Let's Chat! Do Informal Conversations with Students Improve Engagement, Relatedness, and Belonging in the Classroom?

Julia Gardner
St. Mary's College of Maryland

Abstract: According to Maslow (1945), belonging is a basic need shared by all humans. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), relatedness needs must be met for one to become intrinsically motivated. In the context of the classroom, a teacher may be able to develop relatedness and belonging in their students by aiming to establish a strong teacher-student relationship. The purpose of this study was to examine whether relatedness, belonging , and student engagement would improve after the teacher engaged in five-minute informal conversations with each student. Second grade students (*n*=25) at a diverse school in St Mary's County, Maryland completed surveys before and after the informal conversations. The goal of the surveys was to identify improvements in feelings of relatedness and belonging. An observational checklist was used to identify engagement levels before and after the informal conversations. The surveys revealed an improvement in feelings of relatedness after the informal conversations. It is suggested that if teachers spend some time getting to know the backgrounds of their students, the overall classroom experience will be more positive for the student.

Introduction

At the most basic level, humans want to feel like they belong. They want to feel connected to others in a meaningful way, in the sense that they want share their appreciation for others and in return feel like they are being appreciated (Maslow, 1945). When relatedness needs are met, workers feel more personally satisfied and produce favorable outcomes, and intrinsic motivation abounds (Ryan & Deci 2000). When belongingness needs are met, teenagers are less likely to drop out of high school or abuse substances (Osterman, 2000). When the needs for belonging and relatedness are satisfied, people are capable of functioning at their most active, positive, and inspired capacity (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

People typically want to feel appreciated by the groups of people they see the most regularly (Maslow, 1945). As such, establishing feelings of belonging may be especially important in the places where people spend the most time (e.g., home, work, school). Children, like adults, require their needs of belonging and relatedness to be satisfied in order to function at their most inspired levels (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Osterman, 2000; Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003). Children also spend an abundance of time at school in the presence of teachers and peers. Taken together, it can be

deduced that teachers and peers in school play a key role in establishing a child's overall well-being in the classroom environment (Goodenow, 1993; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The teacher plays an integral role in making the individual student feel valued. More than peers, teachers are responsible for a child's emotional engagement in school (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Osterman, 2000). The relationship between the teacher and the student has been qualified as "Teacher Student Relationship Quality" or TSRQ in empirical research (Baker, 1999; Hughes, 2011). A teacher can make a student feel cared for by working on developing a strong TSRQ, which can also influence motivation, engagement, and academic performance (Hughes, 2011). Research suggests that TSRQ may be especially important to develop in the early grades, because it may have a comparatively strong influence achievement and engagement (Hughes et al., 2008).

The relationship between student feelings of relatedness, their engagement in the classroom, and TSRQ has never been explored together in the context of a second grade classroom before. In the present study, I used an action research design to see if each of these factors could be improved as a result of having informal conversations with every student in one second grade class.

Theoretical Framework

Relatedness and Belonging, at the Core of the Human Condition. Maslow (1945) suggested that people have basic needs that, when met, allow them to feel satisfied and fulfilled in life. First there are physiological needs, which encompass basic requirements for the body to remain at homeostasis, such as getting enough food or sleep. Once physiological needs are met, one can work on satisfying their safety needs, such as feeling free of danger in their home, school, or work.

After safety needs have been established, individuals can focus on nourishing their needs for love and belonging. People want to feel affection from significant people in their life, and they want to feel accepted by their social networks (Maslow, 1945; Nichols, 2006). The need to belong is so pertinent it has stemmed its own hypotheses from other theorists. Dowson (2009) discussed the "need to belong hypothesis," which suggests that people have a strong desire to create sustaining relationships that are high quality and positive by nature. Only after the need for belonging has been met can one work toward establishing their self-esteem, and finally self-actualization (Maslow, 1945)

According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) self determination theory (SDT), individuals become more intrinsically motivated when their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence are met. When a human successfully meets these needs, the result may be an active and inspired lifestyle, influenced in large part by intrinsic motivation. Meeting these needs is also an important part of human growth, partly due to their potential to shape one's personality (Osterman, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). While all three of the components of SDT are important for explaining human patterns of motivation and well-being, the present study looks most closely at the need for relatedness. Relatedness is feelings of connectedness with another person, which has the potential to elevate one's mood and energize oneself (Martin & Dowson, 2009).

If a social context responds to basic human needs like relatedness, humans can become more active and internally motivated, which can improve their overall well-being

(Ryan & Deci, 2000). If a social context does not respond to basic human needs, like when authority figures fail to place an importance on connectedness or become over-controlling, people can lose their sense of initiative and become distressed (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Martin and Dowson (2009) suggested that the need to belong and the need for relatedness are strongly associated with one another. The energizing affect that one may get from feelings of relatedness is tied with the drive people have to cultivate meaningful and lasting relationships (Martin & Dowson, 2009). As such, the constructs of humans needing to belong and feel a sense of relatedness can be seen as fundamentally linked, and logically studied together.

Review of Literature

Care in the School Environment. Children, like adults, require needs of belonging to be met across social and personal situations (Maslow, 1945). Especially influential are adults guiding the children, with whom children spend the most time. According to attachment theory, children need caretakers to be trustworthy, supportive, and available (Bowlby, 1988). Hughes et al. (2012) framed the same expectations for teachers. Students listen to teachers are thought to be supportive and well-liked. Hughes et al. (2012) found a positive relationship between students who viewed teachers as warm and students' math competence beliefs. Additionally, at a more rudimentary level, students do not want to disappoint a teacher who cares about them (Stipek, 2008). Since the majority of children spend a great deal of time in school, it is logical to suggest that schools and teachers should work on fostering an environment in which students feel they belong. This can be accomplished through teachers prioritizing teacher-student relationship quality (TSRQ) (Baker 1999; Pianta, Hambre, & Stuhlman, 2003).

TSRQ can be defined as the level of meaningful connection shared by a student and a teacher. A healthy TSRQ is characterized by low levels of conflict and high levels of support, as perceived by both the student and the teacher (Hughes et al., 2012). The development of a strong relationship between student and teacher can bring lasting long-term benefits for both the child and the school community. For the child, TSRQ can mean increased feelings of belonging along with improved engagement and motivation (Klem & Connell, 2004). For the school community, it can mean improved student achievement as an indirect result of TSRQ-fostered engagement and motivation (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Osterman, 2000).

Pianta et al. (2003) defined patterns of relatedness that may characterize the relationships between teachers and students: optimal, deprived, disengaged, confused, and adequate. In optimal relationships, students reported high levels of positive emotions and low demands for needing to be near a teacher. In deprived relationships, students reported negative emotions and a strong desire to be near the teacher. In disengaged relationships, students did not want to be close to the teacher and also did not experience positive emotions. In confused relationships, students would report feeling high levels of positive emotions while also reporting a high desire to be close to the teacher. In adequate relationships, students were mid- range on both measures (Pianta et al., 2003). Given the patterns of relationships between teachers and students, if may be safe to conclude that adequate and optimal relationships should be the goal when fostering TSRQ.

Since relatedness is thought to foster intrinsic motivation, perhaps the same can be extended to TSRQ. Intrinsic motivation allows people to function at their highest, most creative, and inspired capacity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). On the most practical level in the school context, motivation can mediate student achievement (Hughes et al., 2012; Meyer & Turner, 2009). Motivation can, in part, be measured by a student's engagement. Klem and Connell (2004) reported that elementary school students who perceived their teachers to be exceptionally supportive were 89% more inclined to also report being engaged in school when compared to students with more typical support levels.

Students who have close relationships with their teachers are more likely to be engaged, and engagement can lead to higher levels of achievement (Hughes et al., 2012). As such, TSRQ can impact achievement indirectly through engagement (Hughes et al., 2012; Klem & Connell, 2004; Osterman, 2000). Additionally, when teachers foster a caring environment, students are more likely to attend class and achieve higher test scores(Klem & Connell, 2004). Further, the grades an individual student receives are tied most strongly to the amount of support they receive from their teacher (Hughes et al., 2012).

Sometimes, there can be a disparity between how teachers and students view their relationship with one another. This is because TSRQ has two components: the teacher's view of their relationship with a given student, and a student's view of their relationship with that same teacher. As such, researchers have suggested it is critical to look at students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers to get a more complete picture of nature of the relationship (Hughes et al., 2012).

Young students perceive positive TSRQ when their instructors demonstrate behaviors that are attentive, fair, and address needs unrelated to academia (Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hambre, 2003). Students may also perceive that a teacher cares when they show empathy, responsiveness, and understanding (Teven & McCoskey, 1996). When children feel a teacher appreciates them, they are more likely to feel generally comfortable and happy in school, and think their overall education experience is fun (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

The failure to establish strong, positive TSRQ can result in negative consequences. One of the primary reasons students drop out of school is feeling alienated from their teachers and school community (Osterman, 2000). Students who don't feel a sense of relatedness with their teachers may also display aggressive or withdrawn behaviors, perform poorly in class, and appear generally less interested in activities (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Osterman, 2000). As such, it is important to establish a healthy level of TSRQ through establishing an optimal teacher-student relationship.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 25 students in one second grade classroom at an elementary school in St. Mary's County, Maryland. The school received Title I funding, which indicated that several students attending the school were from low-income families. The participants were 14 boys and 11 girls between 7 and 8 years old. There was 1 Hispanic student, 11 Black students, and 13 Caucasian students. The classroom demographics roughly matched the school's demographics.

Data collection

For the present study I used a mixed methods approach, in that I collected quantitative and qualitative data to address each of my research questions (see Figure 1). To measure feelings of relatedness and belonging, I partially created and partially adapted a questionnaire. I created a Likert-type questionnaire about whether students felt I cared about them and if they felt like they belong at school (see Figure 2). I adapted two questions from Baker's (1999) open-ended interview questions, specifically questions pertaining to feelings of belonging, into a Likert format. I also created frowning, neutral, and smiling faces as illustrated response anchors for students who may be struggling readers. A question related to student perception of care was "Do you feel like Ms. Gardner listens to you when you have a problem?" A question related to student perception of belonging was "Does school make you happy?"

The pre- and post- test questionnaires were nearly identical, although with one notable exception. The post-test included one quantitative question, "What is something Ms. Gardner does to show that she cares about you?" This item was included to allow a reasonable and developmentally appropriate opportunity to examine student indicators of caring and belonging outside of the confines of a Likert-type format.

I also created a behavior checklist to measure engagement in students one day before the start of the action research. The checklist included items pertaining to students' levels of on-task behavior during instruction and execution of activities (see Figure 3).

Procedure

In the first stage of my study, my mentor teacher observed student behaviors related to engagement using the observational checklist while I taught. The same day, students were asked to complete the student questionnaire. An unbiased third party entered and asked the students to complete the questionnaire to limit any need the students may have had to please me or the primary teacher with their responses.

The next stage of my study was the action research stage, wherein I sat with each student in the classroom and had an informal, five-minute long conversation. I talked to them each individually during the class breakfast time at the start of the day to eliminate disruption from content instruction. I also took them into a quiet space to minimize distraction from other students. The students themselves directed the nature of the conversation. If the student did not feel like talking to me for the full five minutes, they could return to the class morning routine.

The last stage of the study was much like the first stage of the study. My mentor teacher observed and recorded student behaviors using the same observational checklist while I taught. Students were asked to complete the same questionnaire again, except this time the questionnaire had one quantitative question at the end. Once all forms of data collection were attained, descriptive statistics were run and implications for the present study were drawn.

Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data from the student questionnaire, I used descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel. Using a paired t-test, I found the difference between the pre- and post data. For the quantitative data on the questionnaire, I reviewed the student responses for key words and coded them under themes using a system of theme-related

matrices. Then, after patterns were coded, I drew conclusions about the data. For the behavioral checklist, I also used a paired t-test in to find the difference in pre- and post information.

Findings and interpretations

Does talking to individual students for 5 minutes improve student feelings of relatedness to the teacher?

The constructs of relatedness and belonging are so often intertwined, but there was one question on the Likert-type survey that exclusively measured the construct on relatedness: "How much do you feel like Ms. Gardner knows about your life outside of school?" Students responded to the question by circling the smiley face that most closely resembled their response to the statement. In this particular instance, students could circle a range from "a little," represented by a frowning smiley face, to "a lot", represented by a beaming smiley face, with a total of four possible answer options (see figure 2 in Appendix).

Surveys were administered before and after ten days of having informal five-minute conversations with students in the classroom. All 25 students were present for the pre- and post-surveys. I compared the results of the two surveys using a two-tailed, paired samples t-test. The results as they connect to the construct of relatedness are shown in Table 1.

Table 1:

Pre and Post Measures of Relatedness

Question	**Pre-Test Average**	**Post-Test Average**	***p*-value**
"How much do you feel like Ms. Gardner knows about your life outside of school?"	1. 92	2. 48	. 01

According to this data, the change in student feelings about how much they felt like I knew about their lives at home was significant ($p < .05$). After my five minute conversations with each student, the majority of students felt I knew a significantly greater amount about their lives outside of school. This demonstrates that in taking the time to sit down with and get to know each student, students generally felt my knowledge of them as a whole person improved. Perhaps in taking the time to sit with each student and learn about them individually, I helped foster a healthy attachment dynamic between myself and my students. According to Bowbly's (1998) attachment theory, it is possible that in demonstrating an interest in my students I showed that I was trustworthy, supportive, and available as a caretaker. This is the kind of supportive environment in which TSRQ can flourish (Hughes et al., 2012). My students recognized my efforts to make a connection and learn more about them, and this may yield promising long-term results for student engagement and achievement in the classroom. As previous research has shown, there are

positive correlations between perceived levels of support and student motivation and performance (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Osterman, 2000).

Does talking to individual students for 5 minutes improve student feelings of belonging in the classroom?

Although the constructs of relatedness and belonging often connected, there were two questions on the Likert-type survey that exclusively measured the construct of belonging: "How happy do you feel at school?" and "How safe does Ms. Gardner make you feel at school?" Students responded to the question by circling the smiley face that most closely resembled their response to the statement. In this particular instance, students could circle a range from "very unhappy" to "very happy" and "not safe" to "always," respectively.

As with the item before, and all other Likert-type items on the survey, I compared the results of the two surveys using a two-tailed, paired samples t-test. The results as they connect to the construct of relatedness are shown in Table 2.

Table 2:

Pre and Post Measures of Belonging

Question	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	*p*-value
"How happy do you feel at school?"	2. 8	2. 84	. 86
"How safe does Ms. Gardner make you feel at school?"	3. 24	3. 24	1

According to this data, feelings of belonging did not significantly improve after implementing the five-minute informal conversation intervention with each student, with (p>. 05). Although not significant, there are some important trends worth mentioning in this data.

It should be noted that "4" was the maximum number for the average when measuring "How safe does Ms. Gardner make you feel at school?". A "4" would indicate that all students felt that I created an exceptionally safe class environment. The results indicated measures that stayed consistently at 3. The results show 24 for both the pre-and post-tests, which seems to indicate that the students already felt high levels of safety and belonging. This could mean that prior to the informal conversation intervention phase of the study, I made my students feel safe in my presence.

Maslow (1945) purports that safety is one of the first needs people must have met before they can focus on fulfilling their needs for belonging. In this context, the high levels of safety in my class could suggest that having the need for belonging is a not too distant next step for fulfillment in second-grade classroom. This is particularly critical because people crave the satisfaction of belonging needs in order to work at levels that help them

reach their full potential, and children are no exception (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Osterman, 2000; Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003).

Does talking to individual students for 5 minutes improve student feelings of relatedness to the teacher and feelings of belonging in the classroom?

Two questions on the Likert-type survey measured both feelings of belonging and relatedness. Among these were the following: "How much do you feel like Ms. Gardner cares about you?" and "How much do you feel like Ms. Gardner listens to you when you have a problem?" Students could respond by selecting the smiley face on a range that best suited their desired answers from "A little" to "A lot" and from "Never" to "Always," respectively.

As with the item before, and all other Likert-type items on the survey, I compared the results of the two surveys using a two-tailed, paired samples t-test. The results as they connect to the construct of relatedness are shown in Table 3.

Table 3:

Pre and Post Measures of Relatedness and Belonging

Question	**Pre-Test Average**	**Post-Test Average**	***p*-value**
"How much do you feel like Ms. Gardner cares about you?"	3. 16	3. 12	. 83
" How much do you feel like Ms. Gardner listens to you when you have a problem?"	2. 84	3. 2	. 11

According to this data, items on the survey measuring both relatedness and belonging did not yield a significant increase between pre-and post-implementation ($p > .05$). Nonetheless, research has shown the importance of nurturing relatedness and belonging in the classroom. People seek approval from others in the environments where they spend the most time (Maslow, 1945). In the classroom context, children seek approval from their teachers, and thus strongly desire feelings of relatedness and belonging in this environment (Goodenow, 1993; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Although the present measure did not demonstrate an improvement in feelings of relatedness and belonging in the classroom after five minute informal conversations, it was worthwhile to make an effort by implementing a new intervention with the goal of improving TSRQ.

Since the entire purpose of the survey was to measure constructs of both relatedness and belonging, I also ran an overall analysis comparing the items on the pre-and post-surveys together, as a unit. However, I decided to remove the first question ("How happy do you feel at school?") from the analysis, as it did not quite measure

relatedness and belonging as directly connected to the student's relationship with me. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4:

Pre and Post Measures of Relatedness and Belonging

Pre-Test Average	**Post-Test Average**	***p*-value**
2. 8	2. 84	. 86

The data shows no significant increase in student feelings of relatedness and belonging when grouping together several items on the survey ($p>.05$). Regardless, as mentioned previously, it is essential that teachers focus on developing TSRQ in their classroom through working on fostering feelings of relatedness and belonging in their classroom. People in general function at their most inspired and motivated capacities when feelings of relatedness and belonging are met, and the same extends to children in school (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The post-survey also included an item where students could write in a response detailing something specific I did to show that I cared by answering the question "What is something Ms. Gardner has done to show she cares about you?" To analyze qualitative responses, I used a system of matrices where I coded for qualitative themes by putting different quotes from students underneath the appropriate theme.

Five out of twenty-five students' responses relayed that I cared because I helped them with their problems. One student said, "She helps every day and she helps me solve problems." Another said, "She helps me figure out what to do with problems. Thank you, Ms. Gardner!" Although these responses do not directly connect with the five-minute conversations I had with each student, they do reflect the significance of feelings of relatedness connecting to perceived care in an instructor.

Two students claimed that they knew I cared because I listened to them. One of student said, "She listens to me when I need something and she helps me too!" Another student said, "She made cookies for the class [and] she listens to me when I talk to her." The listening aspects of both these responses could be partially attributed to the five-minute conversations I had with the students. During the conversations, I did a fair amount of listening to the students tell me whatever they wanted about their lives.

Three students said that they could tell I cared because I was "caring" or "nice." For example, one student said, "She always be [sic] nice to me." These sorts of responses are hard to attribute to any one action I took during the action research phase of this study. It is possible that their perception of me as 'nice' improved with my efforts to informally talk with each of them, but it is hard to definitely point to one reason why a student may attribute at teacher as 'nice.'

One student had a response that was difficult to classify into the other themes: "When everyone got a prize box and I did not get one but she made a deal that if I be good the next day I get a prize and I did!!" Although this does not relate to the five minute informal conversation, this response showed following through on promises may be a way

that students perceive good TSRQ in teachers, and further studies may consider looking into this construct.

Thirteen out of the twenty-five students mentioned that I gave them cookies as an indication that I cared about them. One student said, "Ms. Gardner cares because she gave me a cookie." Another said, "She made me and the class cookies and it made me very happy."

It is also worth noting that I gave the students cookies under special circumstances. It was a two-hour delay, and many students in my class receive free and reduced meals under Title I funding. The delay caused them to miss breakfast, and thus many students were antsy and hungry long before lunch. I had a stash of Girl Scout cookies at my desk that I readily shared with my students, and they seemed especially appreciative given the circumstances. According to Maslow (1945), physiological needs must be met before all others. I recognized my students were hungry, and in order to help them focus on learning and fulfilling their other "higher" needs, I gave them a cookie. I was overwhelmed to learn how much it had influenced the qualitative data, and I would be curious to learn what their responses would be had I not brought in cookies. However, given the circumstances, I would not have done anything differently.

Although the qualitative portion of the post-survey yielded mixed results, and none of the responses directly related to my five-minute conversation with each student, it provided insight into the students' view of TSRQ. TSRQ has two parts: the teacher's view of the relationship with an individual student, and an individual student's view of that same relationship. Researchers have suggested that whenever one is to look into TSRQ, one must investigate the student's perspective (Hughes et al., 2012). I am pleased that, despite non-significant findings, I followed these methods.

Does talking to individual students for 5 minutes improve student engagement?

To demonstrate whether students' levels of engagement improved after having five-minute informal conversations with each student, my mentor teacher filled out a pre-and post observational checklist (see Figure 3 in Appendix). The checklist was filled out in the afternoon during a math lesson during both the pre-and post- phases of the study. However, there were irreconcilable inconsistencies in the ways that the observational checklists were filled out, and the data the observational checklists have been dropped from the present study.

However, the connection between TSRQ, student engagement, and achievement have been linked in previous research (Hughes, 2011). The present study proposed that through having five-minute conversations with individual students, improvements would be made to student feelings of relatedness and belonging in the classroom, and in turn student engagement and achievement would progress as well. While findings yielded insignificant increases and the measurement for engagement was dropped, this study still purports a practice that has the potential to bolster pedagogy and improve the overall quality of the classroom experience for students.

Conclusion

The present study sought to examine whether five-minute informal conversations improved student feelings of relatedness and belonging in the classroom, and whether this

led to overall engagement. Using a pre-and post-survey that had quantitative and qualitative measures, as well as an observational checklist, the aforementioned constructs were examined. It was found that students felt that I knew significantly more about their personal lives after the action research phase, which suggests improved feelings of relatedness after the five-minute conversations. Although no other items yielded significant results, the present study has important implications for pedagogy and future research.

Limitations

There were several limitations in the present study. The study phase with conversations took two weeks-- meaning there were two full weeks for some students between the pre-survey and the post-survey. In an ideal scenario, I would have been able to test all students under the same conditions with the same days apart between pre- and post-surveys. However, in the present situation with the daily classroom schedule, that would not have been possible without interfering with instructional time.

The survey itself was not without flaws. Upon further deliberation, I decided that the survey item "How happy do you feel at school?" may not be a strong, direct measure of feelings of belonging with respect to a climate I can create. On a given day, students have many outlying factors that can influence how they feel in school. While a teacher can ideally set a positive tone, they are not solely responsible for a student's happiness in school. This question also may not have tested the relatedness and belonging constructs in a way that I felt fit.

On the qualitative post-section of the survey where students could answer the question "What is something Ms. Gardner has done to show that she cares about you?" More than half of my students recalled a time when I gave them cookies. In the future if I were to implement this study, I would make sure I didn't give my students anything concrete so I could see if they recounted actions I took instead of objects I gave them as demonstrating my care.

Additionally, I needed to remove the observational checklist as a measure of engagement, due to irreconcilable inconsistencies in the way the pre- and post-checklist were filled out. As such, the relationship between student feelings of relatedness and belonging connecting to classroom engagement was unable to be fully examined in this study.

Implications

For future research, I suggest examining engagement as it ties in with feelings of belonging and engagement by videotaping student levels of engagement before and after the five-minute conversation intervention. This would supply more concrete qualitative evidence. I also would suggest potentially doing two rounds of five minute informal conversations so that way each student has more than one chance to talk about all the things they want to share, and has double the opportunity to establish a connection to improve feelings of belonging and relatedness. I may also propose the teacher-researcher keep a journal of their own feelings towards the individual students and the class at large while taking part in this process, as

The significant finding that students thought I knew more about their lives at home after the five-minute informal conversation implies a substantial increase in feelings of

relatedness. For theory, this means spending a little extra time getting to know and listening to one's students may create a deeper sense of connection in the classroom. The idea that getting to know someone can improve feelings of relatedness is by no means a new concept, but something so simple has the potential to make a world of difference in the classroom.

Teachers should consider adopting this practice to try expanding their knowledge of each student while also demonstrating genuine interest and care. Every teacher wants their students to thrive, and they may be able to play an important role in helping them do so by simply sitting down and lending an ear for five minutes.

References

Baker, J. (1999). Teacher- Student Interaction in Urban At-Risk Classrooms: Differential Behavior, Relationship Quality, and Student Satisfaction with School. *The Elementary School Journal, 100,* 57-70.

Blum, R. W., & Rinehart, P. M. (1996). *Reducing the risk: Connections that make a difference in the lives of youth*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health.

Chen, J.& Kim, S. (2014). The quality of teachers' interactive conversations with preschool children from low- income families during small-group and large-group activities. *Early Years: An International Research Journal, 34,* 271-288.

Estell, D. B., & Perdue, N. H. (2013). Social Support and Behavioral and Affective School Engagement: The Effects of Peers, Parents, and Teachers. *Psychology In The Schools*, *50*(4), 325-339.

Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of Relatedness as a Factor in Children's Academic Engagement and Performance. Journal of Educational Psychology, 95, 148-162.

Nichols, S. (2006). Teachers' and Students' Beliefs about Student Belonging in One Middle School, *The Elementary School Journal, 3,* 255-271.

Goodenow, C. (1993). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students: Relationships to motivation and achievement. *The journal of early adolescence, 13*, 21-43.

Hughes, J., Luo, W., Kwok, O., & Loyd, L. K. (2008). Teacher-Student Support, Effortful Engagement, and Achievement: A 3-Year Longitudinal Study. *Journal Of Educational Psychology*, *100*(1), 1-14.

Hughes, J. (2011). Longitudinal Effects of Teacher and Student Perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationship Qualities on Academic Adjustment. *The Elementary School Journal, 112*, 38-60b.

Hughes, J., Wu, J., Kwok, O., Villarreal, V., & Johnson, A. Y. (2012). Indirect Effects of Child Reports of Teacher-Student Relationship on Achievement. *Journal Of Educational Psychology*, *104*(2), 350-365.

Jennings, P. & Greenberg, M. (2009). The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence in Relation to Student and Classroom Outcomes. *Review of Educational Research, 79,* 491-525.

Klem, A.M. & Connell, J.P. (2004). Relationships Matter: Linking Teacher Support to Student

Engagement and Achievement, *Journal of School Health, 74,* 262-273.

Martin, A. & Dowson, M. (2009), Interpersonal Relationships, Motivation, Engagement, and Achievement: Yields for Theory, Current Issues, and Educational Practice, *Review of Educational Research, 1,* 327-365.

Meyer D., & Turner, J. (2009). Discovering Emotion in Classroom Motivation Research. *Educational Psychologist, 37,* 107-114.

Noddings, N. (1992). The Challenge to Care in Schools. *Teacher's College: Columbia University.*

Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(3), 323–367.

Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B., & Stuhlman, M. (2003). Relationships between teachers and children.

Reynolds, W. & Miller, G. (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Educational psychology* (*Vol. 7*, pp. 199– 234). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Ryan, R.,& Deci, E. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well being. *American Psychologist, 55,* 68-78.

Stipek, D. (2006). Relationships Matter. Educational Leadership, 64(1), 46-49.

Teven, J. & McCroskey, J. (1996). The Relationship of Perceived Teacher Caring with Student.

Wentzel, K. (2002). Are effective teachers like good parents? Teaching Styles and Student Adjustment in Early Adolescence. *Child Development, 73,* 287-301.

Appendix

Figure 1: ***Research Questions***

Research Questions	Data Source #1	Data Source #2
Does talking to individual students for 5 minutes improve student feelings of **relatedness** to the teacher?	Questionnaire *(**Pre-** & **Post**, Quantitative items)*	Questionnaire *(**Post**-Only, Quantitative item)*
Does talking to individual students for 5 minutes improve student feelings of **belonging** in the classroom?	Questionnaire *(**Pre-** & **Post**, Quantitative items)*	X
Does talking to individual students for 5 minutes improve **student engagement**?	Observational Checklist *(Pre- & Post, Quantitative)*	X

Figure 2: ***Survey Given to Students***

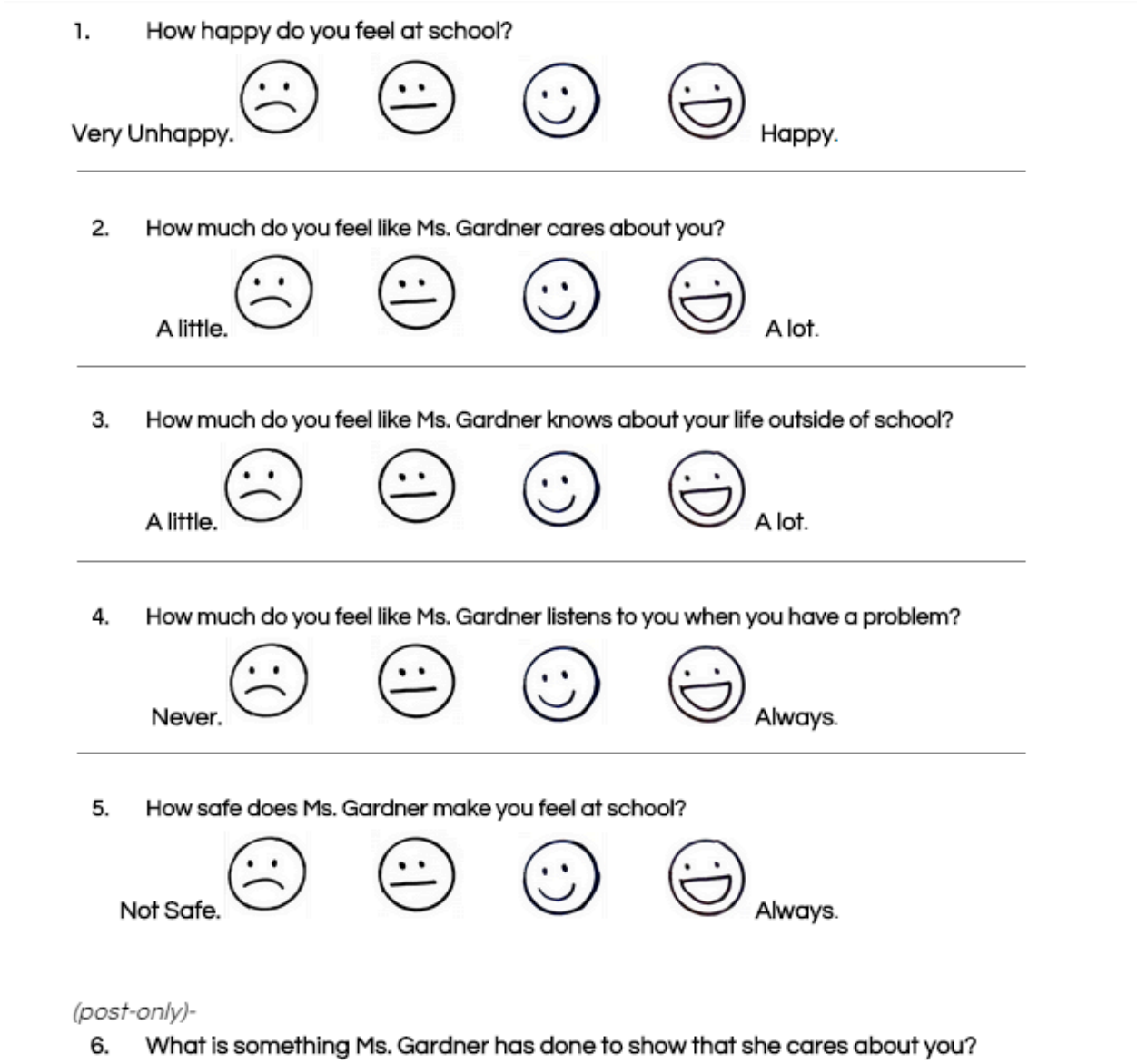

Figure 3: ***Observational Checklist***

Student Name	Actively Participating[1]	Following Directions[2]	Not Following Directions[3]	Appropriately Off Task[4]
Student A				
Student B				
Student C				
. . .				
. . .				
. . .				
. . .				
. . .				
. . .				
. . .				
. . .				

1. **Actively Participating**: Asking questions when appropriate, sharing answers when appropriate, putting forth effort on assigned task, excited/focused affect.
2. **Following Directions**: Student is doing what teacher has explicitly told them to do.
3. **Not Following Directions**: Student is engaging in behaviors directly in contrast to what teacher has explicitly told them to do without permission from the teacher.
4. **Appropriately Off-Task:** Student is not doing assigned task, but is engaging in other appropriate teacher-approved school work (reading, catch up work, etc.).