strategies revolve around teachers listening to students, building students' self-confidence, sharing information about themselves, involving students in the learning process, demonstrating compassion and empathy, admitting one's own mistakes, and the practice of self-reflection to assess how personal behavioral choices might ultimately influence future outcomes for the student in the relationship (McKinney & Berube, 2018; Mihalas et al., 2009). Parker provides four strategies for educators to keep in mind to help students know that they care: take a learner-centered approach, display caring behaviors, use a responsive classroom approach, and be aware of the effects of students feeling disconnected (Parker, 2019, p. 21). The classroom environment must be conducive to social and emotional growth of all individuals;

both students and adults through the facilitation of interpersonal problem solving, motivation, and conflict resolution (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Nichols, 2006). Teachers' psychosocial characteristics may impact their ability to create and maintain optimal classroom environments and supportive relationships with challenging students. (Jennings. 2014) Teachers must define not only a classroom culture that is motivating for their students, but also for themselves as a teacher (Nichols, 2006). When teachers foster a sense of community in their classroom, students exhibit a more prosocial orientation, resulting in fewer disruptive behaviors (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers who are skilled at providing emotional support respond to their students with warmth and sensitivity, and they recognize, understand and are responsive to their students' individual needs and perspectives (Jennings. 2014).

Application

Teacher-student relationships play a vital role in future student outcomes (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002; Nichols, 2006; Murray, 2002; McKinney & Berube, 2018). The relationship a teacher has with a student often correlates with student behavior and academic achievement (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002; Nichols, 2006; Murray, 2002; McKinney & Berube, 2018). Therefore, an emphasis must be put on creating a classroom climate in which students feel safe and valued. A responsible teacher assumes conscious and deliberate responsibility for her modeling (Stanulis & Manning, 2002). Student success in the school setting is promoted when students begin to see the classroom as a safe, comforting environment where their individual needs are met and they feel self-worth. This is especially true for students with emotional and behavioral disorders or who have experienced adverse childhood experiences. Some students may have a mistrust and feel apprehensive regarding build relationships with adults as a result of their previous negative experiences which could have included experiencing or witnessing a form of abuse, abandonment, death of an important individual, economic hardship, etc. (Sacks, Murphey, & Moore, 2014). It can be difficult for educators to persistent in their efforts to connect with these students as many exhibit anti-social, defiant, disrespectful, and aggressive behaviors. Educators who are persistent in their verbal and non-verbal communication with, not only individual students, but all students and staff encourage positive relationships (Stanulis & Manning, 2002). Teachers need to recognize that early adolescents with high incidence disabilities need to feel supported by adults within schools (Murray, 2002). Murray recommends teachers provide students with opportunities to learn skills for building positive relationships with adults, learn more about students' backgrounds, interests, and communities, develop

increased awareness of classroom interactions, and model and expect appropriate behavior. Demonstration of caring and nurturing behaviors allows teachers to slowly gain the trust and respect of students; in turn promoting student success of demonstrating social, behavioral, and cognitive achievement throughout school, home, and community settings (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002; Nichols, 2006; Murray, 2002; McKinney & Berube, 2018). Teachers need more specific information about effective ways to engage and relate to students. According to Minahan, accommodations will vary for individual students depending on their specific mental health, social, behavioral, and emotional challenges. Generally, though, they include interaction strategies designed to help teachers build relationships with given students, give them praise effectively, and give them directions in a way that won't lead to defensiveness. Minahan suggests that it is important for teachers to find time to make personal connections with students whenever possible. Concrete examples of kindness helps students know their teacher likes them despite challenging behavior. Building relationships in this way not only helps students feel more comfortable, it also makes it easier for teachers to read student cues (Minahan, 2019).

As discussed within this literature review, pre-service teachers lack adequate preparation in general classroom management and strategies for managing challenging student behaviors (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016). This is a topic in which is in need of further attention and action. With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the resulting inclusion of students with disabilities and various other challenges within mainstream education, educators must be more prepared than ever to address and manage student needs as well as their own personal well-being. Teacher preparatory programs lack the depth of management and de-escalation strategies needed to adequately prepare individuals for today's

classrooms. This lack of readiness can lead inexperienced teachers to respond to students in a manner or provide a consequence that is either harsh or escalates the student behavior.

Conclusion

After evaluating the literature, a few themes emerged which became evident in supporting positive teacher-student relationships leading to minimizing challenging student behavior. First, teachers must be aware of their own social and emotional competence before they may adequately support student emotional and academic development (Jennings, 2014). Adults may lack the depth of emotional literacy and mindfulness needed to accurately and effectively carry out the implementation and explicit teaching required of many social and emotional learning programs as well as create a positive culture and climate for optimal learning within their classroom. To be successful in implementing school-wide behavior support and intervention systems, school districts must provide all staff with professional development that addresses the specific social and emotional skills that are required to enact the specific program. While teacher-student relationships were the overall topic this literature review was aiming to address, it became abundantly clear that the positive relationships required to minimize student behaviors and to support positive student outcomes expanded beyond the teacher-student relationship. In fact, literature supported the importance of teachers building positive relationships with colleagues, parents, and the community. Adults serve as role models for children. As adults demonstrate positive interactions, conflict resolution, and empathy; children are learning and being encouraged to put the skills into practice as well. Encouragement of relationship-building supports the creation of a school environment which nurtures each individual child. A positive culture and climate where each student is valued for the attributes which they contribute to the community is vital in increase student self-worth and acceptance amongst other students.

There is a misconception that students who exhibit challenging behaviors are purposefully acting disrespectful, noncompliant, or non-participatory (Minahan, 2019); in a manner which puts to the test most well established classroom expectations. Much focus is concentrated on the challenging behaviors of students in a manner that draws negative attention to the student and may lead to increased severity and duration of student challenging behaviors. In the moment when students are exhibiting challenging behaviors, teachers are left with the responsibility to make the quick decision to not take the students' behavior personally and to also act empathetically. How a teacher responds to challenging student behavior during a time of crisis can have a lasting impact on the success of the student to learn important emotional skills which will support the development of self-regulation skills and reduce the incidents of challenging behavior (Jennings, 2014).

Just as educators are continually evaluating and reflecting upon academic teaching practices and student learning; they must be conducting the same practices for the emotional growth and development of themselves and students. It is important that teachers continually seek to deepen their knowledge of emotional and behavioral disorders as well as social and emotional learning programs and trauma informed practices. If teachers do encounter an incident involving a student in an emotional or behavioral crisis; they must call upon the solid relationship that they have built with the student and the strategies they employ to de-escalate the the student misbehavior (Minahan, 2019)

The occupation of "teacher" is vastly broader than being tasked with instructing students in academic areas. Teachers are not only in charge of their own destiny, but are among the elite

few who are privileged with using the positive relationship they build with students to influence the destiny of every student they encounter.

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