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# The Effect of Student-Teacher Rapport on Classroom Participation

Silvia Ibarra

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The Effect of Student-Teacher Rapport on Classroom Participation

By

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A Graduate Field Experience Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts Urban Initiatives at

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has been approved for  
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**Abstract**

The following case study explores the role student-teacher rapport plays in a student's classroom participation. Multiple research studies support the idea that positive student-teacher interactions foster learning and student achievement. Students in a Midwestern middle school were given a survey to measure the quality of their relationship with their reading teacher. Additionally, three teachers were observed in order to quantify the amount of whole-group and small-group participation completed during a lesson. The results support the conclusion that classrooms with higher levels of positive classroom relationships create an environment that increases student participation. Given these data, recommendations are made as how an educator can develop positive classroom relationships with his or her students.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The following case study was completed through a review of literature relevant with the areas of student-teacher classroom relationships, improving the student learning experience, and the effects of student participation on academics. All of the information gathered pertains to reading classrooms in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. This thesis will encompass the description of the study, present and analyze the collected data, and make recommendations for future research studies.

### **Problem**

Throughout time the framework for teaching has shifted its execution styles; it is no longer recommended to lecture students without their interaction in the lesson (Halvor, 2009). This interaction is encouraged through peer-interaction, whole-class discussions, and other opportunities that allow students to share their point of view on the content presented. However, it is often difficult for educators to generate a classroom environment that encourages all students to participate in these aforementioned settings. Even more difficult is the task of increasing student participation at the middle-school level, when students often encounter low levels of self-esteem (McNeely, 2004). This case study examined student participation in middle school classrooms in order to make recommendations as to how to improve the learning experience for this specific age group. Alongside these recommendations the researcher explains the significance of positive student-teacher rapport for participation to foster in the classroom.

Many factors can affect the development of a safe environment that fosters student participation. One such factor is the school environment outside of the actual classroom (Mitra, 2003). For this reason, the researcher decided to examine the amount of classroom participation

and levels of student-teacher rapport within the same school climate. This allowed the researcher to control for extraneous variables. With this case study the researcher sought to identify classrooms with high levels of student participation and student-teacher rapport in order to later investigate what developments led to such successes.

Further analysis of similar research studies connects classroom participation to higher levels of academic success and personal fulfillment (Stoeckli, 2010). The benefits of student participation remind educators of the importance of improving their relationships with students.

### **Connection to Standards**

In accordance with the Wisconsin Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning, it is essential for students to learn in a safe environment (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, [www.dpi.wi.gov](http://www.dpi.wi.gov)). When a child is part of a classroom that does not allow him or her to focus on the content being taught it is difficult for learning to occur. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction the following requirements are essential for learning to occur:

- Every student has the right to learn.
- Instruction must be rigorous and relevant.
- Purposeful assessment drives instruction and affects learning.
- Learning is a collaborative responsibility.
- Students bring strengths and experiences to learning.
- Responsive environments engage learners.

In support of these guiding principles for teaching, it is important for educators to learn new ways in which to increase the measures established by the principles. This study hopes to provide additional measures to allow educators to provide all students with “the right to learn” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, [www.dpi.wi.gov](http://www.dpi.wi.gov)). Through the evaluation of the importance of whole-group discussions, this research study also demonstrates the necessity to view “Learning as a collaborative responsibility” and the fact that “Students bring strengths and

experiences to learning.” Lastly, the suggestions for creating a classroom that encourages participation correlates to the last guiding principle, “Responsive environments engage learners.” This research study is closely related to four of the six guiding principles established under Wisconsin state law, which demonstrates the importance of its results and recommendations. The researcher conducted the case study with the purpose of improving the learning experience for both the students and teachers involved.

### **Overview of the Study**

A total of 64 students in 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade were surveyed for the purposes of this study. Students attended an inner-city school in a Midwestern city. All students came from a low-socioeconomic background. The students encompassed three homerooms that were each observed three times. Additionally, the majority of students had attended the same school since kindergarten. The purpose of the survey was to determine the type of relationship each homeroom had with the classroom teacher. Additionally, the classroom observations were conducted in order to assess the amount of student participation in each class. Upon collecting all of the survey and observations data, they were analyzed in order to determine which classroom had a higher frequency of student participation. Survey results were also used to identify which class experienced a stronger relationship with the classroom teacher. The researcher anticipated finding a positive correlation between the classroom with higher amounts of classroom participation and strongest student-teacher relationship. The recommendations made as part of this research study constitute the behaviors observed in classrooms and survey results.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Introduction**

As I reflect on my teaching experience I strongly believe that many of my successes are due to the time I have dedicated to my students. This time has resulted in the development of positive student-teacher relationships. These relationships have allowed my students to feel worthy and valued by an adult; this feeling is not common to the majority of urban low-socioeconomic students. My time at Cardinal Stritch University has given me the opportunity to analyze the successes and areas for growth in settings with high levels of positive classroom culture. I have been able to do this through the mentorship established by the University and my own implementations of course teachings. Through these experiences, I decided to conduct my research study on the effects of a student-teacher relationship on classroom participation.

The purpose of focusing on student participation will allow others to make the important connections between a student's higher levels of participation in the classroom and a higher investment in his or her academics. In the following article summaries, I provide evidence to quantify the measures of classroom participation and student-teacher relationships.

#### **The Current Educational Model**

In preparation for the research study, it is important to understand the current reality in the educational system. More specifically, it will be useful to understand the context of how students and teachers interact both inside and outside the classroom. For this reason, two research studies were reviewed to observe the style in which most classes are currently taught. It was also important to analyze research studies that provided insight about how a teacher explains and fulfills his or her role. The same perception of this role fulfillment was also analyzed for

students in the elementary to college levels. The collection of such data was important in order to complete observations and survey information based on student classroom participation.

Recent findings have documented that lecture style lessons are not effective for student learning. In an attempt to identify the amount of teacher talk present in a typical classroom, David Moguel (2004) conducted a research study specific to this topic. Moguel (2004) sought to detect the reasons as to why teachers talk more often than students usually do. He goes so far as to describe the teacher talk as “too much” and inhibitive of student learning.

The study consisted of two phases. The first required a comprehensive literature review of previous studies that examined the characteristics of a typical lesson in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. The second phase was a case study of six teachers. These teachers were currently enrolled in a credentialing course and were video taped during three different occasions to discuss “interaction” and “participation” in their respective classrooms.

During the first phase of the study, Moguel (2004) collected information on the amount of learning time spent by a teacher talking to students instead of having students work on purposeful activities. These purposeful activities were defined as activities that allowed students to elaborate on classroom discussions or write extended pieces of writing during specific amounts of time. As Moguel (2004) collected data he realized that identifying how much a teacher talks was not a useful measure of effective teaching. For this reason, the study focused on identifying the types of talk that teachers present to students.

Once the study shifted focus, the analysis of teacher talk was able to provide more information that is purposeful. The researcher cites the findings of Hugh Mehan and Courtney Cazden, (1979). Mehan (1979) identified a pattern between teacher and student interchange. The pattern consisted of three parts: teacher *initiation*, student *response*, and teacher *evaluation*.

This three-part system referenced follows the IRE format. Moguel's (2004) continued research identified the IRE as the most common type of conversation styles in classrooms for all grade levels.

In order to help teachers stray away from teaching in the IRE format, the investigator conducted a case study of six teachers to identify ways to improve student participation. During the three recorded observations Moguel (2004) was able to evaluate the discussion style of the group itself; this was important to correlate the individual teacher's learning style to his or her teaching style executed in the classroom. Through the observations, Moguel (2004) was able to find a correlation between a teacher that did not value student-led discussions and his or her lack of participation in the small-group discussions. A similar correlation was also found for teachers that participated often or led the group discussions.

Through the compilation of such research and the case study the researcher came to the conclusion that is it important for teacher preparation programs to demonstrate and execute lessons in the way teachers should implement their respective lessons. By lecturing teachers on theory and content they will in-turn lecture their own students, which is not the most effective or desired learning style. The results are critical and should encourage teachers at all levels to vary the instructional methods used in any classroom whether at the elementary level or at the doctoral level.

Similar ideas were analyzed in order to explore the current structures of the educational system in a study conducted by Marit Honerod Hoveid and Halvor Hoveid (2009). Their work sought to employ four studies completed by French, philosopher Paul Ricoeurian. These studies were analyzed in order to determine the levels of influence imposed on a student by his or her teacher. Through the data collection, Hoveid (2009) sought to identify the constructs that

constitute an individual as a “student.” Additionally, the results were analyzed to determine the specific “human capacities” that should be taught by a teacher to a student (Hoveid, 2009).

These capacities were identified as the characteristics that a student needs to attain from an educator.

The analysis helped Hoveid (2009) determine the three operations of a student: to speak, to act, and to inform. The student learns to speak by being part of a student-teacher relationship. The student begins to develop his or her own identity through the interactions experienced with the teacher. The student then continues to learn how to “act” through the approval and judgments of his or her teacher. The student internalizes those results and reflects on his or her own capabilities as “I can” or “I did” (Hoveid, 2009). Finally, the student begins to develop the ability to interpret his or her own identity through his or her own perception. However, this is still dependant on the teacher response. The student develops his or her individual identity only by collectively sharing this narrative with the teacher. The compilation of all three ideas comes together to form the student version.

Since a teacher’s influence is so vast, it is important that teachers are aware of the influence he or she can have on the speaking patterns of a student. This will guide teachers with an additional strategy to help children develop healthy forms of identity and self-worth. The work of Ricoeurian, suggests that teachers maintain a strong student-teacher relationship (Hoveid, 2009). Teachers must do so by evaluating student situations as a neutral third-person not involved in the dilemma; this will ensure a fair judgment. Furthermore, it is imperative that teachers do not develop a casual relationship with students, as this will impede adequate judgment making.

The results of the analysis reveal that it is important for teachers to reflect on their relationships with their students. It also creates an opportunity for further research. In regards to student dependency on teacher opinions, future researchers should attempt to determine whether a teacher's teaching style is de-valuing a student's purpose or if it is teaching students to become life-long learners who seek continuous improvement.

Both studies reveal that most teaching professionals embody lecture-style settings. However, these settings do not foster student-teacher relationships. Understanding the value of student-teacher relationships is essential as I seek to find ways to assist teachers in improving the levels of student participation in their middle school classrooms.

### **Quantifying Student Participation Inside the Classroom**

Since various classroom observations were completed, it was important for the researcher to know how to classify behaviors as active participation. For this reason, the researcher explored various studies that aimed to measure classroom participation through various measures. The following studies exemplify models after which all observations conducted as part of this study used as a reference point. For instance, due to the user friendliness and analytical data, most studies use student surveys with Likert-scales, which helped produce results for this research study.

However, before the researcher could begin to measure the amount of student participation present in a middle school classroom, it was important to define positive participation for all observers. The definitions were compiled using the findings in a Dana Mitra (2003) article *Student Voice in School Reform: Reframing Student-Teacher Relationships*. In this research study, the researcher examines ways schools can improve student achievement and



school climate. It also explores ways in which schools can design an effective process for school reform.

Mitra (2003) examined the effectiveness of the reform process at a low-socioeconomic status high school in California's Bay Area. Whitman High School had recently received a grant for the implementation of a three-year reformatory process from the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. While the reform process was under way, Mitra (2003) conducted 100 semi-structured interviews and 100 observations of student and teacher meetings over a two-and-a-half year period.

Mitra (2003) decided to work with Whitman High School since it was in the middle of a reformation process. In 1998, the school had a 57% graduation rate and documented a 33% of teacher turnover on a yearly basis. About half of the student population consisted of English Language Learners. Additionally, the school was in a low socioeconomic status neighborhood and 50% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

In preparation for the school reform, Whitman High School worked closely with a consultant to design a plan to change the school climate. The plan was created after a thorough examination of the existing school climate. The plan consisted of improving two parts of the school: 1. Student-focused activities and 2. Teacher-focused activities. The goal of both types of activities was to improve student-teacher relationships.

The student-focused activities allowed student leadership to develop. One example of such activities included student-led neighborhood tours for their teachers. The tours allowed teachers to see the daily interactions students encounter and brought them closer to their students. The school's principal also participated in the tours; students later revealed that his participation made him more approachable in school. Teachers and students were also able to

interact in a non-formal setting, which opened the door to creating positive relationships. The tours were so successful that the school's administration decided to include them as part of the new teacher trainings.

In addition to the neighborhood tours, discussion groups for students and teachers were established. All the groups were co-lead by a student and a teacher. The discussions helped to empower students and strengthened the positive changes implemented. It also allowed students to be seen as equal and feel valued by their teachers. Students were grateful for the opportunity to become an important part of the school's positive transformations. The teacher-focused activities also helped to create positive changes for the school. Discussion groups gathered to identify the curricular changes that were needed in order to improve the school. Students were also included in the groups to provide teachers with feedback on the clarity of the books. Additionally, students partook in staff meetings, which created a less hostile environment since teachers were less willing to act unprofessionally when students were present.

The results of the interviews and surveys demonstrated that investment in the school had increased for both teachers and students. Both parties wanted to improve the reputation of the school and take ownership for its successes. The analysis of the Whitman High School experience also identified that their positive changes in culture were due to the strong staff leadership and investment in wanting to improve the school. Two leaders were selected to execute the reform programs. One individual was a teacher that had been at the school for four years and had built rapport with both teachers and students. For this reason, this individual was in charge of directly advising both teachers and students. The second individual had been with the district for 25 years and this person was in charge of the funding of the activities implemented. Mitra (2003) attributes the successes experienced at Whitman High School largely

due to their ability to divide responsibilities between these two individuals. Therefore, she suggests that when a school is looking to improve student involvement the school should have a relationship-building plan and a financial stability plan.

This research study was important for my thesis because it helped to identify the importance of student participation. Furthermore, it provided support for increasing student participation and voice in order to improve student success and school climate. The results have also been helpful in comparison to other research studies that identify how specific environments react to school climate reformations. Lastly, since the analysis of the research study identified the importance for students and teachers to work together for a common goal this further supports my hypothesis that student-teacher rapport increases student participation and investment.

Before conducting classroom observations it was necessary to define examples of active participation behaviors. In the study, *The effects of student verbal and nonverbal responsiveness on teachers' liking of students and willingness to comply with student requests*, Timothy Mottet (2004) sought to measure differences between nonverbal and verbal student body-language. The research study explored the relationship between nonverbal and verbal responses and if they are dependent of each other. Additionally, the analysis of the research study examined if the types of responses had any effect on teacher willingness to comply with student requests.

In order to examine the verbal and nonverbal cues without bias from prior interactions with the student four different videos were created. One video contained high levels of positive examples of body language, such as eye contact, straight posture, and appropriate body language. Another video included low levels of these examples of positive body language. Another video

included many examples of negative nonverbal body language and the last video contained few examples of negative body language.

In order to analyze the videos 112 university level teachers were contacted through a letter invitation. Upon watching each video, the observers then completed a survey to determine how willing they would be to comply with the student requests presented in the video. Through the analysis of the survey data Mottet (2004) found that nonverbal and verbal cues do not interact together to affect teacher willingness to comply. However, a significant correlation was found between nonverbal responsiveness and a teacher's willingness to fulfill a student request. The behaviors that encourage teacher compliance were low-levels of eye contact and quiet note taking.

The results of the study helped to determine the levels of power that are subconsciously given to students. It is also important to realize how students are influential in the effectiveness of the classroom. Furthermore, it provides students with power over the teacher's behaviors, which is not always considered. Further research can help to identify ways in which students and teachers can work together to reach an equal balance of power between each student and the instructor.

Continuing to look at the factors that influence classroom participation it is important to consider the research study by Georg Stoeckli. In his research study, *The role of individual and social factors in classroom loneliness*, Stoeckli (2010) seeks to find out the affect that self-esteem and social anxiety have on vocalized student participation. Stoeckli (2010) focused his research study on students in 4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> grades. He had a total of 704 male and female participants. All students attended the same school in Switzerland.

The research collected was based on a 22-question survey conducted during one class period. Each question required a response on a four-point Likert scale, which consisted of 1 (not at all) to 4 (entirely true). The survey analyzed four characteristics in each student: loneliness, social anxiety, self-esteem, and participation. The second part of the survey consisted of evaluating each student's perspectives based on peer evaluation. Students were given with the class roster in which students had to rate each classmate based on the following criteria: 1. "doesn't talk much" 2. "would rather be alone" and 3. "is shy." The purpose of the peer perspectives evaluation was to determine if a correlation between peer perception and classroom participation could be detected. It is also important to note that the survey was conducted at the end of the school year once students had developed a strong understanding of their peers' personality traits.

Through the analysis of the results Stoeckli (2010) found that 62% of students did not experience loneliness while in school; there was no significant difference between male and female students or grade levels. However he did find a strong correlation between social anxiety, self-esteem, and classroom participation. For this reason, Stoeckli alienated social anxiety and self-esteem results from each other in order to compare the effects of each on classroom participation. Even after the variables were separated as part of the analysis significantly high correlations were found between social anxiety experienced by a student and a lower amount of classroom participation. The same correlation was found for low levels of self-esteem and classroom participation.

The results of this study are important for the execution of my research because it helps to provide ideas on how to further evaluate classroom participation. Furthermore, the study provides further support for previous findings that highlight the importance of positive social

dynamics of a classroom in order to encourage student participation and learning. Stoeckli (2010) also suggests that this study should encourage others to calculate in teacher influence on the perceptions of other students. He addresses the idea that teacher-student relationships were not addressed in his study but it is also an important factor to analyze. Further research should also help teachers focus on assisting students to overcome loneliness and increase beneficial classroom interactions.

The information collected through the analysis of student classroom participation has helped to determine the various ways in which I can measure student participation. Additionally, it provides important information on the teacher's role on affecting the levels of participation. Both aspects will continue to be explored through my own research and observations.

#### Improving Urban Education through Student-Teacher Relationships

The observations will not only seek to identify the levels of participation in a middle-school classroom but will also focus on how student-teacher relationships help to foster or hinder the levels of student participation. For this reason, it was important to also quantify the characteristics of a positive student-teacher relationship. These characteristics will be explored with the following studies.

In order to determine the variables that I will measure to determine the quality of teacher-student relationships I read a research study that analyzed the quality of these relationships in two different schools. A total of four researchers were involved but Laura Sanchez Fowler (2008) was the lead researcher. The researchers sought to answer the following four questions:

1. Are ratings of student behavioral performance influenced by teacher ethnicity?
2. Does student classroom behavior correlate to teacher-student quality?
3. Are ratings of students' dependant on teacher ethnicity and/or grade level?

4. Does the teacher-student relationship quality influence the academic evaluation of a student?

The study was conducted using two Midwest schools with a predominantly African-American student population. The schools shared the same geographic location and demographics. Additionally, the schools were strategically selected in order to examine how each school's culture may potentially affect the development of teacher-student relationships. One school instituted an Afro-centric culture and presented culturally relevant professional development to its teachers, while the other school did not. A total of 230 students and 20 teachers were used to conduct the study. All students and teachers pertained to grades kindergarten through third grade.

In order to gather information to answer the aforementioned questions the 20 teachers involved completed a survey that analyzed each of their students' behaviors. Teachers completed the surveys based on a three-point Likert scale. Each teacher had to analyze the prosocial and externalizing behaviors that each of their students demonstrated. Teachers also had to evaluate each student's academic ability. Finally, teachers had to determine the quality of the student-teacher relationship quality.

Upon the collection and analysis of the surveys the researchers found that there is a significant correlation between student behavior and the quality of the student-teacher relationship. A positive correlation was also found between the quality of relationships and the teacher's evaluation of student academic performance. The remaining two research questions were determined to have a negative correlation. There was no correlation between the quality of student-teacher quality and academic performance. The results also found that there was no relationship between teacher ethnicity and the quality of the student-teacher relationship. This

last finding is particularly important for the two specific schools that were analyzed because it can mean that the culturally relevant professional development implemented by the Afro-centric school has had no change or influence on student academic growth. For this reason, it is important that later research focus more on the impacts of teacher ethnicity and relationship quality.

Various research studies have been completed in order to attempt to improve the learning environment inside a classroom. In an attempt to measure a positive working environment in a middle school classroom Becky Sinclair and Barry Fraser carried out a research study (2002). The purpose of the study was to identify ways in which student feedback can help teachers improve the classroom environment. Additionally Sinclair and Fraser (2002) added a variable to distinguish if gender affects a person's perception of classroom environment.

In order to conduct the research 43 schools were contacted. A total of 745 students in sixth grade through eighth grade participated in the study. The gender breakdown of student participants was equally broken down to a 50:50 ratio. During the first stage of the research study all students were presented with a 30-item survey that was used to measure the following categories: 1. Cooperation 2. Teacher Support 3. Task Orientation 4. Involvement and 5. Equity. Before the surveys were administered the students' teacher was asked to leave the room in order to not influence the student responses.

Upon assessing student results three teachers were selected to serve as independent case studies during year two of the research study. During this time, each teacher received targeted coaching that was based on students' evaluation of teacher performance and classroom environment. Phase two of the research study required weekly meetings for the teacher and the improvement team. It also required teachers to base their teaching on student assessment results.



Lastly, changes to the classroom environment were made based on the constant reassessment of student classroom perceptions.

The analysis of both phases of the study reveal two strong correlations; one being that teachers tend to view more of a positive classroom environment than what is perceived by the students. Additionally, female students also claim to experience a positive classroom environment more often than their male counterparts. The findings for this study will help to identify ways in which to improve classroom environments in many urban settings.

Additionally, since the survey used with students was a compilation of various studies it is also in the process of creating a survey that can be standardized for similar purposes in the future.

It is also important to identify how positive student-teacher relationships can affect students outside of the classroom. In their research study *School connectedness and the transition into and out of health-risk behavior among adolescents: A comparison of social belonging and teacher support* Clea McNeely and Christina Falci (2004) seek to find out if student-teacher relationships can help to decrease student involvement in various negative behaviors. In the research study both researchers analyzed how the student connectedness affected the involvement in any of following behaviors: sexual intercourse, violent acts, and/or substance abuse. For the purposes of this study school connectedness was measured by how safe a student felt in the school, how much support was provided for the student and how engaged the individual student was with school academics and extracurricular activities. In order to assess these criteria students were presented with a survey to determine the five-point level in which they agreed or disagreed with the statement. The sample population consisted of 20,745 students in seventh grade through twelfth grade. Students were recruited from a total of eighty urban schools.

The analysis of the results revealed that the majority of students in seventh grade through ninth grade were not participating in dangers behaviors. Out of all the students surveyed a relatively small percentage of 27% of students reported smoking cigarettes. Additionally, the analysis determined that the level of social belonging in regards to student popularity did not have an affect on involvement on participating in health-risk behaviors.

On the other hand, teacher support presented a significant on effect on student health-risk behaviors. If a student was already participating in any type of health-risk behavior the development of teacher support led to cessation of such behavior. For example, for students that were already smoking cigarettes, 15% of students decided to stop smoking due to positive teacher influence. Furthermore, if a student was contemplating engaging in a health-risk behavior a relationship with high teacher support had a significant effect on deterring the student from making the wrong decision.

The findings of the study can be beneficial to both students and to entire schools. If more teachers invest in developing supportive relationships with their students, he or she can have a lasting impact on the students' behaviors not only their academics. Additionally, teachers can provide students with a protective relationship when the student may not be able to find this type of relationship elsewhere. This can also result in an increased investment in school participation. Most importantly, the results determined that middle school students were more likely to benefit from supportive teachers. This can lead to the implementation of various strategies at the middle school level. These strategies will foster the development of positive relationships between students and teachers so that students will be less likely to engage in health-risk behaviors at an older age.

As informative as the results of this study are, it also leaves the opportunity for further

research to identify how children value and develop supportive relationships. For example, it will be important to analyze how a specific student develops a supportive relationship with his or her parent in comparison to his or her teacher. Furthermore, it will be beneficial to determine if the development of said supportive relationship is necessary for the development of a similar relationship with another adult authority figure.

Both studies provided valuable information in regards to the long-term impact a teacher can have on the lives of students. For this reason, it is important that I allow students to express their thoughts as to how their teacher is influencing their lives outside of their academics.

### **Conclusion**

The collective research represented by the aforementioned studies has provided analytical and factual evidence for the importance of examining the impact of student-teacher relationships on classroom participation. I hypothesize that a stronger student-teacher relationship will foster higher levels of student participation. I also aim to find strategies and techniques that are effective for the teachers that will be observed to create those positive relationships. If the hypothesis is correct, the impact of the results can be greatly beneficial to the specific school and to bilingual education in its city. A study similar to this is important to the well-being of the educational system because it will allow any professional working in the educational system the importance of valuing student input. Most importantly, it will encourage staff, educators, and administration to become better acquainted with the students they serve. These shifts in mindsets can result in significant changes for the future of our nation's educational system.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Procedures for the Study**

#### **Introduction**

In correlation with the review of literature this chapter will explain the measures implemented to carry out the case study. A detailed explanation of the student population will provide more contextual understanding about the student experience. The researcher will then describe the steps completed as part of the case study. This explanation will encompass the description of the survey used and how it was developed; the analysis of the survey data will be discussed in a later chapter. Additionally, the subsequent courses of action will also be explained, which encompass the classroom observations. The selection process for each class will be provided along with a description of each teacher observed.

Before commencing to describe logistical data for the study it is important to first define specific terms referenced throughout this research study. Based on the review of literature, *student-teacher relationship* and *student-teacher rapport* will be used interchangeably (Halvor, 2009). Both of these terms describe the idea of a positive working affiliation between a student and teacher. At times the student-teacher relationship will be used to describe the connection between the classroom teacher and one specific student. Furthermore, the student-teacher relationship may also reference the overall working relationship between students and their classroom teacher as determined by the observations and survey results.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, *active participation* consisted of student interaction with the teacher or his or her peers during a whole-group lesson, in regards to the material presented. *Active participation* in a small-group setting demonstrated by a student required him or her to complete the assigned tasks through collaborative work with other students in his or her group. In order to be considered an active participant during a whole-group lesson a student would have to complete the expectations established by the classroom teacher, while also participating at least once in the class discussion. Active participation in a small-group setting required students to carry out a conversation with his or her peers about the content assessed through the group work. In addition to this conversation requirement, students should have also made a genuine attempt to complete their work during the allotted time. The abovementioned definitions will help the reader better understand the implications for the research study.

### **Description of Sample Population**

The analytical data represent 64 students from a Midwestern city. The specific geographical location is predominantly Latino, as is the population of the school used. The

school's student population consisted of 97% of students who come from a Latino background. Furthermore, 1% of the population identified as Caucasian, another 1% identified as African American, 0.5% of students was Native American, and the remaining 0.5% was listed as "Other." The school's genetic makeup was also representative of the students used in the case study. Out of the 64 participating students only three did not identify as Latino; their ethnic background was the following: 95.3% of students were Latino (61 students), 3.1% were white (2 students), and 1.6% were African American (1 student).

All students attended an elementary school for kindergarten to eighth grade but assisted classes in the middle school wing of the building. The school implemented a developmental bilingual model, which fostered its heavily Latino population. However, the three classrooms observed were not part of the school's bilingual program. All three homerooms were examined during reading class. Middle school students were researched in order to address possible social issues that are often experienced during the early adolescent years (Sanchez-Fowler, 2008).

Originally, the researcher wanted to observe the bilingual homerooms but was unable to do so due to scheduling conflicts. Instead the advanced classes were observed for each grade level. Once this occurrence was determined, the researcher further predicted that higher levels of participation would be observed since students with higher levels of understanding tend to participate in class more often than other students (Mottet, 2004).

The 64 students consisted of 60.9% male students and 39.1% female students in 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The average age for students was 12 years-old, ranging from 11 years to 15 years. The majority of students in each class attended his or her current school for at least two years, which created stability between students. However, in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade homeroom one new student transferred to the school at the beginning of the year. In a similar manner, two new

students were added to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade class roster. There were no new students added to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. Furthermore, both the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms experienced many roster changes throughout the year, as many students were added or taken out of the homeroom. It is important to note the change in classroom rosters because this may have resulted in instability in the classroom environment and sense of trust between peers. The significance of this instability will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom consisted of a total of 25 students, 16 males and 9 females. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade homeroom was comprised of 19 students, 11 males and 8 females. Lastly, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had 20 students, 12 males and 8 females. Both the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher were new to the school and undergoing their first year of teaching. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher was a returning staff member and in her second year of teaching. Again, the implications of this information will be further discussed with the analysis of the results in Chapter 4.

### **Description of Procedures Used**

Before beginning to collect data, Informed Consent Forms were given to parents in Spanish and English. These forms can be found in Appendices A and B respectively. Since classroom observations were an integral part of the research study it was essential that all students return the Informed Consent Forms. It took the researcher approximately two weeks to gather the forms from all 64 students. The next step consisted of distributing the student survey. The researcher introduced the survey to all the classes. She explained that the survey was completely anonymous and the importance of answering honestly so that the results may help to improve their future learning experiences. It took all three classes an average of 7 minutes to complete the survey. This survey was not analyzed until after all observations were completed;

this helped the researcher and the other observers avoid any type of bias that may have skewed the observational data.

Prior to commencing observations the researcher met with the other two observers that would use the Observation Sheet presented in Appendix D to conduct the procedure. This meeting ensured that all three observers would seek the same information and measure various behaviors in a similar manner. Each class was observed once by each observer for a total of three observations per homeroom. This rotation helped to create inter-rater reliability and validity of the observation sheet. It was also important to observe each classroom numerous times because the three observations depicted an authentic picture of the classroom environment and levels of participation. Whereas, completing only one observation per classroom may have skewed data based on whether the students or the teacher were having a good or a bad day. In order to quantify classroom participation each observer was given a seating chart for each classroom; the seating charts can be referenced in Appendices E, F, and G. Every time a student participated during the whole-group lesson the observer maintained a tally-count of the amount of times each student participated. In order to keep the student's identity confidential, the seating chart was used to keep an accurate count of the tally marks; the students' names were not used on the seating charts.

It took a total of three weeks to complete the observations since each observer only conducted one observation per week. This guaranteed that the observers were not intrusive to the routines and learning that regularly occurred in each classroom. The observers did not discuss the observations with each other until all observations were completed. This acknowledgement eliminated observer bias so that the observer would not have a certain expectation before going into a classroom.



In order to be able to compare the three grade levels in the analysis, the researcher asked the teachers to prepare a vocabulary lesson for the first observation. This parallel between classes allowed the researcher to analyze the classroom participation based on teaching style and not content addressed. The subject matter of the last two lessons observed were at the discretion of each teacher. This also allowed a strong framework for comparison because it provided the researcher with insight to each teacher's classroom routines and expectations.

The process to obtain all of the necessary information for the case study was time-consuming. The researcher first made certain that all Informed Consent Forms were collected. After this, the student surveys were completed. Lastly, a three-week time period allowed the researcher and two other observers to collect classroom participation data. Upon completing all observations the researcher began to analyze the Student Survey data and the Observation Sheets. The information gathered through this analysis will be further discussed in chapter 4. The ensuing chapter will explain the results from the survey and the observations. Additionally, chapter 4 will present graphical data to demonstrate the implications of the data.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

After the month-long process of collecting data through observations was completed the researcher was ready to begin analyzing the data. This chapter will elaborate upon the numerical data and the analytical data of the information gathered. The information will be presented for each grade-level. Subsequently a comparative analysis will then be explain the cross-grade-level information.

#### **Introduction**

Upon collecting all survey and observational data an analysis of all information was completed. This process consisted of comparing the responses to each question across each grade-level. The researcher was then able to identify which grade level had the most “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” responses for each question. Each class’ results were also analyzed

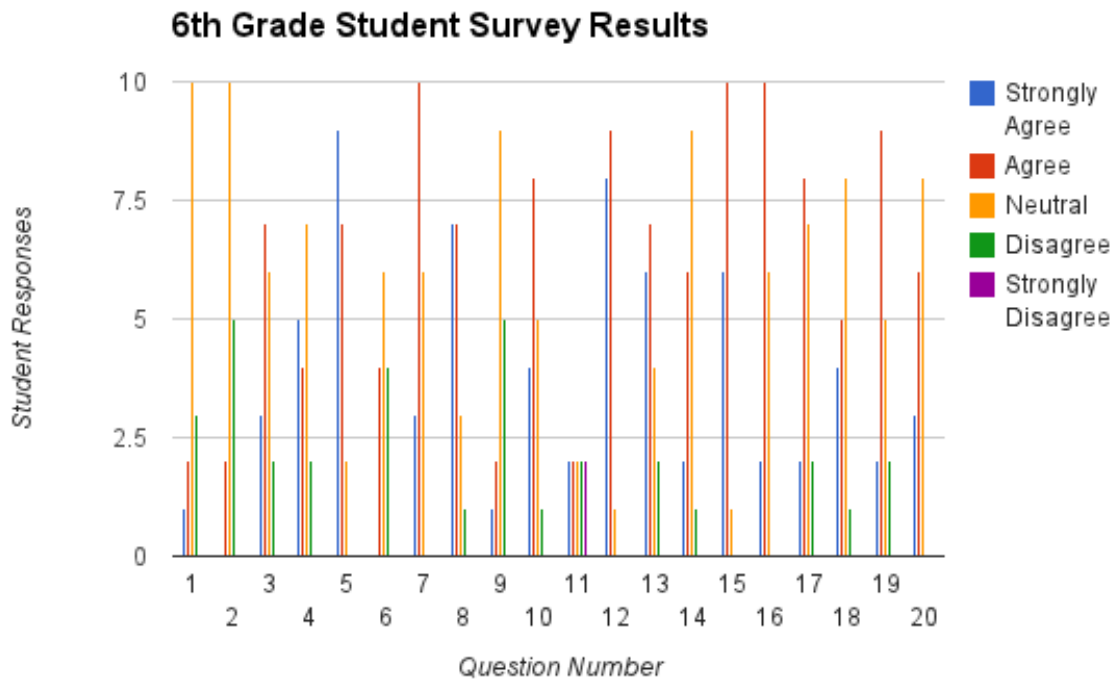
individually to identify which responses demonstrated the strongest sense of positive student-teacher rapport. Lastly, the amount of times that students participated during the whole-group lesson was also recorded for each observation and documented per grade level. The contents of this chapter explain the significance of the data collected. Graphical data will be used to further explain the findings. Furthermore, each question will be explained in regards to its determination of positive or negative student-teacher rapport.

### **Presentation of Student Data**

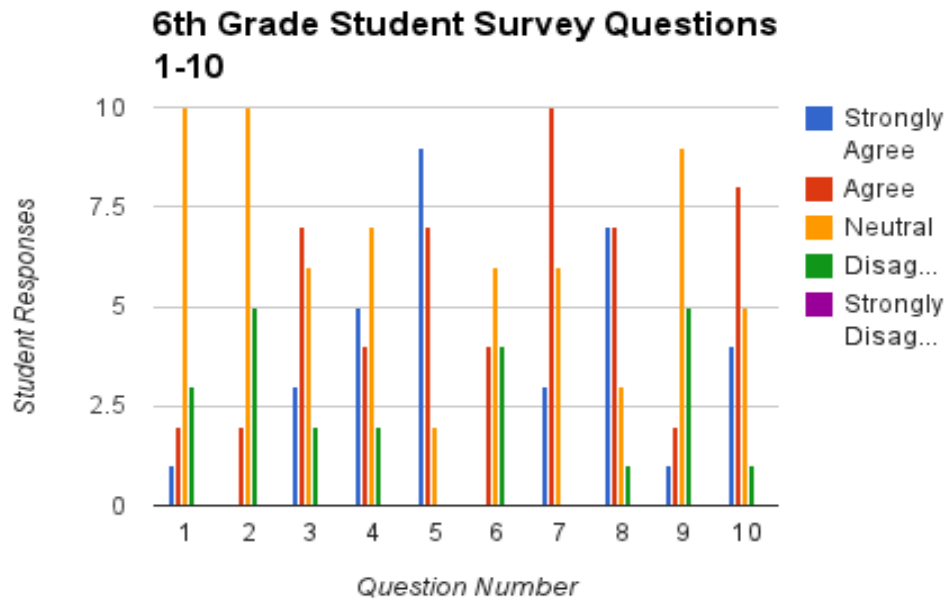
It is important to first examine the data collected from each classroom on an individual basis. This process allows the researcher to understand the occurrences within each classroom and identify possible causes for the results based on the observed data. The student survey results for each grade level are represented with three graphs. The first figure identifies the total amount of student responses for the designated grade-level for all twenty questions in the student survey. Following this figure will be two more; the first will depict the responses for question numbers 1-10 and the latter will display the results for question numbers 11-20. The researcher decided this was necessary in order to better visualize the results of the study.

The following figure is a representation of the results determined by the 6<sup>th</sup> grade student surveys. The author included these findings in the research since it is meaningful to observe all of the collected data in one figure. However, the large number of survey questions did not allow the researcher to make conclusions based on the graph. For this reason, the results were separated into two sections. Figure 2 and Figure 3 describe the results in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### **Figure 1. Total 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey Results**

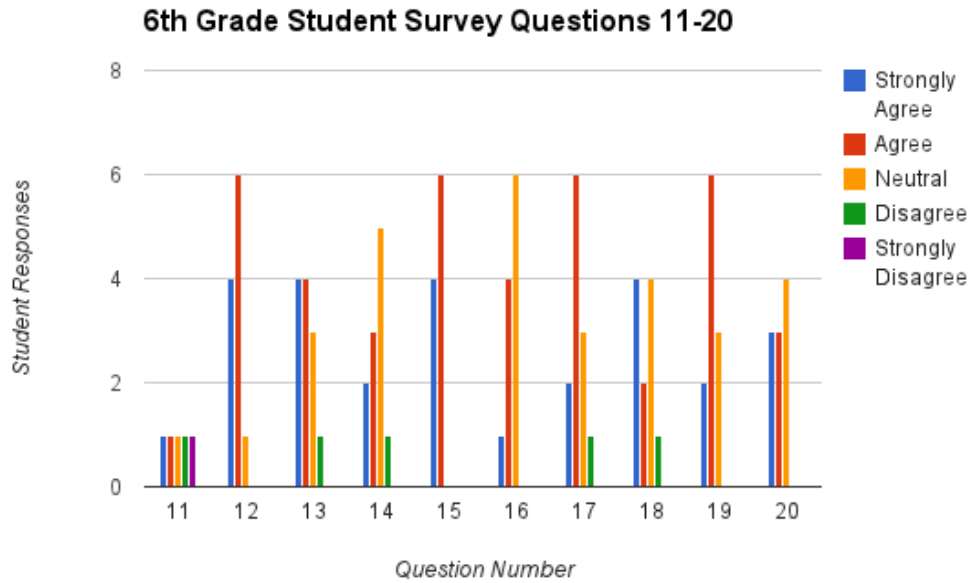


The landscape of all 6<sup>th</sup> grade student survey results demonstrated various examples of negative student-teacher rapport. However, the majority of responses demonstrated an overall positive student-teacher rapport. Through the evidence the researcher found that 13 of the 20 questions demonstrated agreement with scenarios with correlations to a strong and healthy working relationship with the classroom teacher; such questions are explored further in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

**Figure 2.** 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey Questions 1-10.

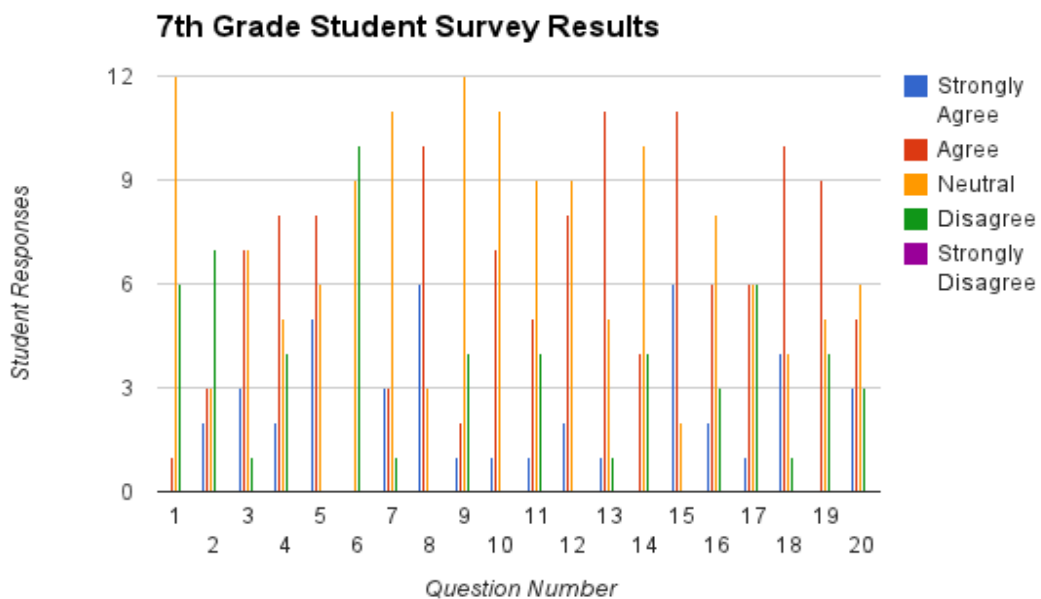
In Figure 2 the researcher was able to better observe the final data. Upon doing so, with item numbers 1-10 the case study revealed that only questions 3, 5, 7, 8, and 10 reflected positive student-teacher rapport. This conclusion was determined since items 3, 5, 7, 8, and 10 have a higher amount of “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” responses instead of “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree.”

**Figure 3.** 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey Questions 11-20.



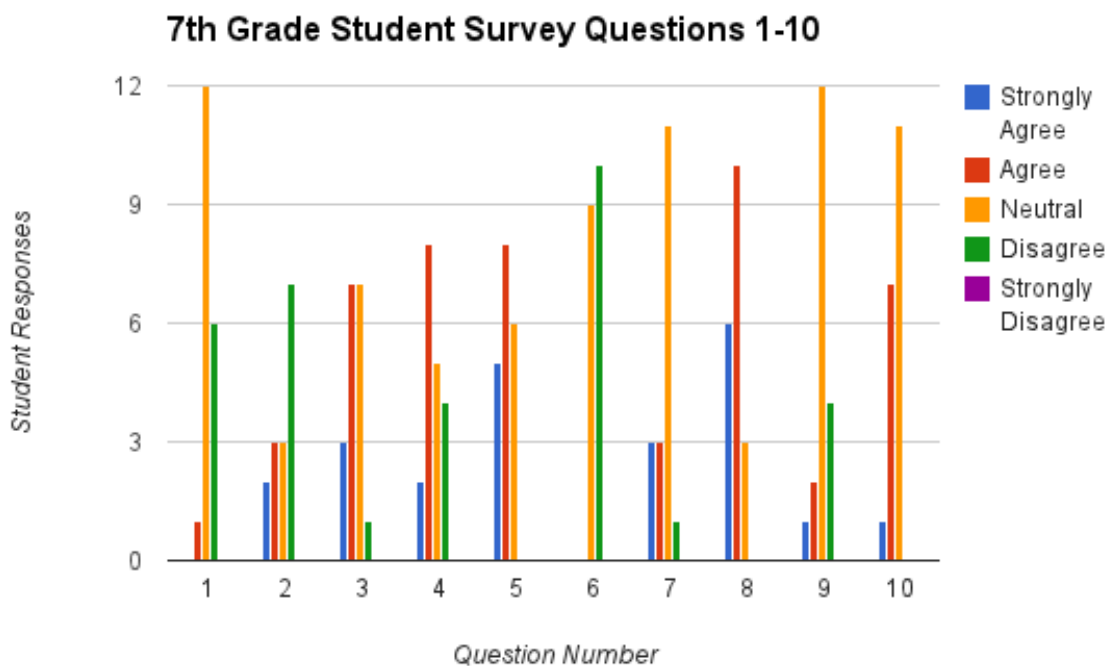
In a similar manner, questions 11-20 also demonstrated a dominance of positive student-teacher rapport through questions 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, and 20. The amount of student responses were higher for the “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” categories for the aforementioned questions.

**Figure 4.** 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey Results.



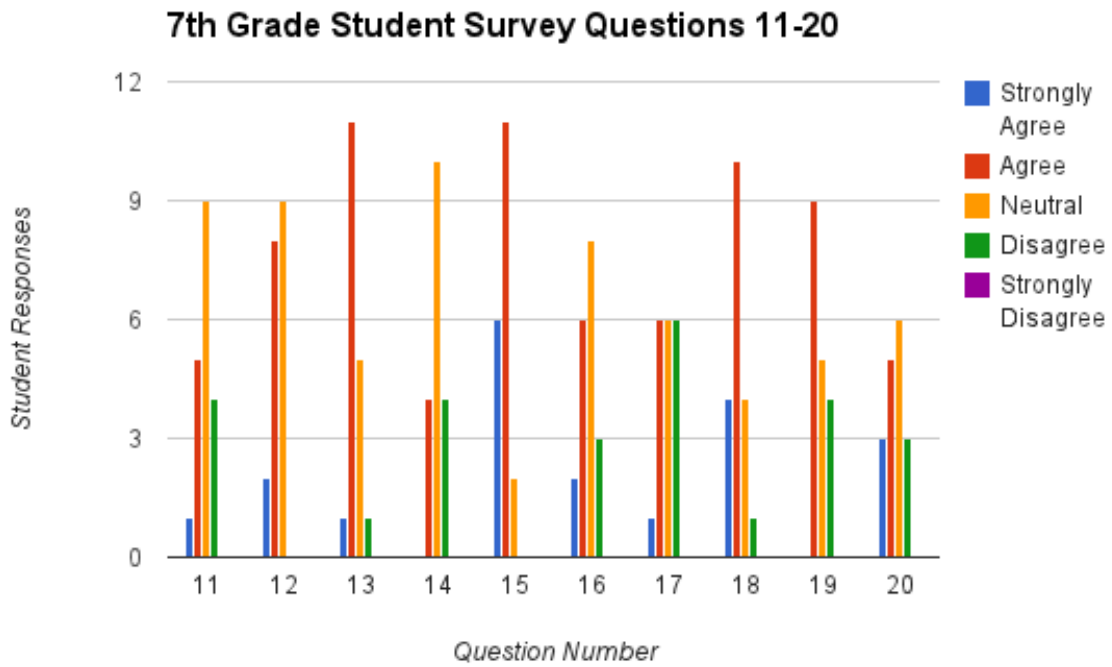
The results depicted in Figure 4 were similar to those found in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade student survey. A total of ten questions demonstrated a positive student-teacher rapport. Nevertheless, these ten questions were not statistically significant since there were also another ten questions that demonstrated either a neutral or negative student-teacher rapport. These questions are analyzed independently of each other in the following figures.

**Figure 5.** 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey Questions 1-10.



In questions 1-10 7<sup>th</sup> grade students identified high levels of agreeance for questions 3, 4, 5, and 8.

**Figure 6.** 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey Questions 11-20



The second part of the Student Survey correlated positive student-teacher rapport for questions 12, 13, 15, 18, 19, and 20. The implications for each question will be explored later in this chapter.

**Figure 7.** 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey Results.

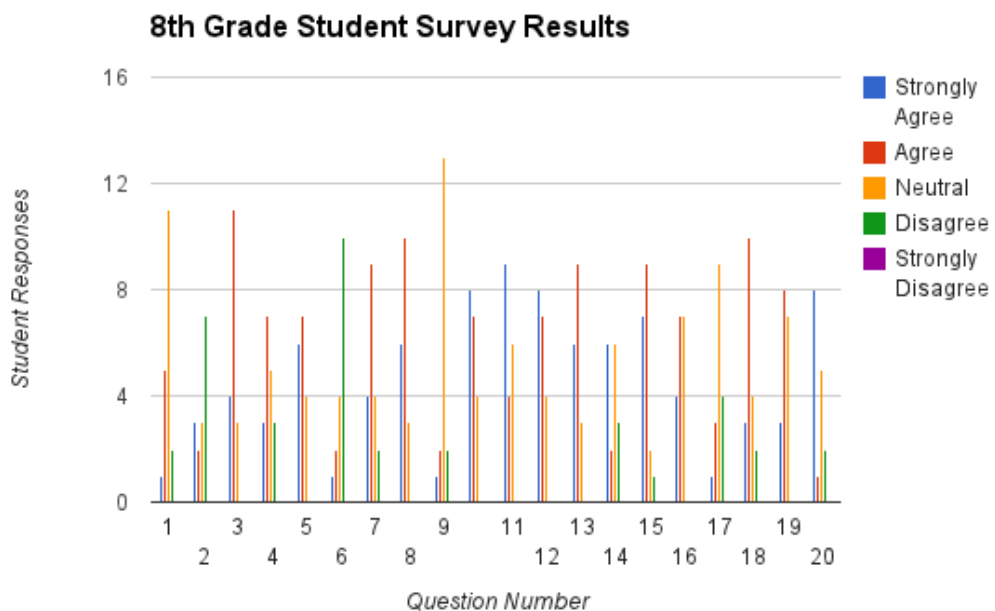
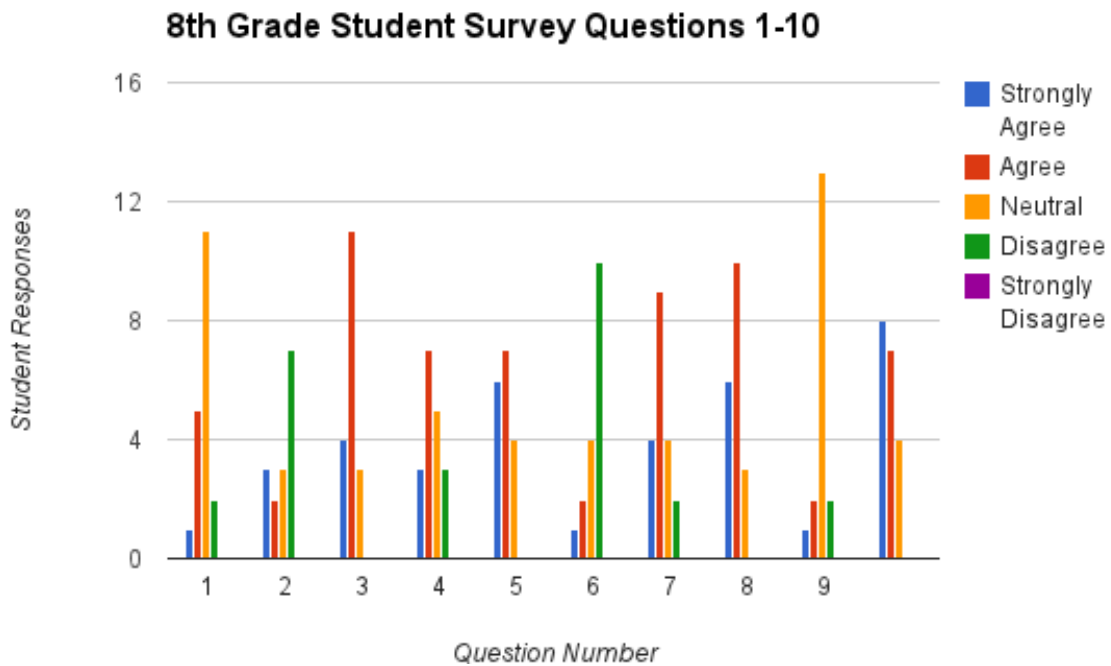




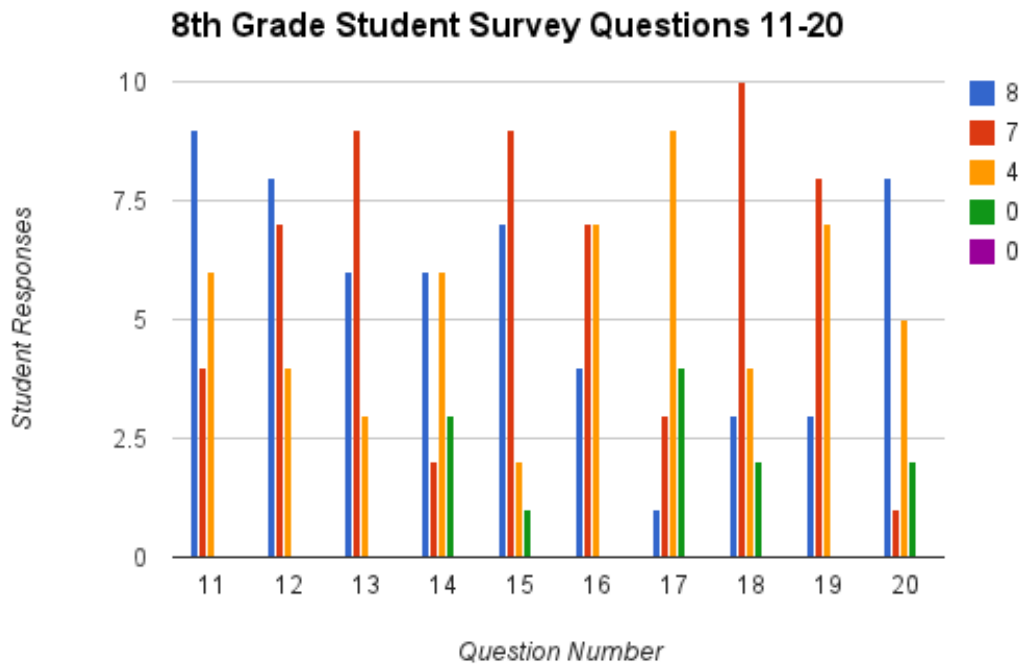
Figure 7 demonstrates the total results for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Student Survey. Eighth grade students identified the most answers representing a strong student-teacher rapport. A total of 15 questions demonstrated a positive working relationship between students and the classroom teacher.

**Figure 8.** 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey Questions 1-10.



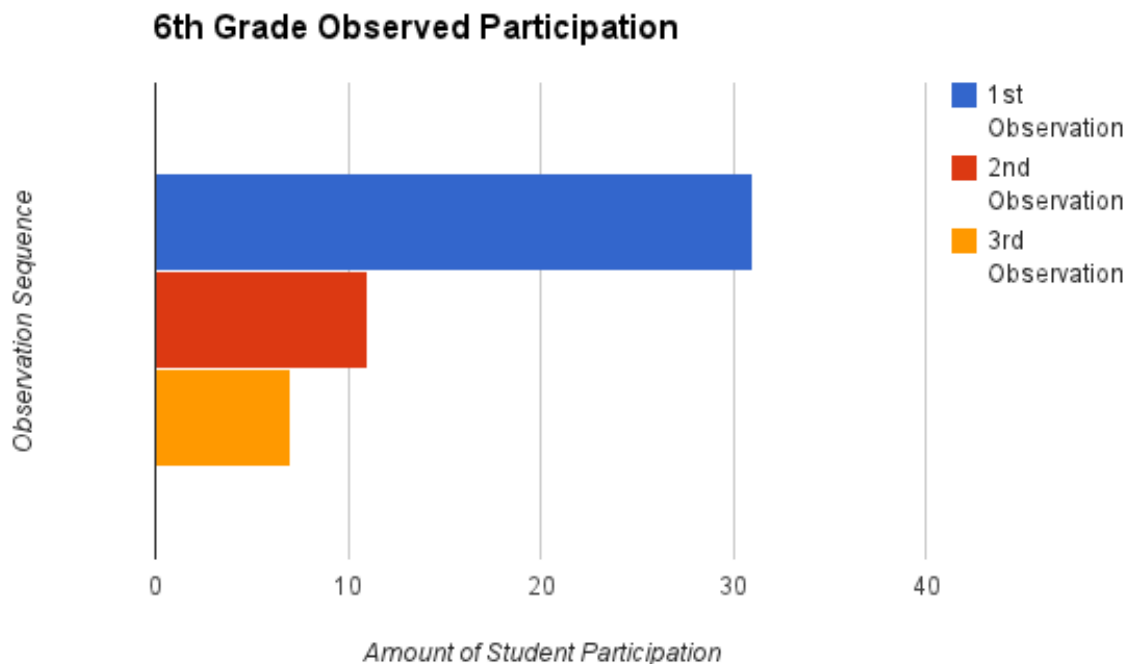
Once the researcher divided the questionnaire into halves she evaluated that questions 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 all had higher amount of “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” responses.

**Figure 9.** 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey Questions 11-20.



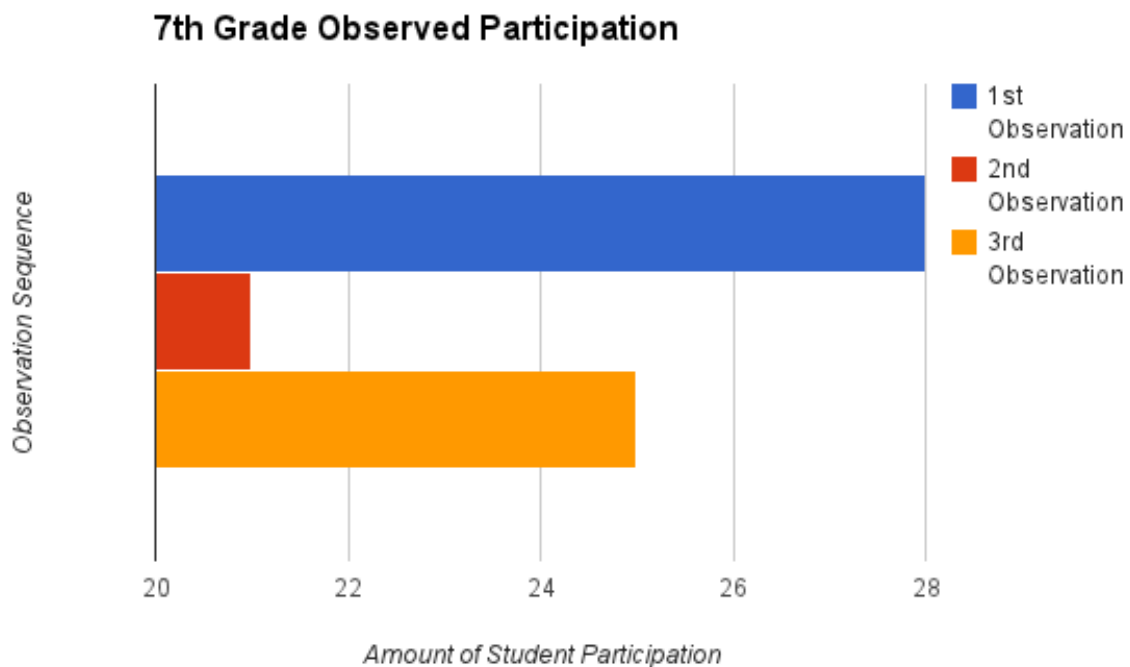
The second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey identified questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20 with characteristics of positive student-teacher rapport.

**Figure 10.** 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Observed Participation.



The compilation of observed student participation in 6<sup>th</sup> grade demonstrated a decline in the amount of whole-group participation during the three-week process. However, the first observation identified a total of 31 student participation contributions; this was the second highest amount of student participation opportunities observed during one whole-group lesson. The second observation recognized a dramatic decrease in the amount of participation observed; the participation counts dropped from 31 to 11. The final observation witnessed a second decline in student participation. The last time 6<sup>th</sup> grade students were observed only 7 participation opportunities were recorded. Since this classroom contained a total of 25 students the 7 observed contributions represented less than 28% of student participation. It is also important to note that only 5 students contributed to the total 7 participation opportunities documented.

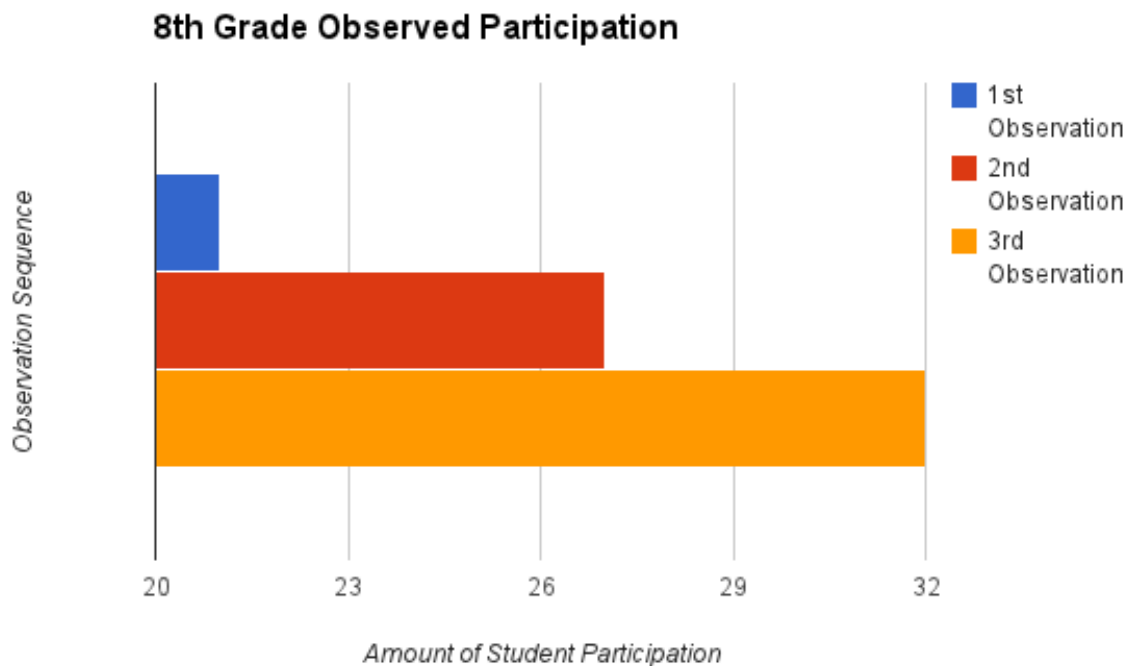
**Figure 11.** 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Observed Participation.



The 7<sup>th</sup> grade observations also identified a decline in observations. However, this downfall was not as significant as the one that occurred in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. The first time the 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom was observed a total of 28 student participations were recorded.

The second observation found 7 fewer behaviors for a total of 21 participative actions. Finally, the third observation resulted in an increase of 4 participations from the previous observation for a total of 25 participative behaviors observed. Each time the 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom was observed, each of the 19 students participated at least once. This was noted by each observer and later confirmed by the classroom teacher that students were held to the expectation that each student must participate at least once during class.

**Figure 12.** 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Observed Participation.



Unlike both of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms observed, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom identified a steady increase of classroom participation. The observation data documented 21, 27, and 32 opportunities for participation during each observation respectively. There were 20 students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. Not all students participated in the three observed lessons; some students participated two or three times. The continual improvement in participative actions represented an average increase of 5.5 actions per observation.

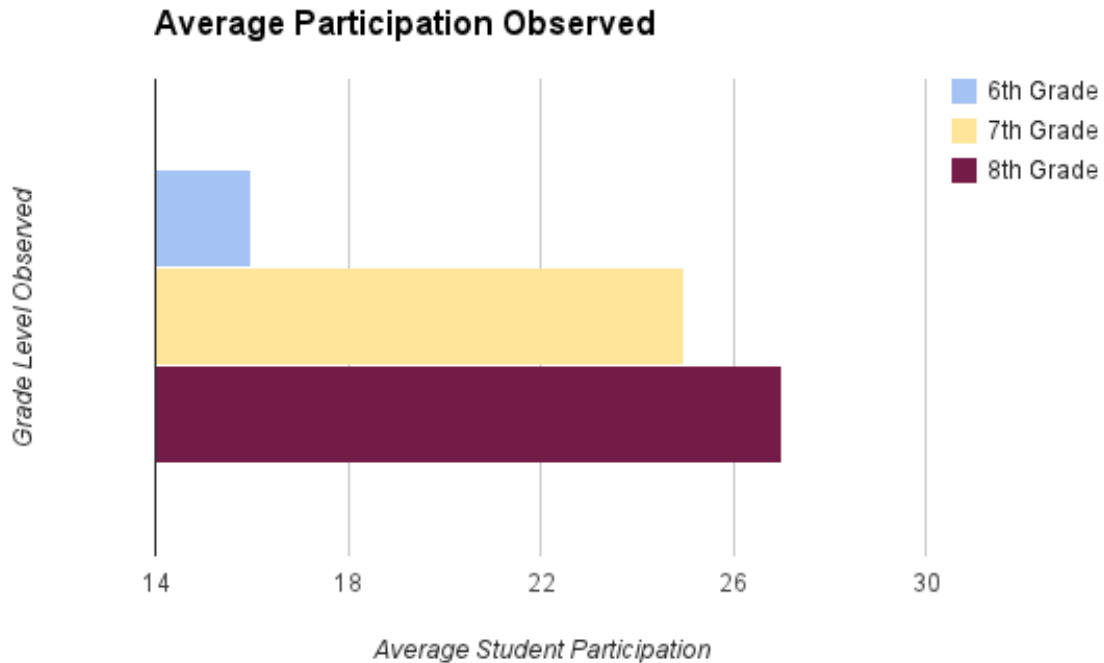
**Figure 13.** Average Participation Observed.

Figure 13 depicts the total average student participation during all three observations completed for each grade level. The average amount for 6<sup>th</sup> grade was 16 participations. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had an average of 25 students participating during each observation. Lastly, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had the largest amount of student participation with an average of 27.

### **Analysis of Student Data**

The data previously explored provided the reader with a general spectrum of the information collected through the Student Survey and the three-week observation process. The following figures will present further analysis of the Student Survey. Each question in the Student Survey will be explored and its implications explained.

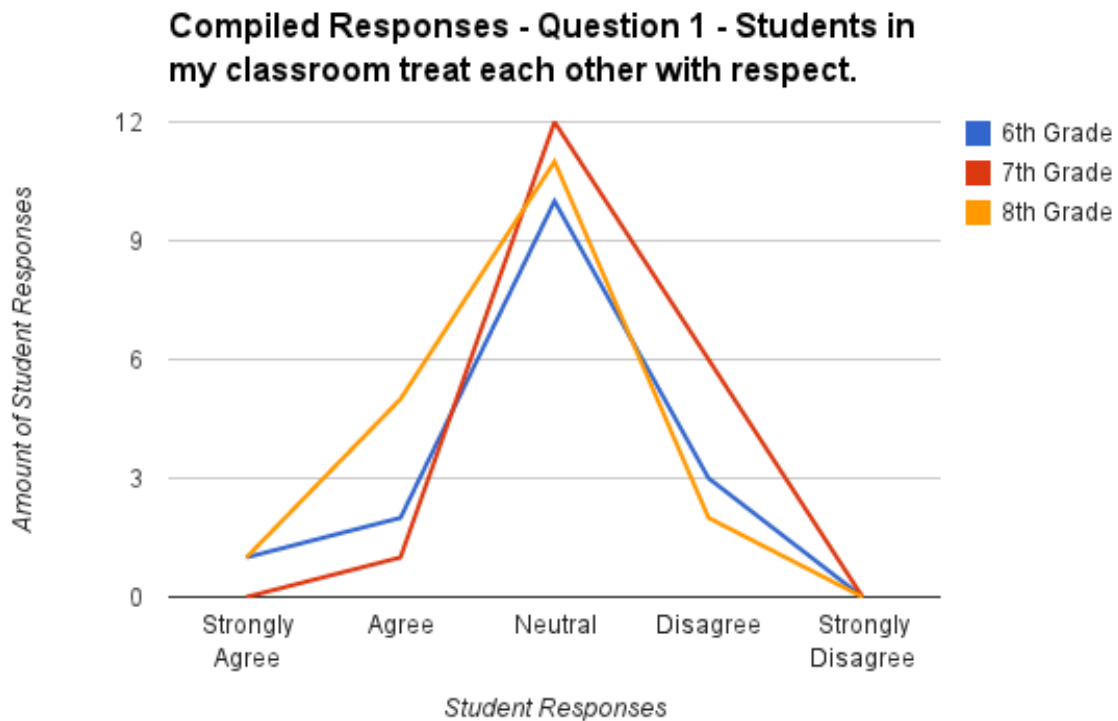
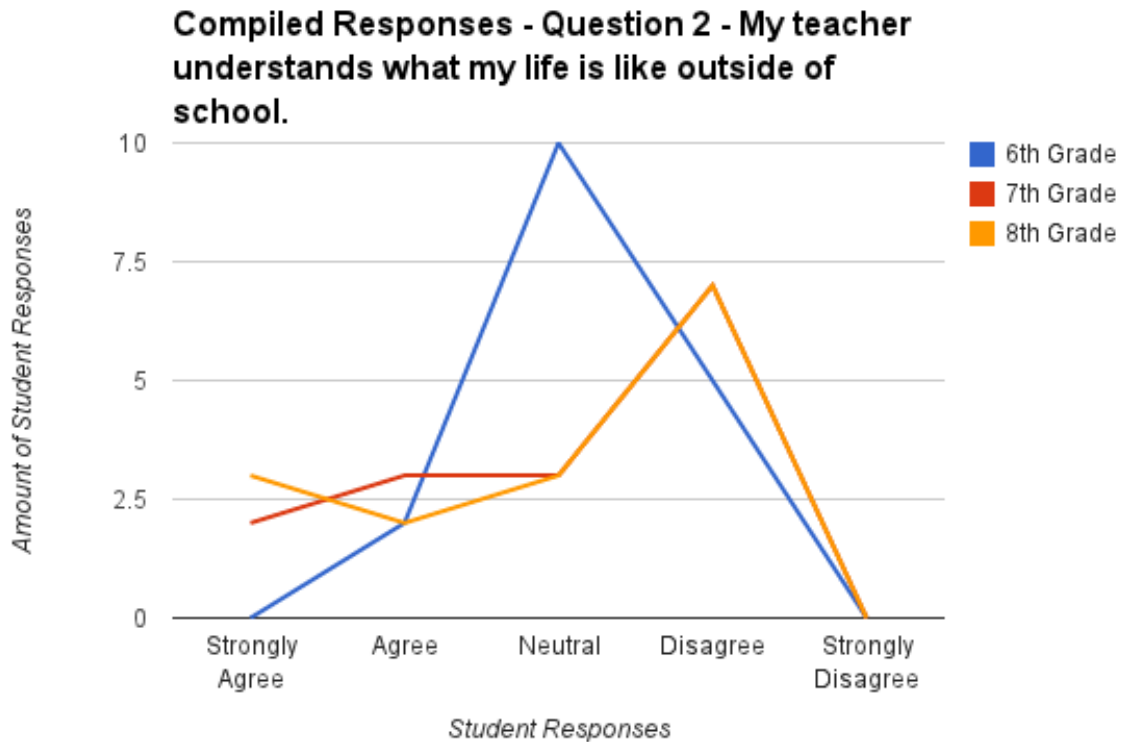
**Figure 14.** Compiled Responses – Question 1.

Figure 14 demonstrates a normal bell curve for all three grades observed. None of the 64 students surveyed responded “Strongly Disagree” for the question *Students in my classroom treat each other with respect*. This demonstrates that students did feel at least a small sense of respect amongst their peers. Overall, the responses were similar for all three grade-levels. However, the responses for “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” were higher in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. This question was important to detect the type of student-teacher rapport because if a student does not feel respected by his or her peers he or she will not create a safe or welcoming relationship with the classroom teacher.

**Figure 15.** Compiled Responses – Question 2.

Question 2 of the Student Survey, represented stronger results for both the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. The question, *My teacher understands what my life is like outside of school*, helped the researcher identify what type of student-teacher relationship represented each classroom. The stronger a working relationship is between student and teacher the more a teacher understands a student's personal situation outside of school. This occurs because the student feels comfortable to express his or her personal thoughts with the teacher.

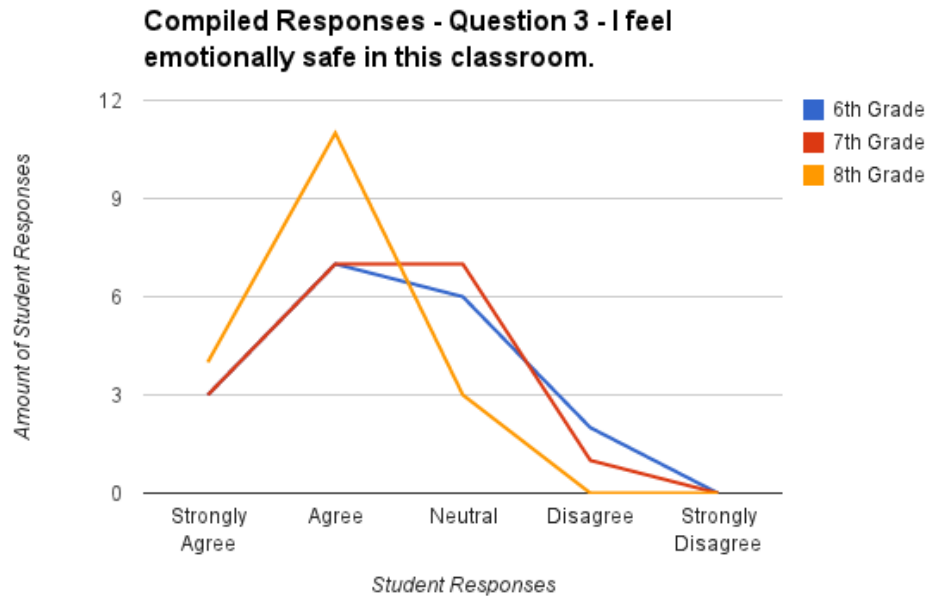
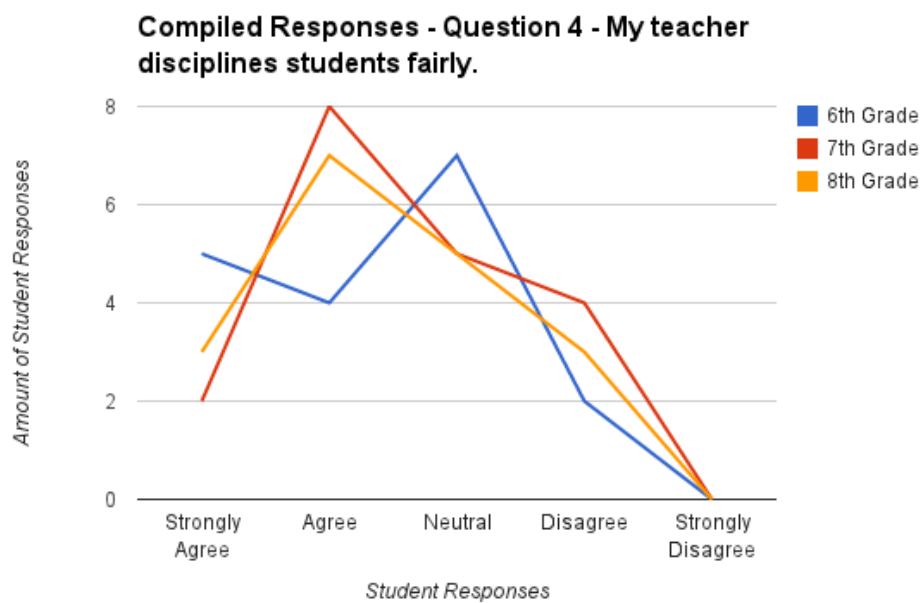
**Figure 16.** Compiled Responses – Question 3.

Figure 16 represents the results for question 3 of the Student Survey was correlated to question 1 since they both attempted to detect the well-being of each student within the classroom environment. Evidently, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom depicted the highest evidence of a positive student-teacher relationship in the same manner as question 1.

**Figure 17.** Compiled Responses – Question 4.



Question 4, *My teacher disciplines students fairly* was important for the student survey because it assessed each student's view of the teacher's discipline system. It is important that students view the behavior management in the classroom as just and equivalent because it will help to foster a positive teacher-student relationship. Figure 17 demonstrates that students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade agreed the most with the prompt.

**Figure 18.** Compiled Responses – Question 5.

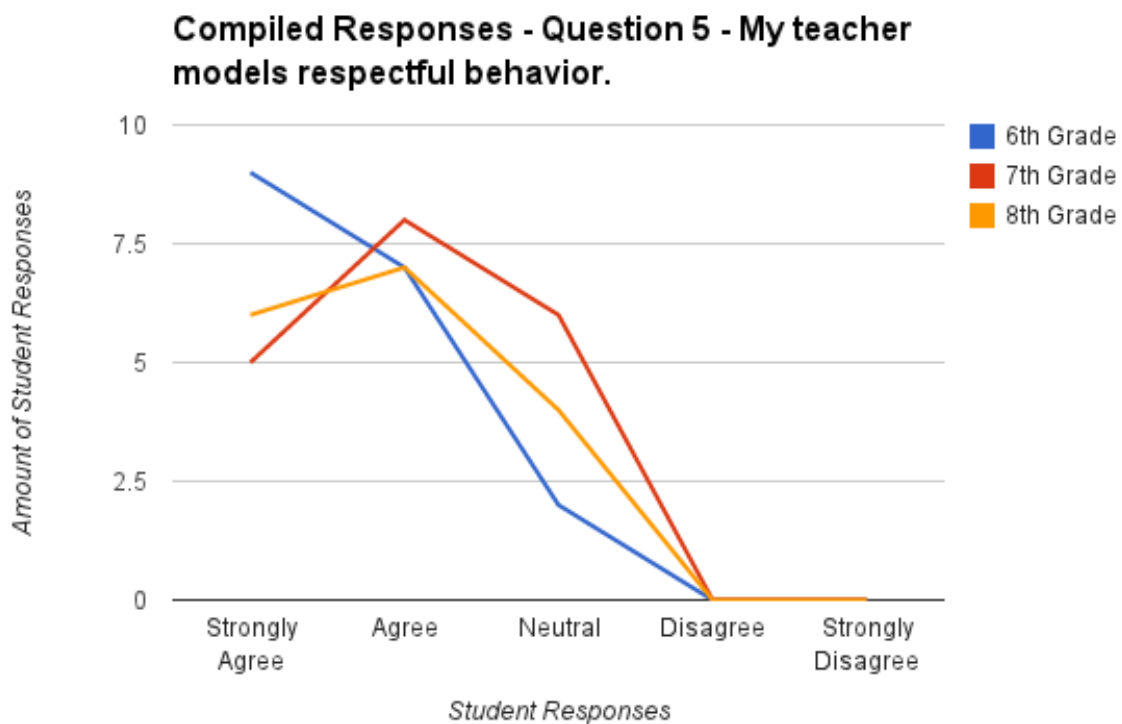
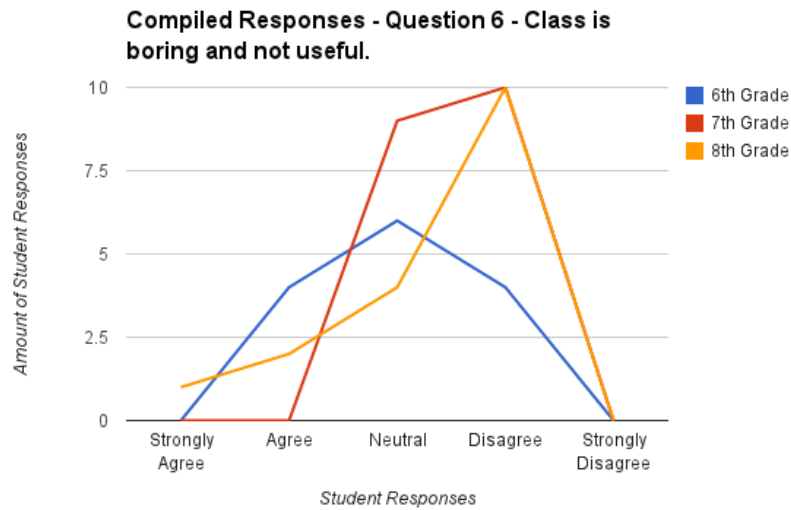


Figure 18 demonstrates question 5, *My teacher models respectful behavior*. This question helped the researcher detect if the classroom teacher was modeling exemplar student behavior for students to follow. Students in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had the highest amount of responses that agreed with the statement.

**Figure 19.** Compiled Responses – Question 6.

Question 6 of the Student Survey is the only question that tested for negative student-teacher rapport. Therefore, students should have responded in the categories “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” in order to demonstrate positive student-teacher rapport. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had the most responses showing disagreement and was the only grade level to not respond in either the “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” categories.

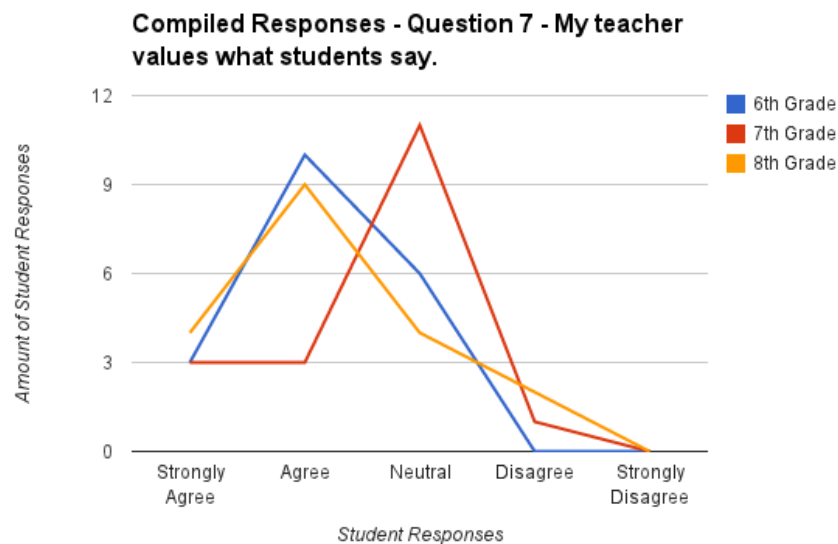
**Figure 20.** Compiled Responses – Question 7.

Figure 20 represents question 7 – *My teacher values what students say*. This question was important because if students believe that their teachers want to hear their ideas expressed, they will be more likely to participate in class. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had the strongest responses for this question.

**Figure 21.** Compiled Responses – Question 8.

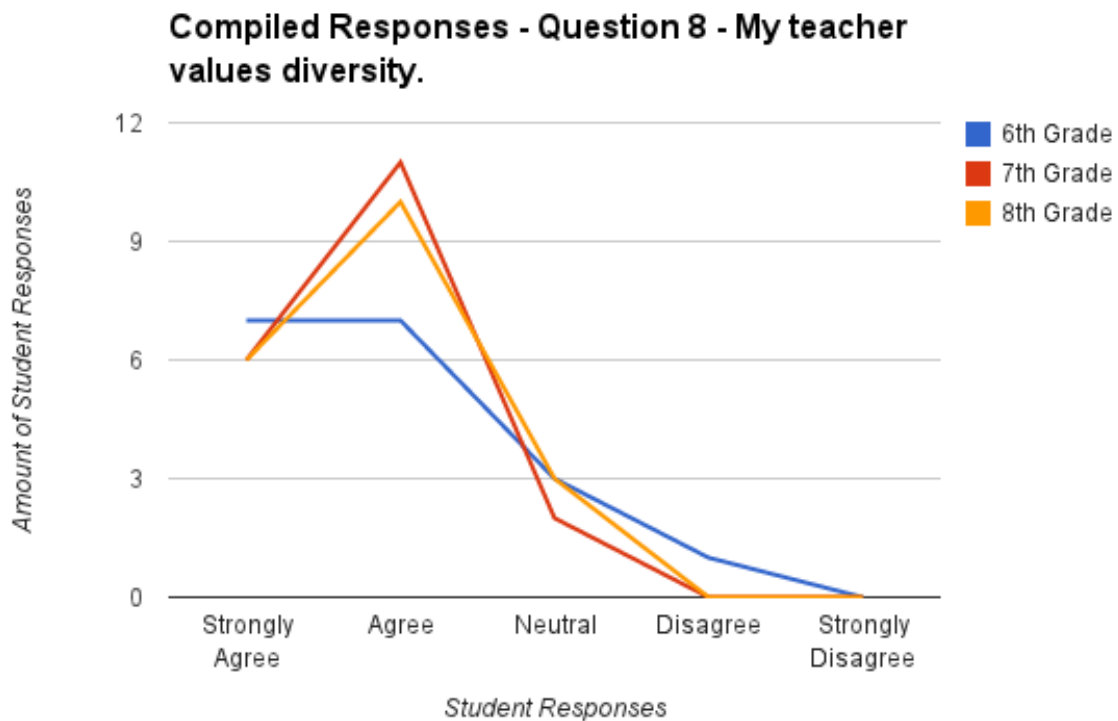
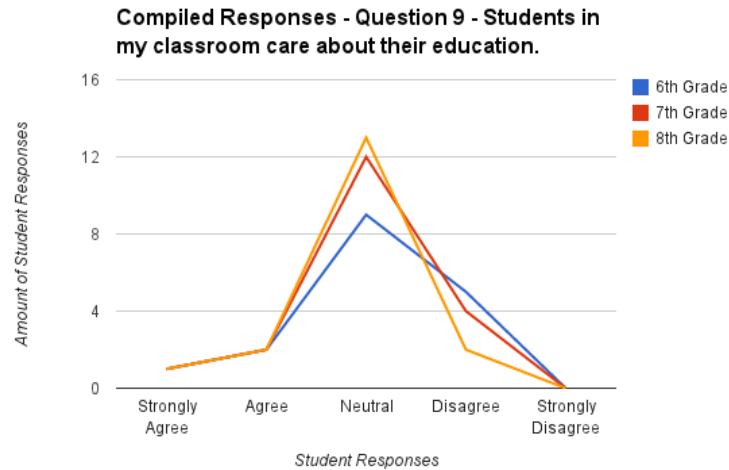


Figure 21 demonstrates the importance of varying opinions within a classroom. The Student Survey aimed to measure this variety with question 8, *My teacher values diversity*. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom showed the highest results for this question.

**Figure 22.** Compiled Responses – Question 9

In order for a student to want to participate in the classroom he or she has to be invested in their education. Often times this investment increases through positive interactions with the student's teacher. Question 9 determined that all grade levels seemed to be closely invested in their education. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade level seemed to have students that cared more since there were fewer responses disagreeing with the statement, *Students in my classroom care about their education.*

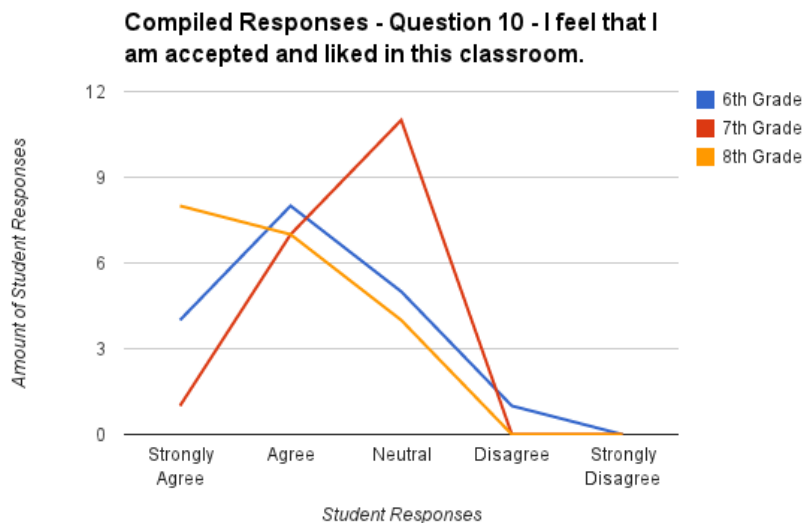
**Figure 23.** Compiled Responses – Question 10.

Figure 10 illustrates the results for question 10, *I feel that I am accepted and liked in this classroom*. In order to create a level of acceptance in a classroom that will foster high-levels of student participation an educator needs to create an atmosphere in which all students will embrace the differences of each other. Otherwise, student participation will decline in order to avoid peer rejection. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom represented a higher level of classroom acceptance.

**Figure 24.** Compiled Responses – Question 11.

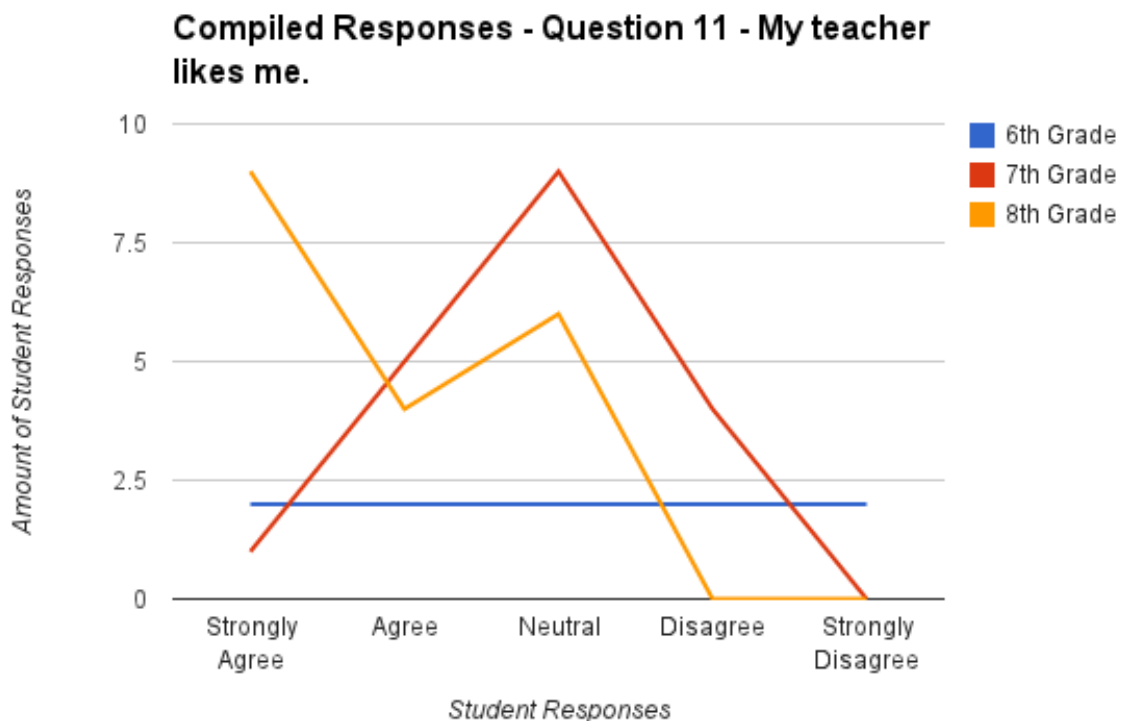
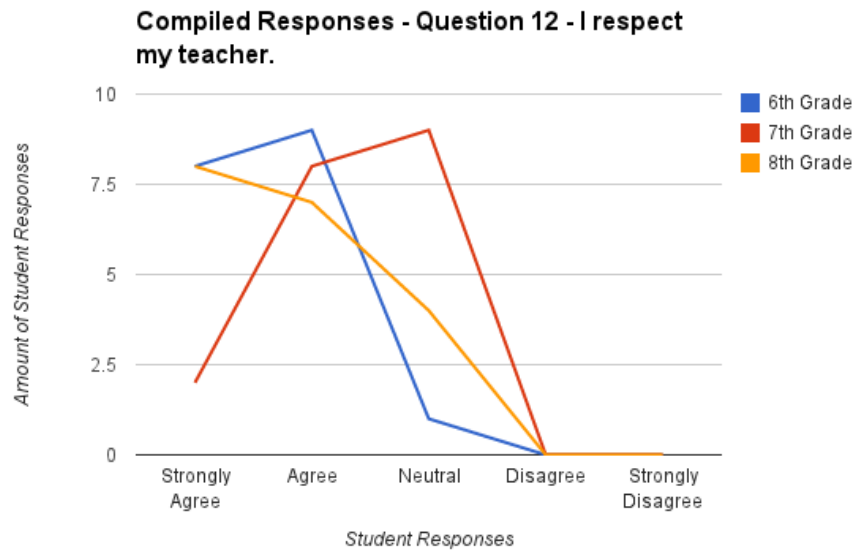
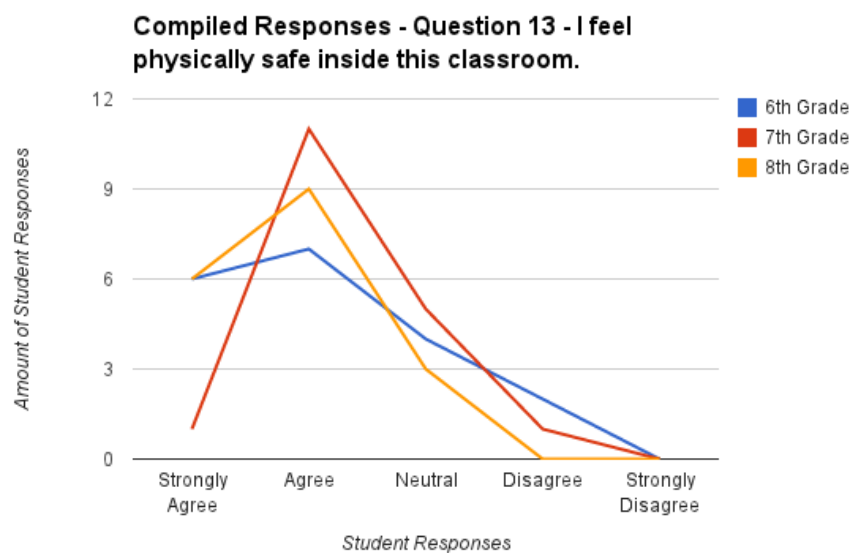


Figure 24 represents the results of question 11, *My teacher likes me*. This question was essential to test for the type of student-teacher rapport because if students think their teacher does not like them, it will be difficult to create a positive working relationship. A higher amount of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students believed that their classroom teacher liked them compared to the other two grade levels.

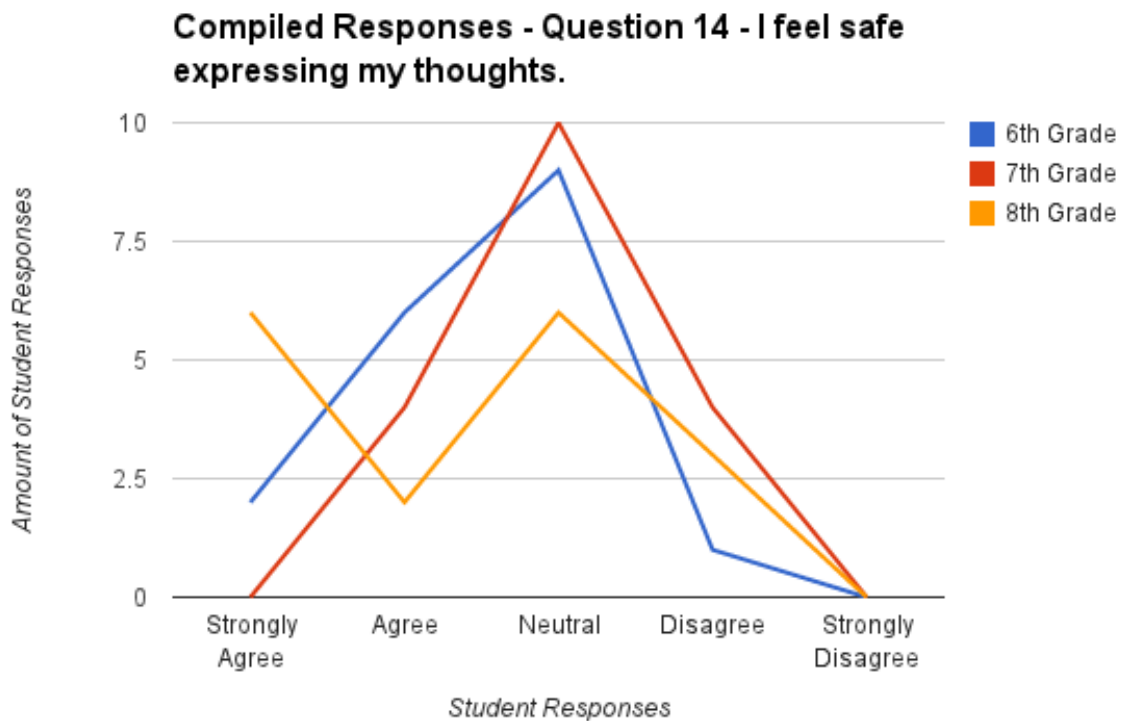
**Figure 25.** Compiled Responses – Question 12.

In the same manner that question 11 tested for the importance of the student feeling liked by his or her teacher it is important for the student to respect the classroom teacher. Figure 25 represents the results of question 12, *I respect my teacher*. Through the responses in the Student Survey the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students respected their teacher more than the other students.

**Figure 26.** Compiled Responses – Question 13.

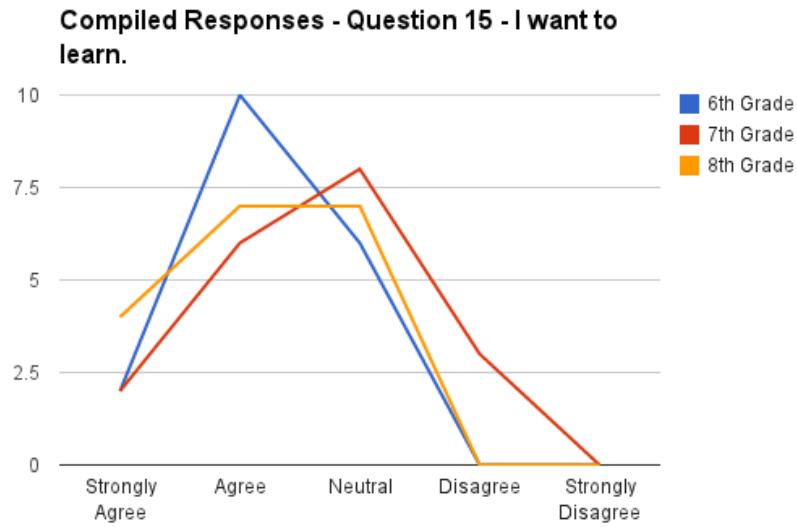
In order encourage classroom participation it is important that a teacher creates a safe classroom. This will ensure that students are not later reprimanded by their peers for participating in class. Question 13, *I feel physically safe inside this classroom* demonstrated that the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students felt the safest in their classroom environment.

**Figure 27.** Compiled Responses – Question 14.



Question 14 was closely tied to the purposes of question 13. Figure 27 represents question 14, *I feel safe expressing my thoughts*. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students depicted equally high levels of feeling safe sharing their ideas with their peers and teacher.

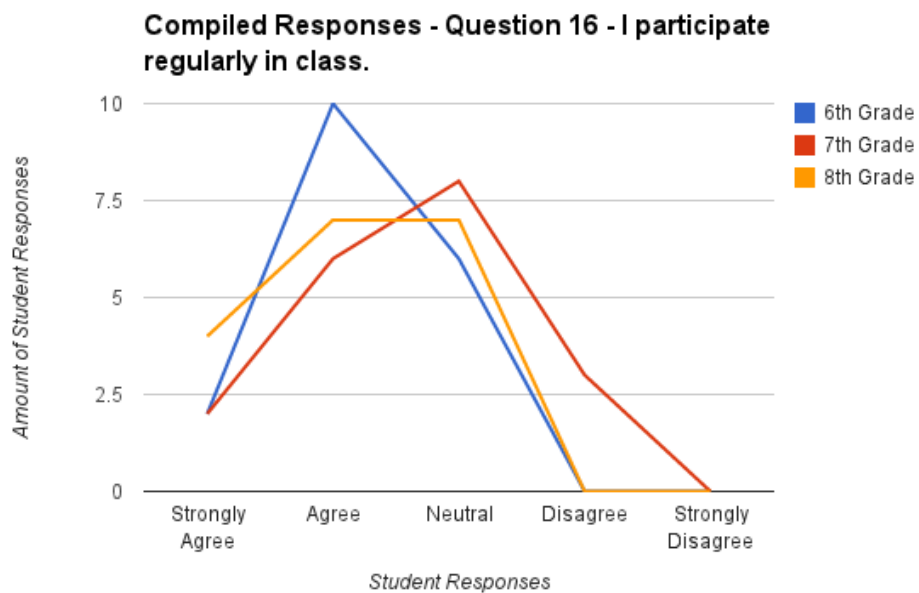
**Figure 28.** Compiled Responses – Question 15.



Question 15 was important to further examine student commitment and investment.

Figure 28 represents the statement, *I want to learn*. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade students portrayed the highest desire to learn.

**Figure 29.** Compiled Responses – Question 16.





Question 16 asked students to self-assess their own level of classroom participation. In comparison to all three grade levels, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students believed they participated the least. While the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students believed they participated the most frequently in class.

**Figure 30.** Compiled Responses – Question 17.

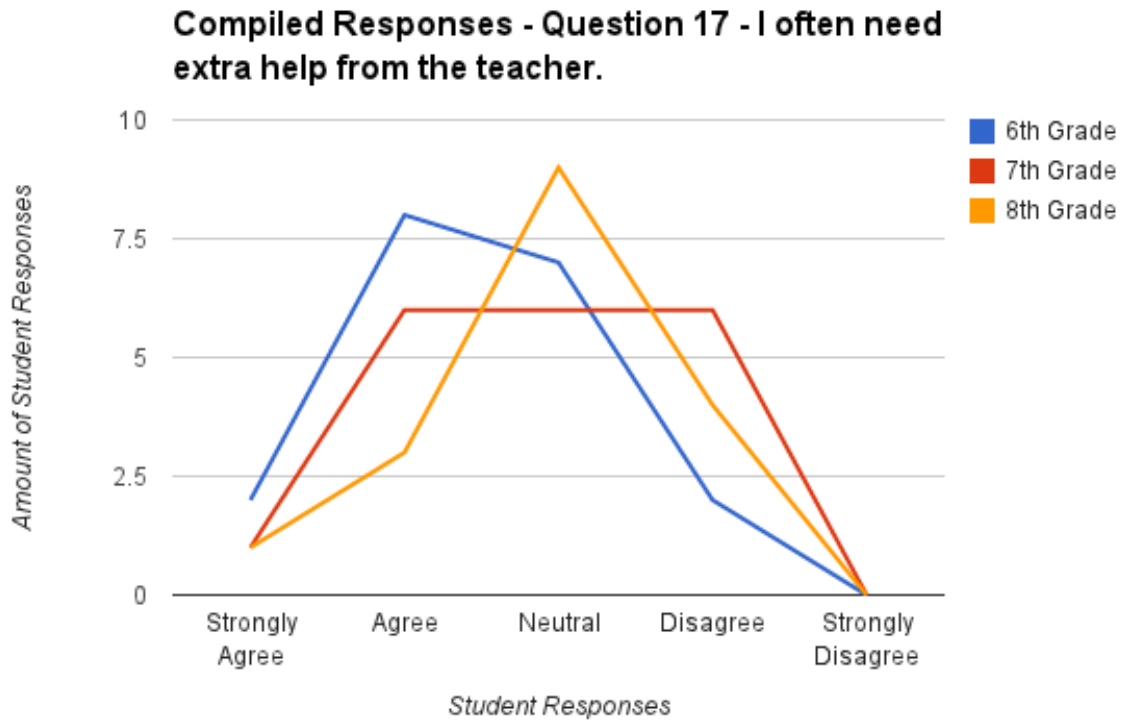
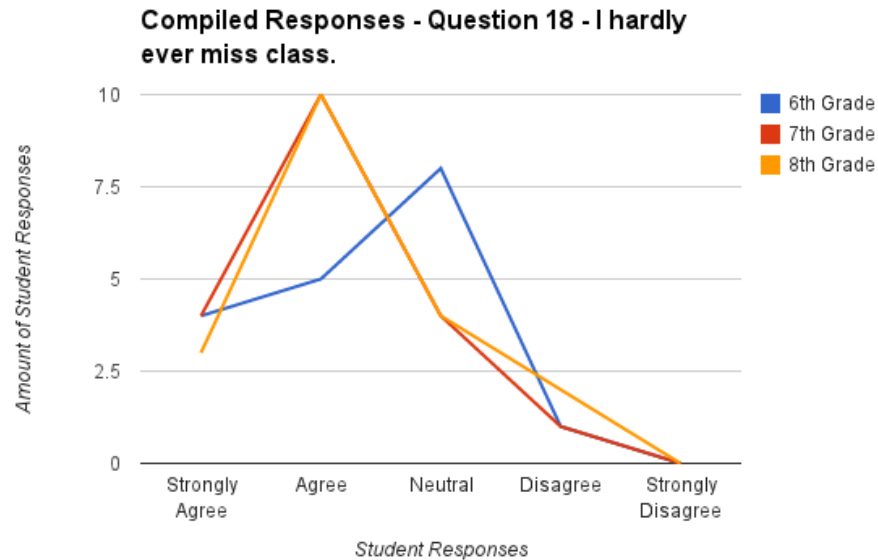
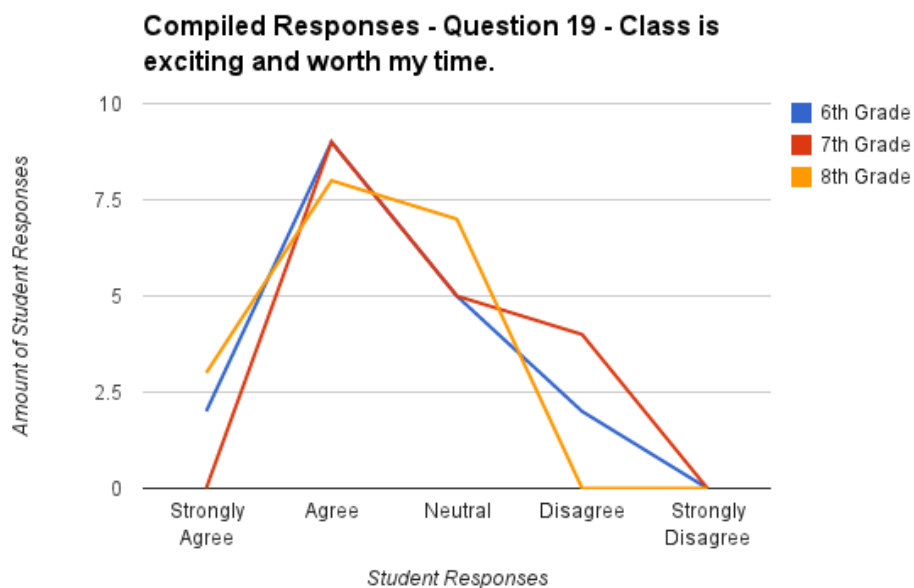


Figure 30 represents question 17, *I often need extra help from the teacher*. It was important to ask this question because if a student believes he or she often needs teacher guidance he or she will be less likely to participate in class. However, if the student feels comfortable accessing help from the teacher it also demonstrates a positive working relationship. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade students demonstrated that they needed the most help from their teacher.

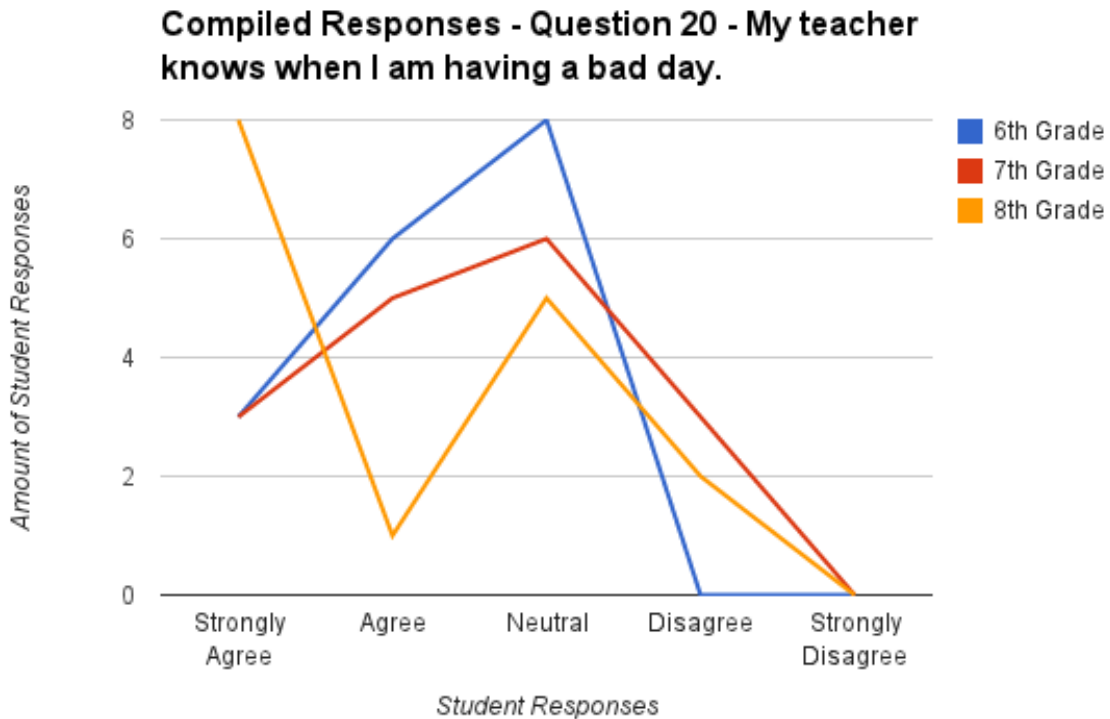
**Figure 31.** Compiled Responses – Question 18.

It was important for the researcher to evaluate student absenteeism in case that this fact might skew the data. According to question 18, *I hardly ever miss class* most students in all three classes identified that they do not miss class often. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade students identified to be absent the least amount of times.

**Figure 32.** Compiled Responses – Question 19.

Question 19, *Class is exciting and worth my time* helped the researcher identify positive teacher-student relationships because it again tested for student investment. Both 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade represented an equal amount of perceived importance to their reading class.

**Figure 33.** Compiled Responses – Question 20.



The final question of the Student Survey, asked students for their correspondence with the statement, *My teacher knows when I am having a bad day*. This assessed the connections and type of relationship that students had with their teacher since the classroom teacher would be able to detect when a student needed special arrangements. Students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade identified the highest levels of having this connective relationship with the classroom teacher.

### Conclusions

Through the evidence provided, it is evident that the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had the highest levels of positive student-teacher rapport. Additionally, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom was the only

classroom that demonstrated a continual increase in classroom participation. It is also important to evaluate the results of the other two grade levels. Specifically, it is important to examine the results that were not anticipated. For example, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had the second highest level of positive student-teacher rapport, yet it also had a significant decline in observed student observation. On the other hand, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had the lowest level of positive student-teacher rapport, while having a high level of student participation.

The implications of the results will be further analyzed in chapter 5. Additionally, recommendations will be made as to how to duplicate results observed in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

#### Introduction

The literature review and data collected in this case study aimed to identify a correlation between student-teacher rapport and student participation in middle school classrooms. The researcher deemed it important to attempt to improve the participation levels in the observed inner-city school due to the benefits it can provide for students (Sinclair, 2002). Various findings will continue to be utilized as recommendations are made based on the results of this case study and previous research conducted.

#### Connections to the Existing Research

As previously mentioned in chapter 4, the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Survey identified 13 out of 20 questions with positive student-teacher rapport, representing a 65% tendency for strong relationships in this classroom. This finding is consistent with research stating that students feel more comfortable sharing their ideas in a classroom where they know their opinion is valued (Mitra, 2003). Therefore, if only 65%, or 16 of the 25 students, identified a positive working relationship with their teacher, the classroom participation will not be at a relatively high level.

In a similar manner, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade results provide evidence that there was not a strong presence of a positive student-teacher relationship. This was represented by question 7, *My teacher values what students say*. Only 6 out of the 19, a total of 32%, of students agreed with the aforementioned statement. According to Mitra (2003), the creation of an environment that does not respect the opinions of its inhabitants will not create a welcoming environment for students. Further evidence is shown in question 11, *My teacher likes me*. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had the least amount of students agree to this statement, which does not build the

needed framework to establish an effective working relationship (Sanchez-Fowler, 2008).

Lastly, the results of question 12, *I respect my teacher*, demonstrated that very few 7<sup>th</sup> graders agreed with this statement. This lack of respect provides further evidence that essential characteristics for healthy working relationships between the 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and students were not present.

Research explains that without the basic needs of a relationship such as respect, it will be difficult to incorporate rapport between students and teachers (Mottet, 2004). Even though, both the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup> grade results illustrate the weaknesses in the classrooms observed, it is important to reference them so that educators can know the consequences of not fostering a positive working relationship with their students.

On the opposite side of the spectrum are the 8<sup>th</sup> grade results. These results provide further evidence for previously conducted research supporting the creation of a safe working atmosphere for students (Stoeckli, 2010). As evidenced by Figure 12, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom demonstrated a continual increase in student participation, which is what all educators should strive for in order to foster learning. Additionally, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom also had the strongest sense of positive student-teacher relationship. A total of 15 out of 20 questions were answered demonstrating the positive working relationship. Various research has concluded that these types of student-teacher relationships help students with their academics and also to excel in areas outside of the school environment (McNeely, 2004). It is important to keep in mind that students in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade experienced a transition year into the middle school environment. While the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have already been accustomed to middle school procedures, which may allow them to focus more on their rapport with teachers and less of the logistics of the school system. Even though the 8<sup>th</sup> grade results demonstrate the importance of investing time to build positive

rapport between students and teachers there are also ways to improve the case study completed. These suggestions will be explored in the latter part of this chapter.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The case study was modeled after several recommendations made by previous researchers. Additionally, the case study was executed with extreme care in order to eliminate inter-rater bias. For example, each rater observed each classroom once. This ensured that the results were not only depicted through one person's point of view. In order to avoid subjective observations, each observer was only allowed to tally the total amount of participation made per student. The observers also had to describe the type of lesson and activity completed to help provide context for the class.

In order to further increase reliability between classes the researcher was the only person that presented the Student Survey. This helped to avoid discrepancies between the directions given to each class. The researcher informed all students that the survey and classroom observations would not be assessed as part of their grade. Students expressed concern that the classroom observations would impact their teacher's employment but the researcher assured students that the results of the observations would remain confidential. Each class was offered 15 minutes to complete the survey but all of them finished before the allotted time.

Reliability was also present in the content of the lessons observed. The researcher asked each teacher to prepare a vocabulary lesson for the first lesson observed. By doing so, it allowed observers to view a lesson taught with different content but with similar strategies. This also controlled for divergence between teaching styles.

Even though the case study had several strengths, it also had limitations. It is important to note these weaknesses so future researchers can implement changes to generate more

consistent results. As previously mentioned, the same person presented the directions for the Student Survey in order to create consistency for all the students. However, this still created some differences in the presentation of the Student Survey. For example, when the 7<sup>th</sup> grade Student Survey was given a student asked what “diversity” meant, a word in question 8. After the researcher explained the meaning to the class, she noticed that several students went back and changed their answer. This could be a problem because if the students did not know what the question was asking, the results for question 8 might need to be disregarded. Additionally, the clarification for the meaning of the word was not given to the other two grades. Therefore, the researcher is now unsure if the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students truly answered the question correctly.

The use of three observers may have been beneficial to create inter-rater reliability, however, the observed results would have been more reliable if one observer conducted them. The use of one observer would have ensured more consistent observations and eliminated bias between observers. A recommendation will later be explored as to how improve the observation process of the case study.

The timing of the case study may have also affected the results. Students were observed at the end of the school year, during a time where behavior issues were frequent and students were not as focused on their studies as they normally would be. Furthermore, students were only observed for a total of three weeks. Results would have been stronger if students were observed for longer periods of time. Through the acknowledgement of these weaknesses it is important to move forward and aim to improve the research methods for more reliable and improved results.



## **Recommendations**

Not only might it be helpful to extend the period of time of the observations but also the time of the year in which they occur. It is suggested that students begin to be observed during the beginning of the year and continue to be observed throughout the year. This extended amount of time will create more realistic results. In correspondence with the year long observations it will also be beneficial to make sure that all teachers observed execute the same behavior management system. This will avoid the incongruity that occurred with the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students that were required to participate at least once during class.

It may also be beneficial to separate the student surveys by gender in order to test for gender tendencies in the development of student-teacher rapport. This change will be greatly beneficial for research that aims to detect if males or females are more prone to certain behaviors due to genetic makeup.

In order to avoid the uncertainty that the researcher experienced with the vocabulary of question 8 it is suggested that a script be used when presenting students with the Student Survey. This script would be used to give all groups of students the exact same directions regardless of who presents the survey. In the case that a student asks for clarification on a word the individual can have a predetermined list of words with definitions to provide for the entire class. This will ensure that results are not skewed due to uncertainty of meaning.

A final recommendation is to obtain permission to record the classrooms observed. This will allow each observer to go back to the recording in case he or she missed any student participation. Furthermore, it will be beneficial for the three observers to view each recording and complete the observation sheet to make each observation more reliable and useful. By

implementing these suggestions future research will create results that are more reliable and valid.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review presented in this case study demonstrates the importance of creating positive working relationships between students and teachers. Similarly, the Wisconsin Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning acknowledge this necessity since teachers must exemplify the following ideas in their classroom and teaching style:

- Every student has the right to learn.
- Instruction must be rigorous and relevant.
- Purposeful assessment drives instruction and affects learning.
- Learning is a collaborative responsibility.
- Students bring strengths and experiences to learning.
- Responsive environments engage learners.

As research continues to develop, further evidence will be found to highlight the value in investing time and effort to build rapport with students. Consequently, these findings should lead to changes in the education field since research has found that higher investment in the classroom leads to better opportunities for students (McNeely, 2004). Additionally, these changes may also increase the amount of teacher retention since they will also be more invested in the development of their students. The continuation of such research will implement positive changes in the education system.

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## Appendix A

## Informed Consent Form – Spanish

## Formulario de consentimiento informado

Abril de 2013

Estimados padres y guardianes,

Actualmente estoy completando mis estudios de postgrado en la Universidad de Cardinal Stritch. Como parte de mis estudios para la maestría estoy coordinando un estudio científico. El propósito de este estudio será, identificar las características que ayudan a un/una maestro/a crear un ambiente productivo que promueve el aprendizaje de todos los estudiantes.

Los participantes del estudio serán los estudiantes de 6°-8° grado que están inscritos en el programa bilingüe. Como parte del estudio su hijo/a tendrá que completar una encuesta breve. Las preguntas de la encuesta ayudarán a identificar la manera en que cada estudiante prefiere aprender. La encuesta se presentará al fin de abril. La clase de su estudiante también se observará para identificar los niveles de participación de los estudiantes en la clase.

He recibido la instrucción requerida para coordinar este tipo de estudio científico. Además el estudio esta basado en estudios previos de otros investigadores y artículos académicos. No hay riesgos predecibles para ningún participante. Toda la información colectada se registrará de una manera confidencial. Adicionalmente, los resultados no serán publicados de una manera cuya se podrá identificar a los participantes.

Los resultados del estudio no resultarán en beneficios inmediatos para los participantes ni para los maestros. Pero es importante ejecutar el estudio para comprender los atributos que ayudarán a los maestros aumentar el nivel de aprendizaje en sus salones. La participación en el estudio es un trabajo voluntario. Su hijo/a puede retirarse del proyecto en cualquier momento del estudio sin consecuencia. En ese caso, la información de su hijo/a será destruida.

Les agradezco su ayuda con este estudio. Si tienen alguna pregunta por favor comuníquense conmigo.

Gracias,

Ms. Ibarra  
Maestra de lectura de 7° grado  
La Causa Charter School

- He recibido una explicación del estudio.
- SI** le doy permiso a mi hijo/a para participar el en estudio.
- NO** le doy permiso a mi hijo/a para participar el en estudio.

---

Nombre del estudiante

---

Nombre de padre/guardián

---

Firma de padre/guardián

---

Fecha

## Appendix B

## Informed Consent Form – English

## Informed Consent Form

April 2013

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am currently completing my graduate studies at Cardinal Stritch University. As part of my studies for the Masters' program I am conducting a scientific study. The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics that help a teacher create a productive environment that promotes learning for all students.

The participants will be students from 6th-8th grade who are enrolled in the bilingual program. As part of the study your son/daughter will have to complete a short survey. The survey questions will help identify how each student prefers to learn. The survey will be presented at the end of April. After the survey is presented your student's class will be observed three different times to evaluate the amount of student participation during class time.

I have received the required training to coordinate this type of scientific study. Furthermore, the study is based on previous studies by other researchers and academic articles. There are no predictable risks to any participant. All information collected will be recorded in a confidential manner. Additionally, the results will be published in a manner that will protect the identity of all participants.

The results of the study will not result in immediate benefits for participants or for teachers. But it is important to execute the study in order to understand the attributes that will help teachers raise the level of learning in their classrooms. Participation in the study is voluntary work. Your son/daughter may withdraw from the project at any time during the study without consequence. In that case, the information collected from your son/daughter will be destroyed.

I appreciate your help with this study. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,

Ms. Ibarra  
Teacher 7th grade reading  
La Causa Charter School

- I have received an explanation of the study.
- YES**, I give permission for my son/daughter to participate in the study.
- NO**, I do not give permission for my son/daughter to participate in the study.

---

Student Name

---

Parent/Guardian Name

---

Parent/Guardian Signature

---

Date

## Appendix C

## Student Survey

Survey

**Directions:** Circle the best choice for the following statements. Do **NOT** write your name on this paper.

1. Students in my classroom treat each other with respect.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

2. My teacher understands what my life is like outside of school.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

3. I feel emotionally safe in this classroom.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

4. My teacher disciplines students fairly.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

5. My teacher models respectful behavior.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

6. Class is boring and not useful.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

7. My teacher values what students say.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

8. My teacher respects diversity.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

9. Students in my classroom care about their education.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

10. I feel that I am accepted and liked in this classroom.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

11. My teacher likes me.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

12. I respect my teacher.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

13. I feel physically safe inside this classroom.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

14. I feel safe expressing my thoughts.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

15. I want to learn.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

16. I participate regularly in class.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

17. I often need extra help from the teacher.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

18. I hardly ever miss class.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

19. Class is exciting and worth my time.

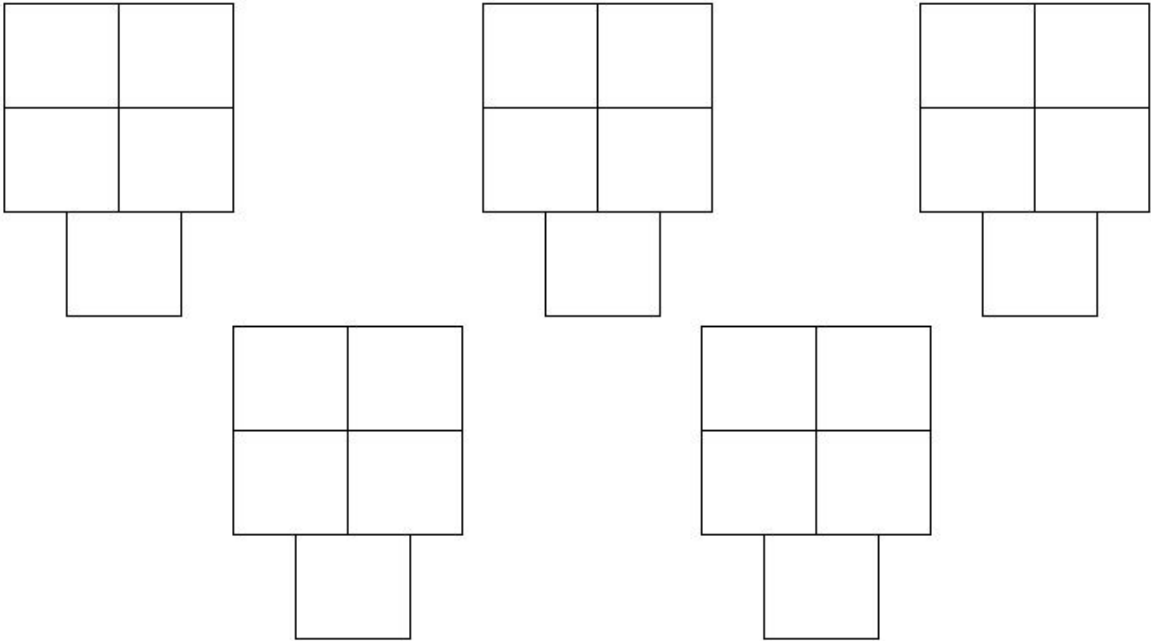
**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

20. My teacher knows when I am having a bad day.

**Strongly Agree**      **Agree**      **Neutral**      **Disagree**      **Strongly Disagree**

Appendix D

6<sup>th</sup> Grade Seating Chart

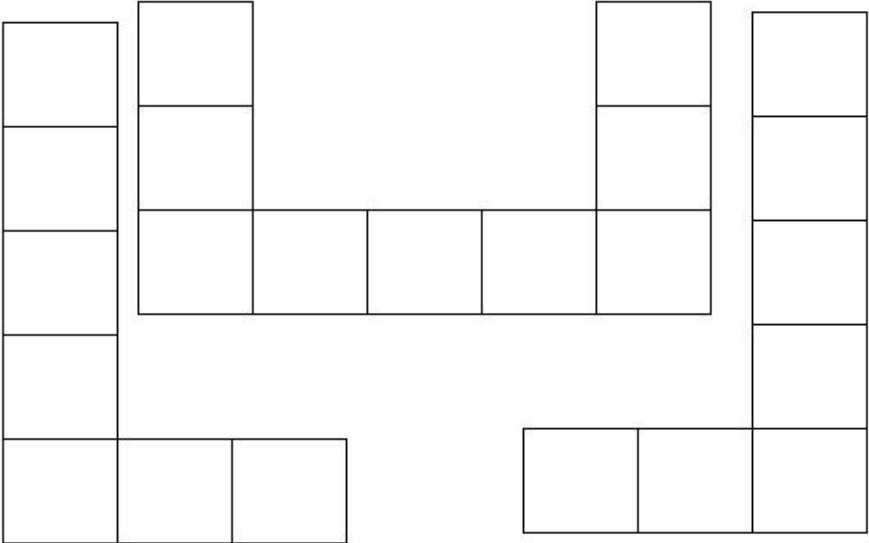


6th Grade Classroom Seating Chart



Appendix E

7<sup>th</sup> Grade Seating Chart



7th Grade Classroom Seating Chart

Appendix F

8<sup>th</sup> Grade Seating Chart







8th Grade Classroom Seating Chart