TEACHER STRESS, TEACHER WARMTH, AND CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO REGULATE EMOTION IN THE PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM CONTEXT: A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

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Cynthia Arraya Wiltshire

An understanding of emotion regulation (ER) is important to children's development, allowing for better navigation of the world. This learning happens in the company of caregivers, within the context of relationships inside and outside the home. Detrimental circumstances (e.g., poverty, lack of quality early childcare options, homelessness), however, exist for children in the United States. These factors have the potential to affect children's academic readiness and success, resulting in them entering Kindergarten labeled at risk for school failure. To manage these factors and the at-risk characterization children receive, one solution has been to send children considered at risk to more school and school earlier (i.e., Universal Pre-Kindergarten, 3-K). Once in school, children spend more waking hours with teachers than with family. Given the importance of the dyadic relationship between teacher and child, much like the parent-child relationship, this researcher sought to understand if at-risk children are, in fact, favorably served by earlier school when teachers themselves operate under equal, but

differing, types of stress. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the researcher reanalyzed Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP) data, looking for associations among teacher stress, teacher warmth, and children's ability to regulate emotion; the researcher also qualitatively investigated Head Start (HS) teachers in the Chicago metropolitan area, asking (a) Do teachers exhibiting more warmth help children develop better emotion regulation (ER) skills? and (b) What are teachers' lived experiences, histories, stories, and perspectives regarding child ER in relation to their own stress and warmth? Reanalysis of the CSRP data demonstrated teacher stress and teacher warmth were each associated with increased child externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Individual and focus group interview data of present-day HS teachers illuminated the problematic circles of influence in which HS teachers work, enriching the quantitative data. When children's first years in school are considered a sensitive period, researchers, policymakers, and educators would do well to learn more about teachers who work around the realities and consequences of stress, as well as what their insights may offer to close the described achievement gap. Implications and recommendations are discussed.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the four most important people in my life: my mother, Lluviza Kusjanovic Arraya; my daughter, Libbie; my son, William; and my husband, Will.

I offer this dissertation to them with sincere thanks and appreciation for their kind words and quiet acts of affection which have guided me forward, encouraged me to be bold, and supported me in the writing of this work. I have been the fortunate beneficiary of their love, patience, and reminders to stay on the sunny side of life.

To these four, I owe whatever promise this dissertation holds and whatever measure of success it merits. I love each of you dearly.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

"Every child does the best they can in every instance, Cindy." These were the words of wisdom shared with me after a particularly challenging experience with a 3-year-old within my first months as an early childhood educator. Entering the classroom, the child hit and screamed, threatening to bite as I approached to help her make the transition from caregiver to teacher. While I anticipated the separation of a child from their caregiver to be a challenging experience for some children, neither previous years teaching, a degree in childhood education, nor my own positionality as a mother of two children prepared me for what I witnessed. In the moment, it felt as if the child was becoming undone; that the child was experiencing a trauma so severe, she seemed an entirely different person, incapable of soothing herself, let alone able to reason. At the time, I could not fully appreciate the ferocity with which so young a child could feel such negative emotion. My mentor's words, like the then-jolting episode, remain a vivid memory, never far from mind and heart as I continue to learn about emotion and its many potentials in the classroom.

The meaning and interpretation I draw from my mentor's words have changed in the years since they were first uttered, however. Both children *and* teachers do the best they can in every instance, given all of the internal and external stress they are invisibly, and perhaps imperceptibly, experiencing and managing. The intermittent years in early

childhood classrooms provided the constant opportunity to observe children closely in their many ways: joyful and filled with curiosity, as well as troubled, distressed, and vulnerable. The previously described anecdote begins to reveal some of the purposeful attempts teachers make to help children regulate their negative emotions[1]—the purposeful attempts I made to help this child regulate her emotions—and to employ the strategies and knowledges they garner independently or with the assistance of colleagues and administration. With best intentions, we teachers work toward helping children calm themselves when they are overwrought, regroup when they are saddened by friends, and recover from the sting of disappointment in any given situation that may present itself while they are in the classroom and in our care. Away from their family, children come to depend on teachers as a model for how best to ameliorate negative emotion (e.g., extreme frustration, anger, sadness, disappointment) in the classroom space (Ainsworth, 1969). While children in preschool are young, their emotions are real; there is something important to honor in these emotions, which are an affective response to their circumstances yet beyond the child's ability to regulate.

Statement of the Problem

There are increasing and potentially detrimental circumstances (e.g., poverty, single-family homes, lack of quality early childcare options, homelessness) in the "child-rearing context" (Pianta, 1999, p. 8) for children in the United States. These factors have the potential to affect academic readiness and success (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

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[1] For the purposes of this dissertation, negative emotions are characterized as behaviors, affect, and language that connote extreme frustration, anger, sadness, and disappointment, for example.

They also have the potential to affect children's ability to regulate emotion as a consequence of parents who are also under great stress (Brooks-Gunn, Schneider, & Waldfogel, 2013; Conger, Reuter, & Elder, 1999, as cited in Conger & Conger, 2008; Gassman-Pines, Gibson-Davis, & Ananat, 2015). These external factors weigh on children's developmental outcomes (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997), resulting in the likelihood of children from the described contextual circumstances entering school labeled at risk[2] for school failure. This risk is great, with implications that can be longstanding (Hrncir, 1991). Yet, in a 2007 address to the Urban Sites Network Conference, Gloria Ladson-Billings sagely noted, "We cannot saddle these babies at kindergarten with this label and expect them to proudly wear it for the 13 years, and think, 'Well, gee, I don't know why they aren't doing good.'" In agreement, the present researcher recognizes the duality of the at-risk label. While understanding that the term rose to prominence, becoming a tool to highlight those in jeopardy of school failure (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983), its nature, then and now, is troubling. It bears weight on children as a demeaning, real, and significant label, one that remains important to disrupt.

Although risk is defined to describe the probability or relationship between a problem and an outcome, it can instead and mistakenly be defined as the *cause* of failure (Pianta, 1999; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). In these circumstances, children and their opportunity for schooling suffer (Ghongkedze, 2018). Describing individual children as

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[2] Pianta and Walsh (1996) referred to the definition of "at risk" as noted by Hess, Wells, Prindle, Lippman, and Kaplan (1987): "an actuarial, or probabilistic, relation between one index, for example, poor academic skills, and the likelihood of attaining a given outcome of interest, such as dropping out of school, given specified conditions or factors" (pp. 16-17).

at risk, therefore, is best understood in the "context of prevention" (Pianta, 1999, p. 12)—here, centered on teacher-child relationships (Pianta, 1999). In this regard, schools can ideally be seen as places where children can find shelter, so to speak, from may be characterized as the troubles of individual familial circumstances. Yet, schools are rife with structural issues (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1971; Bowles & Gintis, 2011) that prevent children labeled at risk from being fully served (Ferri & Connor, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Lareau, 1989). The demands of accountability and efficiency found in American public schools (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Pinar, 2012) make American schooling problematic, and especially so for children considered to be at risk.

Given that the working definition of at risk includes not only the probability of an accumulation of negative events (Pianta & Walsh, 1996), but also the intersection of race and class (i.e., non-White, poor) in determining who is labeled at risk, the management of these factors seems to have manufactured a solution whereby children considered at risk are sent to more school and school earlier (i.e., Universal Pre-Kindergarten [UPK], 3-K[3]). There is an underlying problem with this well-intentioned notion, however, especially given the changing demographics of the United States (Colby & Ortman, 2015). By the year 2044, it is estimated that more than half of all Americans will belong to a minority group; by 2060, nearly 20% of the population will be born outside of the United States (Colby & Ortman, 2015). When smartness is considered the property of Whites (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011), children who are other than White suffer the consequences. Perhaps tangentially, although more likely not, there exists a "racial

[3] Similar to UPK, 3-K is pre-kindergarten education provided to New York City (NYC) families with 3-year-old children who qualify based on income and need (New York City Department of Education, n.d.).

disproportionality in special education" (Kramarczuk Voulgarides, Fergus, & King Thorius, 2017, p. 61) and an increase in disciplinary measures (e.g., suspensions, arrests) of preschool-aged children precipitously tilted toward children of color (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). The tension existing between ensuring children's school readiness and school success and the pressure of stress in the preschool classroom fuel a potential disconnect between children and teachers.

More school and school earlier do not necessarily guarantee school readiness and school success simply by virtue of its institution. In fact, an early school entry date is demonstrated to correlate with more frequent referral and diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) among younger cohort members of classrooms (Layton, Barnett, Hicks, & Jena, 2018). Rather, it seems likely these well-intentioned means of schooling designed to support positive outcomes for children may result in stifled children, especially if teachers themselves are under increasing amounts of both internal and external stress (Li-Grining et al., 2010).

Much like the effects of stress on the parent-child dyad (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2013; Conger et al., 1999, as cited in Conger & Conger, 2008; Shonkoff et al., 2012), the effects of stress on teachers are significant (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Moreover, the effects of teacher stress are weighty for the classroom with teacher emotional and physical well-being jeopardized (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998), and the potential for the relationship between teacher and child also being increasingly jeopardized (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Rationale for the Study

Teacher Stress

Teachers are under ever-increasing levels of stress (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Contributing factors to these levels of stress in the early childhood context include low pay, managing children's behaviors in the classroom, and interactions with families both in and outside of the classroom (Curbow, Spratt, Ungaretti, McDonnell, & Breckler, 2000; Deery-Schmitt & Todd, 1995). While a modicum of stress can be productive and motivating for adults on the job (Anderson, 1976), chronic levels of stress can become detrimental for teachers' physical and emotional well-being (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998) and result in teachers leaving the profession at a yearly rate of 25% (Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014).

The Head Start (HS) teachers of this study are under further risk of stress. Head Start classrooms remain "the primary early childhood education service provider for low-income families in the U.S." (Watts, Ghandi, Ibrahim, Masucci, & Raver, 2018, p. 3), purposefully serving children whose families meet several criteria ultimately labeling the children at risk. Not only are HS teachers expected to manage all of the day-to-day facets of the classroom, as any other teacher perhaps, but they are asked to do so with the added expectation and pressure to prepare children from under-resourced communities to exceed expectations, to move beyond the boundaries of their current station in life. Teachers are expected to engage children in academically rigorous curricula, individualizing plans, working with federally-, state-, and locally organized funders, and working toward imposed and external standards of success. Additionally, HS children demonstrate a "higher prevalence of conduct problems and a decreased level of social

competence" (Driscoll, Wang, Mashburn, & Pianta, 2011, p. 39) when compared to the greater population of children in preschool programming (Kaiser, Xinsheng, Hancock, & Foster, 2002; Randolph, Koblinski, Beemer, Roberts, & Letiecq, 2000; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1998, all cited in Driscoll et al., 2011).

Gagnon, Huelsman, Kidder-Ashley, and Lewis (2019) described the stress experienced by preschool teachers as being different from the stress faced by K-12 teachers—a direct result of the internal psychological processes, the emotional nature, of working with such young children (Buettner, Jeon, Hur, & Garcia, 2016; Jeon, Buettner, & Hur, 2016). Specifically, early childhood education (ECE) teachers face *teaching* stress (Abidin et al., 2004, as cited in Gagnon et al., 2019). Different from the previously described and more distal forms of *teacher* stress (e.g., low pay, managing children's classroom behaviors, interactions with families), *teaching* stress deals with students directly as the source of stress. Moreover, the relationship between a particular child and the teacher, whether it is described as close or conflicted, has bearing on how teachers perceive and succumb to teaching stress (Gagnon et al., 2019). It can be imagined, then, that this additional *teaching* stress for early childhood educators would have implications for the teacher-child relationship, and thereafter the necessary modeling of emotion regulation (ER). This feels particularly weighty given modeling is considered to be actions as subtle or "brief as tone of voice, eye contact or emotional cues" (Katz, Cohn, & Moore, 1996, as cited in Pianta, 1999). This is, potentially, yet another mechanism by which teachers are sending messages to their students that they are unable to contend with them and with the demands of school.

Teacher Warmth[4]

Despite the stresses highlighted, HS classrooms are also optimally intended to be social and relational spaces (Acar, Torquati, Garcia, & Ren, 2018; Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Pianta, 1999) where children learn how to negotiate with their teachers and their peers, not merely pursue the academic. In these spaces, the quality of relationships and interactions between early childhood teachers and students is important for student success, both academically and socially, and especially so for children at risk (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002). More critically, the literature demonstrates that children often depend on teachers as surrogates for mothers at the nursery-school age (Ainsworth, 1969). Further, those children who are maltreated, as may be the case for some children in HS programming given circumstances of socioeconomic status (SES; Pelton, 1978, as cited in Cicchetti & Olsen, 1990), which is further discussed in the literature review, are especially dependent on adults other than their parents (Lynch & Cichetti, 1992, as cited in Driscoll et al., 2011)—teachers fitting this description. These relationships, forged between teachers and children considered to be at risk, have the potential to ameliorate the associated risks of academic and socioemotional failure of school risk (Burchinal et al., 2002) if teachers are able to manage their own levels of stress while in the classroom, and thereafter bolster and nourish warm relationships with students.

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[4] It is important to note that warmth is not a universal construct. There are underlying assumptions with regard to warmth, the way that it is displayed in families, and, for the purposes of this dissertation, in classrooms that reveal it to be raced, classed, and gendered. Therefore, any singular definition will not fully encompass the complexities that are inherent in the term. Noting this caveat, however, does not relegate me, the author, from making a choice in defining warmth. For the purposes of this dissertation, then, teacher warmth is defined to include behaviors and expressions of language and affect from teachers directed toward children that convey acceptance, care, and positive feelings and attention. It is the chosen starting point from which I write this dissertation, one that acknowledges the limitations of its use.

Collectively, these facts are important; they explain the magnitude of the importance and weight that HS programming and its teachers hold for students (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004; Tout et al., 2010, as cited in Pianta, Whittaker, Vitiello, Ansari, & Ruzek, 2018). Teacher classroom behavior-management skills can affect student regulatory success later (Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, Cameron, & Peugh, 2012). As a result, there is a societal expectation placed upon early childhood teachers, in essence demanding that they perform their jobs despite extrinsic and/or intrinsic levels of psychosocial stressors (Li-Grining et al., 2010) and to do so with more than just competence. It is expected that they do so in a manner that is considered warm and nurturing for the benefit of the child.

Historically, the relationship between teacher and child is well-documented; Dewey focused on the social importance of care, and Vygotsky viewed the teacher as a means of support (Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003). More recently, Bowlby (1969) demonstrated the importance of parental attachment, and Ainsworth (1969) connected the relationship between mother and child to that between teacher and child, stating that the child comes to depend on the teacher to the same extent that he would depend on his parent. Brophy and Good (1974) developed the foundational studies of teacher-child interactions, noting that teachers are conducting more than lessons at the front of the classroom; that teaching is "more than simply demonstration, modeling, and reinforcement, but instead a complex, socially and psychologically mediated process" (p. 200).

> The key qualities of these relationships appear to be related to the ability or skill of the adult to read the child's emotional and social signals accurately, respond contingently based on these signals (e.g., to follow the child's lead), convey acceptance and emotional warmth, offer assistance as necessary, model

> regulated behavior, and enact appropriate structures and limits for the children's behavior. (Pianta et al., 2003, p. 204)

This notion of teacher warmth is particularly intriguing and was the focus of this study. For the purposes of this dissertation, the concept of warmth follows the early work of Baumrind (1967), and the subsequent work of Maccoby and Martin (1983), who operationalize parental warmth as a combination of acceptance, nurturance, and involvement. Pianta (1999) detailed six groups of teacher-child relationships; two of particular relevance are those described as "positively involved (warmth, communication) and [those described as] uninvolved (low warmth, low communication, low anger)" (p. 69).

> Emotionally supportive teachers, by definition, can be observed as warm and kind, sensitive to the social and emotional needs of each child, and thoughtful about the way they respond to children. They offer gentle guidance to students, engage in positive communication with students, and demonstrate respect for children through eye contact, respectful language, and a warm and calm voice. (Merritt et al., 2012, as cited in Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008, p. 143)

Today, these teacher-child relationships are utilized as a means of intervention for child outcomes (Driscoll et al., 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Raver et al., 2011). It is demonstrated that teachers who participate in designed interventions can be moved to be more emotionally supportive and accepting of children's autonomy (Hamre et al., 2012) and are capable of engendering warm, positive feelings for students (Driscoll et al., 2011).

Child Emotion Regulation

This described emotional support, the teacher warmth that is defined, is especially critical for student success in the self-regulatory domain. Previous research, including studies using Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP; Raver et al., 2011) data,

indicated that indeed the positive, relational teacher-student dynamic has implications for student developmental outcomes, especially in terms of self-regulation (Jones, Bub, & Raver, 2014; Raver et al., 2008; Raver et al., 2011). Although Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, and Howes (2002) suggested that relationships forged between teachers and children considered at risk have the potential to ameliorate the associated risks of academic and socioemotional failure in school, teacher warmth—the sensitive, responsive, and positive interactions—can be disrupted by the negative effects of stress in the ECE classroom. Sandilos, Goble, Rimm-Kaufmann, and Pianta (2018) demonstrated that teachers who reported more stress were less able to support students emotionally when compared to those who reported less stress. The Prosocial Classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) demonstrated that without necessary emotional support, teachers are unable to fully support children in their charge and care. The model suggests the negatively spiraling consequences of teachers who are stressed: stressed teachers have poorer quality interactions with children in their charge and care, and the children act out, which further impinges on the emotional climate of the classroom. These stressors may result in a negative and cyclical dynamic between teachers and students (Raver et al., 2008; Zhai, Raver, & Li-Grining, 2011). Ladd and Burgess (2001, as cited in Myers & Pianta, 2008) suggested that the disconnect between teachers and children considered at risk compounds the potential for school failure for students.

Emotion regulation "[consists] of the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one's goals" (Thompson, 1994, pp. 27-28). Emotion regulation is important for children's development (Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006),

allowing for better navigation of the world in adulthood (Ochsner & Gross, 2005). Once children enter the preschool context, away from parents who factor most profoundly in their early development (Bowlby, 1969), teachers begin to play an important role in the emotional development of the child by modeling what ER looks, sounds, and feels like. Children are dependent on the adults in their lives for the experiences that educate them (Belsky, 1984); as models, adults provide the context of behavior to which children react. Perhaps it is *assumed* that ECE teachers themselves are able to be resilient in the face of the reported stressors within and outside the classroom, and that they are able to appropriately model means of ER in keeping with the long-term well-being of their HS students. Given the discussion around the realities and consequences of teacher stress, however, and the necessity of the teacher-child relationship and teacher warmth, the question is: Are they? If so, what qualities do these stressed teachers possess that allow them to be resilient and to put together a set of teaching practices that are warm and supportive?

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

In considering how young children learn to regulate emotion in the relationships fostered between themselves and early childhood educators, in this study I think purposefully about children who are often multiply minoritized by the dimensions/ constructs of race, class, SES, and labels of at risk, and of the educators who, themselves often under great stress, and from varying cultural, social, and emotional backgrounds, teach these children. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) study, further described in Chapter III, explored the ways in which teacher stress

and teacher warmth—so simple and yet elusive and ephemeral a construct—are associated, and how they may help or hinder children's ability to regulate emotion. I also explored, based on these initial findings, if warmth acted as a moderator in the relationship between teacher stress and child outcomes in ER. If the processes of teacher warmth bolster against the ravages of stress between teacher and child, as was hypothesized, then what can be done, when looking ahead, to help foster more warmth and, ideally, dissipate stress?

In the context of early childhood classrooms, the teacher-child dynamic is relational in nature, and this relationship should be bolstered and nurtured, not only for the benefit of child well-being, but also for the benefit of the teacher. These relationships are important not only for academic learning, but also for emotional learning, as has been outlined. The goal of this study, then, was twofold. Centering on preschool teacher warmth, I first investigated the associations between teacher stress, teacher warmth, and children's ability to regulate emotion. It was hypothesized that among high-warmth teachers, higher levels of teacher stress will not predict child ER, whereas, among low-warmth teachers, higher levels of teacher stress will predict child ER. As well, it was hypothesized that teacher warmth will moderate the association between teacher stress and child ER, and that the *outcomes* Maxwell (2013) spoke to in the investigated classrooms of the CSRP data (Raver et al., 2011) will reveal teacher warmth to be a means of engendering a relational space between teacher and child that defies the well-known hazards of stress for child ER.

Second, I investigated the parameters in which young children learn to regulate emotion in the preschool classroom—what the *processes* (Maxwell, 2013) behind the

outcomes are. Elucidating what particular teachers themselves know of emotion and its regulation, and how they employ these understandings in their classrooms, this study aimed to glean a more nuanced understanding of how teacher warmth may counteract the understood levels of stress found in early childhood classrooms. Importantly, what can *teachers* qualitatively add to the discussion of ER through individual and focus group interviews. Of particular concern in this work are children labeled at risk, those who by contextual facets, and because of social and economic circumstances of the home (Pianta, 1999), are considered to be behind their more affluent peers even before they arrive to the schoolhouse. This study examined these questions:

1. Do teachers exhibiting more warmth help children develop better emotion regulation (ER) skills?
2. What are teachers' lived experiences, histories, stories, and perspectives regarding child ER in relation to their own stress and warmth?

Theoretical Framework

To uncover the complications that exist in relationships between teachers and children in preschool classrooms, I took up Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of ecological development. This theory is discussed in greater depth in Chapter II as it framed the review of the literature.

Equally important in this study, the choice of methods bears weight. While the particulars are discussed in greater detail in Chapter III, it is important to note that the mixed-methods choice afforded the study advantages that are not found in either a purely quantitative or qualitative study. Further, the explanatory sequential mixed-methods

design begins with the quantitative data as a starting point but uses qualitative data thereafter to enrich the quantitative measures and results. While Creswell and Creswell (2017) suggested this to be a design that affords privilege to the quantitative data, Maxwell (2013) suggested the contrary—that the qualitative processes more clearly inform the quantitative data in such a way as to reveal more than just neat, numeric, and measurable outcomes. Ultimately and of importance, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design choice allowed me to explore more fully the relational space that exists between teacher and child in the navigation and negotiation of emotion in the preschool classroom context predominantly investigated in quantitative means.

Significance of the Study

Alexander, Entwisle, Blyth, and McAdoo (1988) and Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (2003) explored the means by which schooling can have long-lasting effects on the lives of children before they actually finish school. The authors "demonstrate[d] that by the end of the third grade, one can predict with a fairly high degree of accuracy how well a child will do in their later years" (Pianta, 1999, p. 16). This is startling. In third grade, most children are 8 or 9 years old and have another 9 years ahead of them before completing a compulsory K-12 education. This means that the early years in school are paramount to success; they are a sensitive period for the formation and development of the child (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Moreover, this research validated the idea of the present dissertation study, and any study that works to afford more opportunity for children in the early childhood context. These facts, in light of previously raised issues around the idea of more school and school earlier for children considered to be at risk,

highlight grave concerns about the environment in which children are learning. If children continue to be at risk given familial circumstance, if schools are complicated by ambitions of efficiency and accountability for the sake of reform, and if teachers are under increased levels of stress in their attempts to manage their jobs, their charges, the curriculum—not to mention their own lives, what should be done to assure children of their right to develop not only academically but, more importantly, holistically?

Not only does the significance of this dissertation study highlight the troubling patterns potentially occurring inside HS early childhood classrooms, but it also challenges the notion that educating children earlier serves to achieve better long-term outcomes. Perhaps, more school and school earlier would serve greater purposes if teachers were educated, or educated themselves, in ways that were not entirely theoretical (e.g., Piaget, Montessori), and were instead informed by the empirical sciences when considering a child's physiological and psychological development. Does the possibility and necessity of educating ECE teachers to the workings of neuroscience, the physiological and finely orchestrated workings of the brain, matter? If, as I believe to be the case, teachers are better educated to the realities of empirical sciences, instead of solely to the theoretical veins of child development, perhaps both teachers and administrators will have a more complete understanding of that which children are (and are not) capable as they age. With a more complete understanding of childhood development, teachers may be better positioned to push back against the current design of schooling in the United States; why children learning what school is (i.e., being one in many, waiting for a turn, regulating emotion) preempts the academic push of curriculum that is seen in some PreK programming under the auspices of academic readiness.

This broader sense of childhood development may also provide a mechanism by which the behavioral expectations of children in school change. With a more complete understanding of childhood development, schools may see children not as badly behaved, in need of remediation, special education, suspension, or medication. Instead, understanding human development in more depth may afford schools, and children, the space and *time* to develop according to their internal workings. Does this, then, account for the absence of curriculum and a laissez-faire school ideology? Of course not. That would be equally irresponsible. Perhaps there is a more nuanced understanding of children's development that allows all stakeholders to manage both sides of the issue with greater care and purpose.

Most importantly, with a more complete understanding of childhood development and the associated understanding of appropriate school expectations and behaviors, the stress placed on teachers will be partially alleviated, perhaps allowing more warmth to circulate within the classroom and abound in teacher-child relationships. This study revealed some of the qualities that teachers, who may be under great stress, possessed which allowed them to assemble a set of warm and supportive teaching practices, despite the stress. Further, there is the opportunity to enhance the teacher-student relationship in the end by working *with* teachers, instead of simply informing them of their mandated responsibilities, and holding them to expectations that impact not only their own well-being, but also the long-term well-being of their young students.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> Conceive yourself, if possible, suddenly stripped of all the emotion with which your world now inspires you, and try to imagine *as it exists*, purely by itself, without your favorable or unfavorable, hopeful or apprehensive comment. It will be almost impossible for you to realize such a condition of negativity and deadness. No one portion of the universe would then have importance beyond another; and the whole collection of its things and series of its events would be without significance, character, expression, or perspective. Whatever of value, interest, or meaning our respective worlds may appear endued with are thus pure gifts of the spectator's mind. (James, 2002, p. 168, emphasis in the original)

Socioemotional Regulation Overview

Emotion

Emotion matters. James (2002) spoke to the beauty of life, that which surrounds us, when our emotions are present and harnessed in giving meaning to daily intricacies. Without emotion, James noted life as “a condition of negativity and deadness” (p. 168). Long before emotion or its regulation was a subject of investigation by empirical scientists, its importance for human well-being was clearly understood by philosophers. The ways one perceives the world, assigning valence and arousal[1] to experiences, colors how one’s life is lived.

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[1] Valence and arousal are defined to be the “fundamental elements” (Bear, Connors, & Paradiso, 2016, p. 627) of emotion, much the way the elements of the periodic table are composed of protons,

Emotion is an important construct about which to think, and since James's writings, empirical research on emotion has increased in production, range, and dissemination (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016). However, the increased exploration has also increased challenges to understand exactly what is being studied. Emotion remains an area of study complicated by the fact that it is not singularly defined or taken up as such in the sciences. For example, although Ekman and Frisen (1969, 1971) attempted to name and universally define emotion in its most basic forms, it seems unlikely so complex a construct could be so easily delineated to this level of simplicity. Some researchers understand and define emotion as an instinctive and reactive process, dealing with the evolutionarily important brain circuits of survival (LeDoux, 2003, 2014; Phelps & LeDoux, 2005). Others, however, extend thinking to include emotions and feelings as different, and that the body, not just the brain, plays a role in the ways with which these emotions are dealt (Damasio, 1994). At the human level, Damasio and Carvalho's (2013) somatic marker hypothesis posited that decisions are made not only by the brain's cognitive processes, but also by the demands being made in light of emotion. Cole, Martin, and Dennis (2004) put forward yet another definition of emotion, describing emotion as that which gives meaning to experiences, motivation for cognitive processes, and an understanding of surroundings and experiences.

So varied is the field of emotion research that present-day emotion researchers often use frameworks to define emotion, to help readers comprehend the assumptions of their work (Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004), and to gain clarity in this field of study. More

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electrons, and neutrons. In this vein, these dimensional theories of emotion define valence on a scale ranging from pleasant to unpleasant and affect on a scale ranging from weak to strong (Bear et al., 2016).

simply, however, everyday experiences inform us to understand and define emotion as that which moves us, for one reason or another: good or bad, joyful or angry, at peace or frustrated. Fehr and Russell[2] (1984) sagely spoke to the difficulty with which we attempt to define emotion. It is not uncommon for one to be at a loss to describe feelings and emotions, and especially so in the throes of an emotional moment. Further, if fully-grown adults and, moreover, researchers whose vocation is to investigate the phenomenon of emotion find it a challenge to define consistently, imagine how much more challenging this task is for children who are not yet socially and emotionally developed.

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation (ER) has been cited as critical in allowing adults to operate in the world successfully (Ochsner & Gross, 2005). If, for the purposes of this literature review, the definition that Cole et al., (2004) provided to understand emotion is taken up, then it can be practically understood that ER is the change an individual makes in response to surroundings and experiences in light of "activated emotions" (p. 320). Ochsner and Gross (2005) spoke to two models of ER that humans undertake when encountered with emotionally evocative stimuli: the deployment of attention away from stimuli (i.e., ignoring), or the reappraisal of stimuli to decrease the potency of the stimuli (i.e., reevaluating).

The same holds true for young children who are learning the ways of the world in their everyday experiences. It is the processes of repeated experiences that afford a child the necessary learning to be successful in dealing with all facets of development, and for

[2] In their 1984 piece on the concept of emotion, Beverly Fehr and James A. Russell noted that "Everyone knows what an emotion is, until asked to give a definition. Then, it seems, no one knows" (p. 464).

the purposes of this dissertation study, learning to deal with emotion and its regulation. They do so as individuals learning the ways of the world, but also in the company and in rhythm with the adults and caregivers in their lives, within the context of their relationships inside and outside the home (Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006).

As infants, children are able to perceive and discriminate different facial features expressing a wide range of emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, fright, happiness, surprise) and, within the first year of life, are associating the emotions of others to their own behavioral responses (Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006). As young as 2 years of age, children begin to perceive how emotions can affect their own behavior as well as the behavior of others (Dennis & Kelemen, 2009). We see that with age, there is a growing sophistication of emotion understanding. However, these repeated experiences of emotion are not always pleasant, and the skills to understand, name, and regulate emotion become critical for well-being (Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006), particularly in the face of negatively valenced emotion.

As with attempts to define emotion, considering how young children regulate emotion reveals varying studies pointing to varied means in the literature. Dennis and Kelemen (2009) noted preschoolers, when compared to adults, regard behavioral and emotional strategies like distraction or repairing the situation as more effective, yet they more often resort to unproductive behaviors like venting or ruminating. The attempts they make to regulate their emotions are often organized in private speech conversations, almost as if they are practicing aloud and in public, narrating the role the prefrontal cortex (PFC) will ultimately and independently take on (Day & Smith, 2013; Vygotsky, 1980). Blair, Denham, Kochanoff, and Whipple (2004) demonstrated that children who

cope passively or negatively are under more emotional stress. Those children who do not, in some way, outwardly express their emotions are worse off than those who do. In repressing emotion, there is a potential increase for later onset of anxiety-related disorders (Blair et al., 2004).

The gathered literature shows that it is important for preschool-aged children to express emotion in whatever form they are able to muster, and in their own time. This is particularly relevant between the ages of 3 and the time a child enters Kindergarten as these years are "particularly noteworthy for substantial gains in emotional understanding" (Cole, Dennis, Smith-Simon, & Cohen, 2009, pp. 324-325). As stated previously, children's work in understanding and regulating emotion is not undertaken in isolation; children pursue the work of emotion and its regulation in the company of the adults or caregivers who are with them most frequently. It is, therefore, important to think more deeply about these relationships, both in the home and outside of the home and, for the purpose of this dissertation study, relationships at school between teacher and child.

Familial Relationships

In a seminal piece, Bowlby (1969) spoke to the power and importance of attachment in the relationship between child and adult for the beneficial developmental outcomes of the child. Are and Shaffer (2016), more specifically and recently, argued that children rely on the parent or caregiver, and the home environment, to support and bolster development of social and emotional learning. The authors defined emotion socialization as that which an adult caregiver conveys, what they know about emotion, its meaning, "experience, expression, regulation" (p. 708), directly and indirectly, to a child in their care. Are and Shaffer further pointed to Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Meyers, and Robinson

(2007) to illustrate how a child depends on the parent or caregiver to model appropriate ER, and that family practices and overall expressiveness of the family aid the child in developmental ways of managing emotions.

Infants depend entirely on the care offered by parents and other caregivers to grow and thrive. Each cry from an infant is a plea for comfort, food, warmth, and/or physical proximity, for example, and how parents or caregivers respond to these cries helps to develop an infant's sense of security and attachment (Bowlby, 1969). It is the verbal and nonverbal back-and-forth, bid-response interactions occurring between caregiver and infant that begin the social learning necessary for infants to develop healthy social and emotional relationships later in life (Ainsworth, 1979, 1989; Maccoby, 1999).

Caregivers are key in the external scaffolding they provide for a child developing in these social and emotional contexts. They offer a child instruction, both explicitly and implicitly, on how to behave and how to cope in situations that evoke negative affective responses (Maccoby, 1980). The resulting resilience, defined as the differing ability of individuals to deal with levels of disadvantage (Rutter, 2012), determines, in large part, how a child is prepared, or not, to deal with disadvantage later in life. As the responsible party, parents or caregivers provide children with "the most intimate context [of] nurturing and protection…as they develop their personalities and identities and also as they mature physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially" (American Psychological Association [APA], 2017, Introduction, para. 1). The greater the stability and consistency with which warmth is offered, the better the outcomes for a child (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child [NSCDC], 2015).

Yet, as with emotion, defining acceptance and warmth may be challenging, considering the many variables that these include. Is warmth merely intrinsic in a parent or can it be nurtured? Does it look the same for all caregivers and across cultural contexts? Once defined, how are acceptance and warmth conveyed? Developed by Drs. Kathleen Baggett and Judith Carta, the Individual Growth and Development Indicator of Parent-Child Interaction (IGDI-PCI) attempts to define caregiver warmth as verbal and nonverbal messages and interactions of approval (e.g., smiling at the child, making a positive comment to or about the child, providing gentle and affectionate touch, agreeing with something the child has said, indicating that the child's behavior is correct, confirming what the child has just said, thanking the child for something, stating the child made a good effort even if the task was not performed correctly; Baggett & Carta, 2006). Most critically, these earliest familial interactions and the issuance of acceptance and warmth on the part of the caregiver have implications for determining how children develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally on their way to adulthood (Collins & Madsen, 2003; Estrada, Arsenio, Hess, & Holloway, 1987; Maccoby, 1980).

Parental attachment, bid-response interactions, supportive scaffolding, and caregiver warmth not only aid in the learning of emotion and its regulation, but also act as a buffer against insults of childhood including stress (NSCDC, 2015). Moreover, parental warmth is seen to have lasting positive implications with regard to greater academic achievement (Brooks-Gunn & Markham, 2005), adult outcomes in physical and psychological health (Farrell, Simpson, Carlson, Englund, & Sung, 2017), and well-being across the lifespan (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

As one might expect, however, the literature also bears out scenarios where relationships and family dynamics are less than optimal, detailing the negative impact these circumstances may have on the development of a child. Returning to Are and Shaffer (2016), it is demonstrated that influences of a less regulated mother and a less expressive home environment may result in a more dysregulated child. Mothers who are emotionally dysregulated, and particularly those who are considered to be shy-anxious in manner, were more overprotective and less supportive of their preschool children when their own emotional regulation was less than optimal (Root, Hastings, & Rubin, 2016). Further, in a study of foster-mothers and foster-children, those children whose caregiving foster-mother exhibited symptomology showed a decreased ability to regulate their own emotion, especially anger and also demonstrated more anger and greater behavioral problems (Harden et al., 2017). With regard to infants for whom early engagement is critical, maternal mental health and stress can negatively influence the types of interactions in which mothers will engage (Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012).

Poverty, Socioeconomic Status, and Stress

While the previously reviewed literature speaks to the necessity of the parent-child dyad in order for children to understand and regulate emotion successfully, as well as some of the challenges children face when the relationship is altered for reasons of maternal well-being, it does so without accounting for the potential challenges to the dyadic relationship. In order to further explore and better understand these potentially detrimental challenges to the parent-child dyad, an understanding of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of development is important.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development

In his ecological theory of human development, Bronfenbrenner posited that all contextual settings, the proximal and distal "microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, pp. 514-515; see Appendix A, Table A-1), offer experiences of development for a human. Moreover, the settings in which a human develops, both those considered informal and those considered more formal, require a "progressive accommodation" (p. 513) between the person and the environment to occur continuously. It is these ecological systems, or settings, of development that remind the reader of concentric circles, ever widening in their distance from, yet remaining salient in their effects on, the human situated and developing at center. These proximal and distal settings intertwine, push, and pull in their efforts to shape the human, who must in turn accommodate self with each expanding circle of swaying and intervening forces.

Bronfenbrenner delineated three principles of note in this definition of ecological theory. Key in this theory, Bronfenbrenner defined the person at the center as active, rather than passive, in his or her own development. While the environment does exert forces to shape outcomes, it does so not without the resistance and constant readjustment on the part of the human at center. As well, because the environment is exerting forces on the person at center, and the person in response is also making accommodations, this pathway of development is bidirectional and characterized as "*reciprocal*" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22, emphasis in the original). Last, the environment in which the human is developing is never singular. Rather, the environment is a multiplicity of settings in which the human finds himself or herself in day-to-day experiences: "extended

to incorporate interconnections between such settings, as well as to external influences emanating from the larger surroundings" (p. 22).

Further, Bronfenbrenner continued to discuss not only the environment in which the human develops, the settings of institutions and people, but also the relationships that bear out for the developing human. A relationship, he noted, is defined to include any interaction in which one person takes notice of, and displays interest in, the ongoing activities of another person. Key factors of interest in these relationships include not only the formerly mentioned reciprocity, but also a balance of power and an affective nature in the given relationship. It is not enough, in Bronfenbrenner's estimation, to account merely for the existence of relationships; it is also crucially important that these relationships align with give and take, with influence, and, most important for the work of this dissertation, with mutually positive feelings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) hypothesized that once the relationship is initially formed from a mutual attention, there can thereafter be an ideal and continuous development of the relationship: from joint attention to joint activity, and from joint activity to the development of mutually "enduring feelings toward one another" (p. 59). The resulting relationship is transformed upon actualization of "reciprocity, mutuality of positive feeling, and a gradual shift of balance of power in favor of the developing person" (p. 59).

It was in these varying and widening contexts of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory that I situated this study. Its purpose was to distinguish how these widening settings of influence and development rub up against one another, how the differing perspectives and life experiences of individuals in their own circles of development

influence one another, and how the processes and outcomes vary for individuals. In this case, I aimed to think about teachers and preschool children and how the relational space of the classroom helps (or hinders) emotional growth.

If we begin with the teacher-preschool child relationship as the innermost circle of development and consider only the school setting in which these actors are working and playing together for hours in a day, we must consider what circumstances, the outwardly extending settings, bear weight on this relational starting point; what factors, both tangible and intangible, are present and play a part in how teachers and children accommodate to one another and in the classroom setting. As well, we must consider how the relationship between these actors is allowed (or not) to unfold. Bronfenbrenner delineated the optimal scenario for the developing human (in this case, the child in the preschool classroom), but he also accounted for the circumstances that can derail potential development.

> The developmental impact of both observational learning and joint activity will be enhanced if either takes place in the context of a primary dyad characterized by mutuality of positive feeling (one learns more from a teacher with whom one has a close relationship). Conversely, mutual antagonism occurring in the context of a primary dyad is especially disruptive of joint activity and interferes with observational learning. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 60)

The question of this research, then, was which contextual factors can lead from a mutually beneficial relationship that ultimately and overwhelmingly aid in the development of the child to a relationship that can become antagonistic and detrimental for the child?

Taking up the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development allows for an understanding of why the dyadic relationship is so vital to the development of the child. The literature readily details those characteristics of caregiving and parenting that

are considered bolstering and beneficial (e.g., warmth, responsiveness, sensitivity), and also those considered undermining and detrimental (e.g., detachment, intrusiveness, negative regard; Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005). It is easy enough to classify one dyad as successful or not, as the previously noted literature does, but it is more complex and important to consider *why* relationships may sometimes prove problematic. Poverty, socioeconomic status (SES), and stress are often interrelated forces—other circles, outside of the classroom, that affect development—and can mediate how caregivers are able to provide support for a dependent child.

Poverty and Its Definition

Poverty is considered a "wicked problem where we are confused about (a) the nature of the problem, (b) the theories and evidence brought to bear on the problem, (c) the ends or goals we are trying to achieve, and (d) the means for achieving those ends" (Corbett, 2013, para. 4). Most broadly, poverty is understood to mean the level at which individuals are unable to meet basic needs (Blank, 2011). The issue, however, is much more complex than this statement conveys, especially given changing definitions of poverty and changing measures used to capture a snapshot of poverty. For example, there are two measures of poverty in the United States: the Official Measure (OM) of poverty, developed when the Johnson Administration launched its War on Poverty and used solely between 1959 and 2012; and the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), developed in 2010. The OM assesses poverty based on cash resources (e.g., wages, salaries; U.S. Census Bureau [USCB], 2014), while the SPM takes into account not only cash resources but also non-cash benefits from the government aimed to help poor families (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP], housing subsidies), as well as

expenses incurred by families (e.g., taxes, cost of childcare; USCB, 2014). Furthermore, the SPM takes into account a more nuanced view of the family unit. It includes non-nuclear family members (e.g., foster children, unmarried partners; USCB, 2014). As well, it broadens the definition of needs for a family to include not just the cost of food, but also the cost of clothing, shelter, and utilities (USCB, 2014).

It is also important to note that while both the OM and the SPM calculate a poverty threshold for families by considering the number of individuals in a family and their needs, only the SPM takes into consideration the geographic location of the family (USCB, 2014). Consider two families, each living at the threshold of poverty and with the same number of people in the family. One family, however, lives in the New York City metropolitan area while the other lives in rural Mississippi, for example. It might be obvious, but it is important to point out that each dollar may go farther for the family living in Mississippi than for the family living in New York City (USCB, 2014).

These data points and the measures by which they are understood are consequential because of the number of people living in poverty in the United States. In fact, according to the World Bank, of the 769 million people living on less than $1.90 a day in 2013 globally, 3.2 million reside in the United States (Deaton, 2018). These are the poorest of the poor. These numbers of poor in the United States closely resemble statistics of countries considered to be poor countries, not rich, industrialized countries like the United States (Deaton, 2018).

Worse still, economist Robert Allen of the University of Oxford noted that when adjusting for the difference between poor countries and rich countries, the middle estimate of poverty is actually closer to $4.00 per day (Deaton, 2018). This adjustment

actually raises the number of absolute poor in global standard in the United States to 5.3 million. This figure is greater than the number of absolute poor in Sierra Leone (3.2 million) or in Nepal (2.5 million; Deaton, 2018).

The plight of America's poor is painfully detailed in Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas's (2011) *Promises I Can Keep* and Matthew Desmond's (2016) *Evicted*. Inherent in these depictions and histories is the stress under which people are operating while trying to navigate the financial devastation that is their daily existence. The illustrated financial disparities result in people living in an unequal society, and research has demonstrated that this existence can prove deadly for the adults caught in this strain of poverty (Marmot & Allen, 2014). With the struggle of adults comes the inevitable struggle for their dependent children; nearly 16 million American children live below the poverty line (Semega, Fontenot, & Kollar, 2017).

In the United States, children are twice as likely as adults to live in poverty and 70% more likely to live in poverty than the elderly (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Maritato, 1997; Song & Yu, 2002). According to Chen, Hetzner, and Brooks-Gunn (2010), the United States leads other developed countries in terms of its poverty rate for children. Approximately one in six infants and toddlers, roughly 11 million, lives in low-income homes (i.e., two times below the federal poverty line; Jiang, Granja, & Koball, 2017). More alarmingly, it is reported that poverty in the lives of children is weightier in its effects and more long-lasting when compared to adults (Bradbury, Jenkins & Micklewright, 2001; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Most deleterious with regard to the work of this dissertation study: not only does poverty affect the basic needs of a family (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, utilities), but it is also affects the relationships within

the home. Returning to Bronfenbrenner (1979), these are the contextual circles of influence in which children are developing; there are consequences to these truths.

Stress and Associations between Children and Caregivers

The importance of a healthy, caring relationship between parent and child cannot be overstated. This is especially true for families living in poverty and in stressful situations as the challenges these families face are systemic in nature (Chetty, Hendren, Kline, & Saez, 2014; Donnelly et al., 2017; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Portes, 1998). While some stress can be a healthy motivator and is biologically necessary, chronic stress can be detrimental (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Stress, as is well documented in the literature, has great effects on the human body and especially so on the developing child (Shonkoff et al., 2012).

An economic downturn, like that of the recent Great Recession of 2008, for example, can affect families and children in devastating ways. Financial uncertainty may be accompanied by worse parenting behaviors including, for example, increased frequent spanking (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2013). With economic downturn also comes the loss of jobs—a stressful situation for a parent certainly, but also one felt by children in the household, and moreover seen as a negative event in the life of a community, not just for the children whose parent has lost the job (Gassman-Pines et al., 2015). In these circumstances, children are affected by a decrease in emotional well-being and academic success, and an increase in risk-taking behaviors (Gassman-Pines et al., 2015). These stresses place a burden not only on children's immediate familial networks as illustrated by a degradation of family interactions, but also in terms of social relationships beyond

the immediate family (e.g., extended family, friends; Gassman-Pines et al., 2015). This loss of contact with persons whom the child knows and trusts, in addition to the strain placed on familial interactions, is particularly relevant (Gassman-Pines et al., 2015).

Poverty does indeed affect familial relationships in that it affects how adults function as parents (Conger et al., 1999, as cited in Conger & Conger, 2008). As a result, children are also affected in terms of varying measures of well-being (e.g., intellectual, social, emotional, physical; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002, as cited in Conger & Conger, 2008). As well, the literature points to the links between SES and these same domains of well-being for children and adults (Berkman & Kawachi, 2000; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; McLeod & Shanahan, 1996, as cited in Conger & Conger, 2008). Conger and Conger (2008) looked to two theoretical models, the Family Stress Model and the Investment Model, to better understand the linkages between financial strain and well-being.

The Family Stress Model

The Family Stress Model (Conger & Conger, 2002, as cited in Conger & Conger, 2008) "proposes that financial difficulties have an adverse effect on parents' emotions, behaviors, and relationships, which, in turn, affects their parenting abilities or strategies" (p. 65); economic strain mediates the ways and means by which children develop in a family. Specifically, economic strain is found to be positively associated with pressure within families, which in turn relates to declined caregiver well-being and increased caregiver emotional distress, which in turn relates to a deterioration of the caregiver-child relationship (Conger & Conger, 2002, as cited in Conger & Conger, 2008). Children in

these contexts are at increased risk of internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Conger & Conger, 2002, as cited in Conger & Conger, 2008).

The Investment Model

The Investment Model posits that with increased resources, parents are better able to make investments in their children's development (e.g., more educational books and toys, more educational experiences, greater ability to attend to the needs and wants of the child; Conger & Conger, 2008). Conversely, parents with fewer resources "must invest in more immediate family needs" (Conger & Conger, 2008, p. 68) like food and shelter.

What the Family Stress Model and the Investment Model have in common is the idea that with decreasing economic resources come increasing familial stress and the potential for the worsening of relationships between parent and child.

The Emotional Well-being of Children of Color from Low-Socioeconomic Neighborhoods

Taken together, the literature reviewed thus far paints the picture of children in low-socioeconomic circumstances as potentially dismal. It is understood that the quality of relationships matters for all developing children, but the stress found in families living in circumstances of inequality and insecurity (Hacker, 2019) alters the quality of these relationships in any number of ways. For these reasons, among others, children living in circumstances of financial disadvantage are considered to be at risk of school failure (Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

In addition to the deprivation of material resources altering the familial relationship, poverty and SES also affect physiological development. It is understood that stress affects areas of the developing brain that are important for learning and memory.

Socioeconomic status is strongly associated with children's later academic achievement (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Hoff, 2003). Specifically, children may be impacted with regard to early language, cognitive, and neural development (Noble, 2017; Noble et al., 2015; Tomalski et al., 2013). More specifically, and relevant to this dissertation study, differences across children of varying SES may exist in terms of executive function[3] (i.e., inhibitory control, working memory, cognitive flexibility; Lawson, Hook, & Farah, 2018; Noble, McCandliss, & Farah, 2007; Noble, Norman, & Farah, 2005; Pace, Luo, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2017). If children are hindered in terms of both language and executive function, this might alter a child's developing ability to manage emotion in light of previously discussed means of child regulation (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, & Quamma, 1995). In the midst of a negatively valenced and evocative situation, it is understood that a child will have difficulty regulating emotion simply as a consequence of age and inexperience. However, add to these facts the understanding that children from backgrounds of socioeconomic disadvantage may be further hamstrung in language comprehension and production as well as differences in skills of executive function, and the potential of a greater problem is revealed.

With regard to the brain, areas demonstrated as affected by circumstances of SES include the PFC, hippocampus, and amygdala (Shonkoff et al., 2012). The amygdala is well known as the center of threat detection (LeDoux, 2003, 2014; Phelps & LeDoux, 2005). The PFC is well known as the center of executive function (Gilbert & Burgess, 2008). In relation to the amygdala, the PFC often serves as a brake to the intrinsic

[3] Trawick-Smith (2014) defined executive function as "[a] cluster of activities in the brain that are responsible for regulating mental action—including attention, memory, and self-regulation of thinking and behavior" (p. 261).

response patterns of threat detection and fear, which the amygdala serves. One may imagine the amygdala to respond to a detected threat like this: "Threat detected! Get the physiological and behavioral defense mechanisms working!" To this amygdala response, PFC would say, "Wait, slow down. How can this situation be managed?" This colloquial explanation of executive functions describes how the two brain regions collaborate to allow for greater executive functioning—inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and working memory—all essential for school readiness and school success. Of particular interest to this dissertation study is inhibitory control, especially in the realm of emotional regulation.

For this "conversation" between amygdala and PFC to happen, however, a finely tuned process of connectivity and functionality must first develop. Silvers et al. (2016)[4] elegantly demonstrated the typical changes in age-dependent connectivity and functionality between amygdala and PFC, implementing a testing paradigm of "look/far" or "react/close" for negative or neutral visual stimuli in a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) machine with participants ranging in age from 6 to 23. What bears out of this research is that the processes of communication between amygdala and PFC take time. What older participants are capable of doing, how they manage negative stimuli, is far superior to what 6-year-olds are able to manage; with increasing age comes an ability to look at more negative images and reappraise, or reevaluate, them. With increasing age comes the necessary connectivity between PFC and amygdala, allowing for the "conversation" between PFC and amygdala to occur, and for the PFC to tamp down the natural, and appropriate, reaction to threat and fear to which the amygdala responds.

[4] For a complete description of methods, please reference Silvers et al. (2016).

What of children who may be hamstrung by poverty and circumstances of low SES? Do these children fare differently from children of means when considering threat and response, and issues of executive function to include emotion regulation? If all children take time to develop these connections and "conversations," are children described to be at risk significantly different as a result of poverty and altered familial relationships? If this is the case, are the relationships which they attempt to forge with their teachers that much more important?

Classroom Relationships and Interactions

If it is understood that poverty potentially affects not only the quality of familial relationships but also physiological outcomes that relate to school readiness, then what of the relationships in the classroom for children who are subject to living in circumstances of disadvantage, and what of the teachers who work to meet their needs? If, once children attend school, they spend more waking hours in a day with teachers than with their family members and caregivers, it serves to understand that teachers can be a source of powerful influence for children, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested in his ecological theory of development. Comparing maltreated and non-maltreated children, Lynch and Cichetti (1992, as cited in Driscoll et al., 2011) demonstrated that maltreated children engender the relationships of non-parental adults more so than children who are not maltreated. This fact is important; it speaks to the role that teachers play in the lives of children, but especially for those who may suffer from consequences beyond their control. It speaks to the fact that teachers need to be prepared to support children in ways parents or caregivers, perhaps, may be unable for many reasons. Further, this demonstrated need

conveys the necessity for teachers to support children, not only academically but also socioemotionally, despite demands of accountability and efficiency (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Pinar, 2012) present in today's school culture. These understandings assume, however, that teachers themselves are well-regulated (Friedman-Krauss, Raver, Neuspiel, & Kinsel, 2014): emotionally stable, warm, not hindered by stress or, more realistically, well-prepared to manage the stress under which they operate day to day. If we understand that children from backgrounds of socioeconomic disadvantage may be different from their more affluent peers in many ways (Lareau, 1989), but important to this dissertation study, in terms of their emotion regulation (and executive function: cognitive flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory control), then how do these variations affect the classroom dynamic, the relational space between teacher and child? What, then, when there is a classroom full of children in these financial, familial, and stressful circumstances, as is the case with Head Start (HS) programs, and one or two teachers who are trying to run the class, abide by administrative and school standards, and meet expectations of families in addition to all other demands of the children?

Teacher Stress and Well-being

What is more and more becoming a conversation with regard to teacher stress are the implications for the classroom and the well-being of teachers and students (Miller, Murnane, & Willett, 2008). As in everyday life, a modicum of stress can be productive and motivating for adults (Anderson, 1976), including adults in the context of employment (AbuAlRub, 2004). However, chronic levels of stress can become emotionally and physically detrimental for those incurring the stress, and with regard to

this study, for teachers (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). Research has demonstrated that although teacher stress is a reality, there is little research around teacher stress, classroom workings, and child outcomes (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013), especially in the early childhood context.

Yet what research exists demonstrates teacher job satisfaction and/or job efficacy to both be impacted by factors such as adult-to-child ratios, work hour demands, and decreased salaries when compared to K-12 educators (Curbow et al., 2000; Deery-Schmitt & Todd, 1995). Further, teacher self-efficacy predicts teacher burnout, in turn predicting teacher efficacy, absences from school, and leaving the profession of teaching (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Consequentially, teachers in HS programs, relevant to this study, are asked and expected to manage all facets of the classroom as those of any other schooling program, yet also handle the accompanying issues of children from communities that may be under-resourced. Not only are HS teachers expected to "do school," but they are asked to do so in the context of assuring their students receive a thoughtful, pedagogically appropriate, working curriculum, one that will be individualized for particular children, while meeting federal-, state-, and local-funder requirements and imposed standards of success. Moreover, these teachers are charged with bringing up the potential and advancing the well-being of children who may be impeded by poverty and ensuing familial upheaval and unrest. The consequence of this level of stress is a depletion of the early childhood teacher workforce, with a reported 25% of teachers leaving the profession annually (Whitebook et al., 2014), although the early childhood workforce is one of the fastest growing (Lockard & Wolf, 2012).

Classroom Interactions: The Teacher-Child Relationship

These increasing factors of teacher stress may lead, as they can in familial relationships, to teachers being unable to contend with the workings of the day or with the children in their classrooms, resulting in a type of chronic stress affecting teachers' mental health and impacting the classroom environment and student achievement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Returning to Bowlby (1969) once more, and turning to Ainsworth (1969), attachment, or dependency, is described as being associated with mothers first, but then conveyed to other adults. "At nursery school age—the age at which most research into dependency has been undertaken—it [i]s assumed that the dependency shown by the child towards his teachers [i]s the same that he concurrently manifest[s] toward his parents" (p. 986). The parallel between home and school is established and understood to be important to the development of the child. Similar to dysfunction in the home, dysfunction in the classroom can have equally deleterious effects on the child. Sandilos et al.'s (2018) intervention, designed to highlight "teacher-reported job stress and observed teacher-child interaction quality" (p. 280), demonstrated that teachers of the control group who reported higher stress were less emotionally supportive for students when compared to teachers in the treatment group who reported less stress. This is critical in thinking about the present study; in fact, it serves as the crux. If at nursery school age, when children generally leave parents and the home for the first time to be with other adults and, as Ainsworth (1969) pointed out, these children come to depend on teachers as they do their own parents, we must question and look critically at the ways teachers enter into relationships with students; we must ask how best to support teachers in the work of educating children who become dependent upon them. Of

particular interest are the relationships between children labeled to be at risk and teachers who serve these communities.

Indeed, the previously noted structural stressors for teachers (e.g., low pay, long hours, emotionality of working with young children) challenge and illustrate potential problems for the teacher-child relationship. These challenges disrupt the means by which teachers are enacting the early childhood educational opportunities that exist in early childhood contexts—how teachers interact with the children in their charge and care (Pianta et al., 2005, as cited in Hamre et al., 2012). The relationships developed between children and teachers early in the school career of a child matter (Birch & Ladd, 1997) and have implications for children's well-being long after the child has left one classroom for the next (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). For example, children's behavioral orientations in Kindergarten are seen to affect first grade relationships with teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1998).

In addition to structural issues, the literature reveals that behavioral dynamics between teacher and child weigh heavily in the development and sustaining nature of the teacher-child relationship. For example, HS children demonstrate greater "conduct problems and lower level of social competence" (Driscoll et al., 2011, p. 39) when compared to the general population of preschool programming (Kaiser et al., 2002; Randolph, Koblinski, Beemer, Roberts, & Letiecq, 2000; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1998, all cited in Driscoll et al., 2011). This can prove problematic and add to potential disruption in the development or sustaining nature of the teacher-child relationship. Later, "[a]ggression, inattention, and impulsivity are among the central concerns raised by kindergarten teachers when asked to characterize the problems among children who they

viewed as ‘not ready’ for school” (Rimm-Kaufmann, Pianta, & Cox, 2000, as cited in Myers & Pianta, 2008, p. 600; Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2002). These child characteristics affect teachers’ well-being; teachers without necessary emotional support themselves are unable to support children fully in their charge and care (Sandilos et al., 2018). The problem seems to be cyclical in nature (Zhai et al., 2011), and especially troubling when returning to the theoretical framing of this study, that of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory.

Teacher Warmth

Having developed foundational studies on teacher-child interactions, Brophy and Good (1974) noted that teachers do more than merely conduct lessons at the front of the classroom. They argued that teaching is “more than simply demonstration, modeling, and reinforcement, but instead a complex, socially and psychologically mediated process” (p. 200). Rather,

> the key qualities of these relationships appear to be related to the ability or skill of the adult to read the child’s emotional and social signals accurately, respond contingently based on these signals (e.g., to follow the child’s lead), convey acceptance and emotional warmth, offer assistance as necessary, model regulated behavior, and enact appropriate structures and limits for the children’s behavior. (Pianta et al., 2003, p. 204)

Moreover, the concept of teacher warmth runs the gamut within the literature of the academy; it is not limited to an idea of value for the early childhood classroom or simply for children labeled to be at risk. Teacher warmth used as a key word search results in peer-reviewed articles in issues of gender and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education (Pasha-Zaidi & Afari, 2016), in issues of peer like and dislike (Hughes & Im, 2016), and in issues of language acquisition and reading

achievement (Lopez, 2012), for example. Not only are the topics touched by teacher warmth varied, but so too are the contexts (i.e., geographic location, age of children, special education, teacher education). This suggests that warmth is an important and prevalent concept, one that ought to be considered a means to affect most easily and tangibly the relationship between teacher and student, the way children learn about emotions, and the classroom environment as a whole.

Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004) demonstrated that a positive relationship between child and teacher is essential for students, despite age or grade, preschool through Grade 12, and that positive relationships can be established between children who may misbehave or demonstrate externalizing behaviors. Burchinal et al. (2002, as cited in Driscoll et al., 2011) similarly suggested that, despite the negative associations between HS children and their more dysregulated behaviors, relationships forged between teachers and children considered at risk have the potential to ameliorate the associated risks of academic and socioemotional failure in school. For example, when children labeled at risk in the Kindergarten year were placed in first grade classrooms with teachers who offered instructional and emotional support, the children demonstrated the kinds of relationships with their first grade teacher and achievement scores in line with those peers who were not previously labeled as being at risk (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Conversely, at-risk children placed in classrooms that were not instructionally and emotionally supportive did not show these same gains (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). The classroom environment, and its social and emotional ethos, matters in helping students make strides, and there are means for aiding these teacher-child relationships.

Interventions

A means by which to enhance the teacher-child relationship and engender the necessary warmth to convey emotion learning is through intervention studies in classrooms. Opportunistically, interventions harness differing aspects of the classroom dynamic, or of classroom characteristics or behaviors of occupants, in efforts to alter the ecological setting of the classroom for the betterment of children and teachers. While some aim to bolster the teacher-child relationship directly to improve child outcomes (Driscoll et al., 2011), others engage children directly in the learning of emotion and its regulation through classroom lessons (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Still others seek to affect the ethos of the classroom environment (Raver et al., 2011). Despite the differences in approach, interventions can prove valuable in supporting the warmth I named in this dissertation study as beneficial.

For example, it has been demonstrated that teachers who participate in designed interventions can be moved to be more emotionally supportive and accepting of children's autonomy (Hamre et al., 2012), and engender more positive feelings toward their students (Driscoll et al., 2011). Further, the ease with which these positive feelings can be brought about is demonstrated when teachers simply spend more time in one-on-one situations with a child. For example, Banking Time (Pianta & Hamre, 2001) is a series of one-to-one meetings between teacher and child, where the child leads and the teacher facilitates the play. The scheme is designed to promote positive relationships and interactions between teacher and child, looking to find effects in teacher-reported quality of the relationship between teacher and child, teacher-reported child behavioral outcomes, and observer-reported quality of the teacher-child interactions. While findings

have demonstrated modest effects when using Banking Time, teachers reported feeling closer to children, being more tolerant of frustration, and "decreas[ing] conduct problems" (p. 38).

The literature also bears out that interventions can play a role in shaping not just the quality of the teacher-child relationship, but also the very understanding a child has with regard to emotion and its regulation. The Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS; Greenberg et al., 1995) intervention was designed to bolster emotional competency in school-aged children. It takes into account that "emotional development precedes most forms of cognition and defense" (p. 118), and recognizes that "emotional development is an important precursor to other modes of thinking…[later needing to be] integrated with cognitive and linguistic functions" (p. 118). Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, and Quamma (1995) noted that children, regardless of their intellectual capabilities, vary in emotional competence based on not only the "social-cognitions…the plans and strategies" of situations, but also on how "accurately [the child] has processed the emotional content of a particular situation" (p. 119). This dissonance between intellect and understanding of emotion is vital to managing school in that it provides clarity for how a child interprets the actions and emotions of those around him, peers and teachers. Further, it is important to note that a child's ability to negotiate emotion and its regulation is influenced not only by peer and teacher relationships, as has been previously demonstrated, but also by the modeling these groups provide to the child (Greenberg et al., 1995).

Assuming the school is a "fundamental ecology and one that can be a central locus of change" (p. 120), PATHS provides lessons for students designed to increase

children's ability to discuss emotion, their usage of the vocabulary of emotion, and an understanding of meta-cognitive states (i.e., how I feel) through classroom lessons imparted by intervention-trained teachers. Indeed, the intervention improved children's ability to understand and talk about emotions. While a "comfort in discussing basic feelings [and] children's 'efficacy' beliefs in managing and changing feelings" (p. 131) was apparent, less successful was the attempt to support children with a sense of understanding their own emotions, that more than one emotion can be felt simultaneously, or that children can manage their own feelings (Greenberg et al., 1995).

Rather than directly affecting teacher-child relationships, the Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP; Raver et al., 2011), a longitudinal intervention program tested in inner-city HS centers, sought to affect change to the emotional climate of the classroom. Over the course of two school years, from 2004 to 2006, the CSRP involved the participation of HS children and their families, as well as classroom teachers, asking if the intervention services of teacher training in teacher sensitivity and stress-reduction, behavior management skills training, and the addition of classroom mental health consultants could affect change to the emotional climate of the classroom in addition to other stated study goals (e.g., the potential of affecting children's school readiness skills through changes in behavioral regulation). Results from these years of the CSRP investigation found that there was a reduction in child behavior problems, simultaneously improving executive-function skills and academic readiness (Watts et al., 2018), improved means of classroom quality (Raver et al., 2008), and student behavior and cognitive outcomes for children (Raver et al., 2011). Each of these interventions proved

important for the relationship between teacher and child, for the emotional competency of school-aged children, and for child outcomes, respectively.

I argue that the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) comes closest to achieving Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ideal and stated goals regarding the teacher-child relationship: give and take, influence, mutually positive feelings, and a gradual shift in power. However, each study would have been potentially more valuable, I suggest, had there been an effort to collect data that reflected what the teachers themselves were experiencing in more than quantifiable terms. Regrettably, the literature bears out that children spend the greatest share of their day in whole-group instruction, where the teacher directs the learning, or in free-play experiences (Pianta et al., 2018). Children spend less time in one-on-one interactions with teachers or in small-group learning opportunities. If teachers and children are spending the majority of their time together in whole-group instruction, ostensibly for the purposes of promoting the academic advancement of the children through the dissemination and exploration of a crafted curriculum, and doing so at the expense of one-on-one time which has been demonstrated to promote mutually positive feelings between teachers and children (Driscoll et al., 2011), can this be considered a valuable education? Or can it be considered the best form of educating children already labeled at risk? Maybe interviewing teachers as a part of Driscoll et al.'s (2011) Banking Time intervention would have elucidated what obstacles stand in the way of more one-on-one time.

Driscoll et al.'s (2011) findings, although described as modest, are revealing and insightful for researchers looking to continue the work of emotion in the preschool classroom, yet it is information that is not entirely utilized. If teachers are likely to put

forth greater effort with children with whom they have close relationships, and children are equally likely to put forth greater effort in terms of motivation for teachers with whom they are engaged in a trusting relationship, then further exploration into the thoughts and perceptions of teachers via qualitative methodologies matters. While HS programs are mandated to account for the mental well-being of the children enrolled in their classrooms, there is room by which programs can define and implement this aid to children (Lara, McCabe, & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, as cited in Driscoll et al., 2011). Thus, inquiring directly from teachers about what works and what does not, how they are feeling, and how these assessments engage with children is relevant. Similarly, perhaps interviewing teachers who were a part of the PATHS or of the CSRP intervention studies qualitatively may have revealed information important to reducing teacher stress and amplifying teacher warmth, which, in turn, may have implications for child ER and school readiness.

What Do Teachers Know?: The Present Study

It simply cannot be that the issues of teacher-child relationships and the learning that goes into emotion and its regulation thereafter, and for the betterment of child outcomes, is investigated *only* in quantitative means looking for correlational information or through approaches of interventions and causality. Assuredly, this statement should not be interpreted to suggest that my stance on either quantitative methodologies, correlational findings, and/or intervention strategies is disapproving. Quite the opposite! The highlighted interventions aim to be generalizable, affecting the greatest potential change for the greatest number of children in the population of study. I would say,

however, that the interventions reviewed and, perhaps more importantly, those yet to be designed, are capable of being improved by adding in what teachers themselves know of emotion, relationships, and children in their care using qualitative methodologies. By looking first broadly and quantitatively, then investigating locally with qualitative methods, a nuanced understandings of teacher stress, teacher warmth, and child ER will become illuminated.

The issue is not that intervention research does not properly inform and guide teachers in the importance of the relationship, or even in the specifics of the relationship that bear weight and ought to be carefully tended. Positively, the literature revealed that interventions work, but generally suffer from fadeout over time (Jenkins et al., 2018), and large-scale educational randomized controlled trials (RCT) have recently been characterized as uninformative (Lortie-Forgues & Inglis, 2019). Perhaps it would be beneficial to take advantage more fully of a long-overlooked commodity—teacher voices—the lived experiences, histories, stories, and perspectives that teachers bring and to use these in coordination with the RCTs.

What teachers know, how they experience stress, and how they act on their knowledges of emotion, its regulation, and the relationships that bolster these understandings in the workings of an early childhood classroom may prove valuable. Perhaps there is a way to incorporate their thinking into future interventions, taking into account their understandings for developing future strategies. No doubt the research begins by looking *into* classrooms, to be an observer regardless of instrumentation or design, but thereafter it feels important to *ask of* classrooms, to learn from those who are

most central in what is happening, by *listening* to teachers (and children, ideally), for further clarity and insight.

It has been determined that providing children labeled at risk for school failure with more school, and beginning this schooling at an earlier and earlier age, can address the issue of school readiness. This dissertation study aimed to push back on this thinking, given that the teaching workforce is under great stress (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005), is undervalued societally (Herbst, 1989), and is “typified as weak intellectually and otherwise” (Pianta & Walsh, 1996, p. 146). Yet the early childhood education workforce is growing as a result of this “more school earlier” concept in the name of school readiness and is considered to be one of the fastest growing industries in the United States over the next 5 years (Lockard & Wolf, 2012). This suggests the importance teachers intrinsically have, and especially so as the ramp-up for programming for young children increases.

As of 2018, HS programming supports 1 million children in the United States (Pianta et al., 2018). In the state of New York, where this study was conceived and developed, the 2018 State of the Preschool Report determined that 121,572 children were served in HS programs, with state funding totaling $796,699,144 (Friedman-Krauss, Barnett, Hodges, Weisenfeld, & DiCrecchio, 2019). Perhaps more important, Friedman-Krauss et al. (2019) detailed the standards imposed through the New York State Board of Regents: “comprehensive, multi-domain early learning standards…aligned with state K-3 standards, state college and career ready standards, and the New York State Common Core Learning Standards” (p. 128). Given the research that supports HS and other early schooling programming as beneficial for children considered to be at risk (Magnuson et

al., 2004; Tout et al., 2010, as cited in Pianta et al., 2018), as well as the important role of play in academic learning (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009), there may be an inherent problem in how U.S. schooling for at risk children has been conceptualized.

How is it conceivable that HS programming is aligning with state college and career readiness standards, but not first accounting for how a child deals with emotion, especially understanding the potentially problematic familial backgrounds from which HS children may come? Nowhere in the Friedman-Krauss et al. (2019) report is there mention of emotional well-being. Classrooms are measured for curriculum, teacher education, and professional development, but as a measure of success, there is no mention of teacher or child emotional well-being or the importance of the teacher-child relationship with regard to child outcomes of well-being. Further, more school and school earlier continue to add to early childhood teachers' levels of stress that affect well-being, teacher warmth, teacher-child relationships, school efficacy, and child outcomes. These downstream cascading effects are real and need attention.

An increasing number of states are using Quality Rating and Improvement Systems to manage and oversee the overall functioning and support of programming provided to children to ensure positive outcomes (Jamison, Cabell, LoCasale-Crouch, Hamre, & Pianta, 2014). Yet there are no assurances that what is being developed and deployed for children considered to be at risk is equal among programs and thereafter across cities within the United States (Jamison et al., 2014). Some programming is considered to not be stringent or academic enough (Jamison et al., 2014), the focus being on closing the achievement gap, but there is no mention of making strides to ensure that children who may come from emotionally dysfunctional families are supported first and

foremost in their understanding and implementation of relationships, emotion, and its regulation. In other words, imposed standards assure math and literacy skills, for example, will ultimately be learned, but doing so in a vacuum of a relationship-poor classroom makes no sense if the emotional well-being of children is as important as Pianta (1999) and others remind us.

Rather than discussing means of helping children learn what emotion is and how it can be regulated in healthy ways that promote well-being, what is discussed in the literature seems to be ways to manage effectively (and, I would argue, *control*) emotions (Renshaw & Cook, 2017; Williams & Shellenberger, 1996; Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014). There is consistent information describing teacher practice in preschool programming as whole-group (25%), free-play (33%), or involved with meals or outdoor play (35%; Early et al., 2010, as cited in Pianta et al., 2018); the time and proximity with teachers necessary to speak to and rehearse the lessons of emotion in one-on-one (Driscoll et al., 2011) or small-group interactions is not happening. Early et al. (2010, as cited in Pianta et al., 2018) demonstrated how children and teachers spent their time in a day, giving a good accounting of time spent in the preschool classroom, but made no mention of emotion and its regulation, as if it did not matter; historical (Kliebard, 2004) and contemporary (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Pinar, 2012) renderings of U.S. schooling suggest that maybe it does not. This is especially concerning and important to consider, given the known backgrounds of children in HS programming, the known poverty that is inherent within this community, and the detrimental effects that poverty has on those families and children in its grip. What is the point of all of this schooling to abate an at-risk label, to promote the idea of school readiness, if the means by which it is

offered, the means by which teachers are able to take up relationships and provide support for their students, are dictated and clouded by stress and the external workings of a neoliberal education that demands efficiency for efficiency's sake and accountability, each serving to stoke the economic engine of the United States (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Pinar, 2012)?

Perhaps it is important at this juncture to stop adding to the existing mechanisms of schooling in order to bolster more carefully and thoughtfully the important relationships happening in the classroom. Taking time to better understand the working, social, dynamic relationships between teachers and children, and especially for those children who are labeled at risk and for the teachers who support them, would go far, I argue, to improve well-being for both populations. This support would have implications to include less burnout for teachers, greater classroom and academic success for students, and perhaps long-term implications of school success, graduation, and well-being across the lifespan.

Teachers have something to offer us; they know and understand children differently from the means by which a diagnostic instrument can assess. It would be wise to listen to their understandings and knowledges, enhancing the seemingly ubiquitous methods of well-used and powerful instrumentation. Perhaps interventions can be better tailored to meet teachers' needs if researchers have a more explicit understanding of what teachers think about emotion in their classroom—their own and that of their students. Perhaps outcomes could be improved year to year if we target teacher understandings early and refocus research to look for yearly patterns that emerge and patterns across grade levels. What happens in K, 1, 2, 3? How are stresses changing as children grow and

develop, as school expectations change, as teachers gain experience in their working understanding of teaching, and in attempts and experiences to forge relationships with students, but also as issues of burnout become a reality?

This study serves as a beginning point in this more formative type of investigation into warmth and the power of relationships which are of critical importance in the lives of very young children labeled at risk. While these children are filled with promise, they may be hamstrung by social and societal impediments stacked up against them, operating in a cyclically failing process called school (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). The saving grace of these children will not come from outside via institutional changes or mandates (Pianta & Walsh, 1996); the power to help these children will come from the children being bolstered by the supportive adults who immediately surround and educate them—be they parents, teachers, or neighbors. For teachers, specifically, in the context of this dissertation study, a better understanding of their well-being, their levels of stress, how they cope and operate to engender warmth (or how and why they may fail to do so) may go far in helping to understand children's outcomes.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

In conducting two connected arms of inquiry, I undertook an investigation of the relationships between teacher and child that support child emotion regulation (ER) in the Head Start (HS) classroom context. Following an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design[1] (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), each methodology provided affordances unique to its domain and a more complete explanation of all data collected: the quantitative findings provided a broader context for the qualitative findings, while qualitative findings served to color the quantitative findings more fully. This more developed understanding of both data types allowed for the comparison of differing viewpoints of each domain, supplementing the quantitative survey information with human perspectives and experiences, stories, and histories (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Specifically, this methodological choice allowed for a more thorough understanding of the nature of relationships existing between HS teachers and children with regard to issues of teacher stress and teacher warmth, and how these impact children's ability to regulate emotion.

Utilizing this mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), the first arm (Phase 1) capitalized on data collected as a part of the Chicago School Readiness Project

[1] The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design presents two phases of data collection. The first phase involves the collection of quantitative data, which are thereafter analyzed. Results are used to inform the second phase, the qualitative data collection. The purpose of this two-phase design is to allow the qualitative data to inform the beginning quantitative data more fully (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

(CSRP; Raver et al., 2011). The CSRP data offered a sample of HS teachers and children with measures applying to the questions of interest. While Phase 1 served to investigate quantitatively, the qualitative stance of Phase 2 served to flesh out the processes behind the outcomes (Maxwell, 2013). Reanalyzing quantitative data from the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) study in Phase 1 revealed results for follow-up inquiry which were thereafter pursued in the collection and analysis of qualitative data in Phase 2. By taking into account teacher voices that are often left un(der)explored in large quantitative studies, I was able to collect and disseminate the stories and perspectives of the teachers and children in the relational space of the classroom in the second arm of this study.

Data sources included the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data, and individual and focus group interviews. The following questions guided the research study:

1. Do teachers exhibiting more warmth help children develop better emotion regulation (ER) skills?
2. What are teachers' lived experiences, histories, stories, and perspectives regarding child ER in relation to their own stress and warmth?

Implications from the Pilot Study

This study was informed by a pilot study I conducted in the fall of 2018. In this pilot study I asked teachers in one preschool classroom in New York City about their perceptions of ER in order to investigate the interactions and relationships between teachers and children. The qualitative study utilized participant and classroom observations (Bogden & Biklen, 2007), field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011),

and one in-depth interview with each of the three teachers (Spradley, 1979) who worked in the classroom of 3- and 4-year-old children. In the pilot study I asked:

1. What are early childhood teachers' thoughts on ER?
2. How do teachers act on their thoughts in order to teach lessons of ER?

During this study, the classroom was observed six times, with observations lasting between 45 minutes to 3 hours over the 10-week study period. In these observations, I watched the interactions between children and teachers as they began the school year together, following them over the course of the semester to see how relationships developed and how the teachers understood and took up emotion in the classroom. Not only were the teachers learning who the children were as the weeks progressed, in terms of their interests, likes, and dislikes, but the children were also learning to trust the teachers as they began the process of separating from parents or caregivers and entering school. As the opening anecdote in Chapter I narrated, the process of transitioning from home to school is an often challenging and emotionally evocative task for young children, where an inherent trust is demanded between teacher and child for the process to be successful.

These observations were generative in moving forward my intention of combining my background in the neuroscience of ER, the pedagogy of the classroom, and the role teachers play in helping their students learn to manage the emotions that are developmentally typical and appropriate age-wise while in the classroom. Further, interviews and conversations with these teachers on the topics of the brain and how children can be dysregulated—neither of which was firmly footed in empirical sciences, but rather in blogs (Cozolino, 2013), books (Whitman & Kelleher, 2016), and

neuromyths (Tardif, Doudin, & Mevlan, 2015)—left me wondering why teachers were not better educated themselves about the neural development that children of this age were undergoing, and whether a better understanding of this development may have served teachers well as they acted as caregivers for the children in their care. Lastly, the interviews conducted led me to wonder about what stories teachers held that deal with their stress, how they were able to care for children in an ideally warm manner, and if their stories corroborated findings from a large-scale data set like the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011)—or if, perhaps more intriguingly, they served to contradict demonstrated results. Connecting these previously conducted interviews to the CSRP data, I realized that teachers—although in a different time and in different schools with different children in different cities across the country, and regardless of setting or education or levels of stress—knew about emotion, were capable of reflecting on why it matters for young children, and did their very best to institute best practices to help their students each day. As my mentor's words remind me, like the children, teachers too do the best they can in every instance, *despite* levels of personal or professional stress. What matters for teachers are moments with children and what they are able to offer children to allow them to grow positively in the world.

By completing the pilot study and continuing to expose myself to a deepening understanding of the importance of ER, the lack of exposure for teachers to this same information, and a widening theoretical perspective of childhood development, I began to wonder if the dissertation research was the right avenue to combine these notions and explore them further. This wondering led to realizations that teacher knowledge about emotion, and why it matters, has many ways by which it can be approached. It cannot be

that we define emotion in so singular a quantitative fashion. To understand the quantitative data on ER more fully, as well as its associations with teacher stress, teacher warmth, and children's ability to regulate emotion, more human data needed to be qualitatively collected, inductively thought over, and analyzed.

Although not a part of the pilot study proper, I also garnered experience working under the tutelage of Dr. Debbie Sonu of Hunter College. As a Research Assistant, I assisted Dr. Sonu's collaboration with three other institutions in Canada. The Multi-Site Study on Teacher Conceptualizations of Childhood sought to understand early childhood and elementary teachers' conceptualizations of childhood. My responsibilities included recruiting preservice teachers and facilitating and conducting interviews and focus groups, in which the participants brought and discussed artifacts tied to their conceptions of contemporary childhood. These efforts required the transcription, as well as the thematic coding and analysis, of teacher journals, interviews, and focus group data.

Methodologically, the pilot study and my work with Dr. Sonu offered me necessary experience in qualitative data collection and analysis, and the ability to see the importance of qualitative data in adding texture to the quantitative data traditionally collected as a part of ER research. Thus, a mixed-methods approach to the dissertation research was employed, with the hope that this more nuanced approach to the study of ER would offer teachers a voice, in addition to the voices of the researchers who were seen as experts in this field.

Data Context[2]

The purpose of this study, as stated in Chapter I, was to better understand the relationships and interactions between teachers and children in the context of HS classrooms, looking for associations between teacher stress, teacher warmth, and children's ability to regulate emotion. Utilizing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how teachers deal with stress and offer warmth to the children in their care as well as how children regulate emotion than either a purely quantitative or qualitative study could. The goal of this dissertation research remained to add dimension to teachers' work in the ever-important task of helping children learn to manage and regulate emotion while being independent of their caregivers. Optimally, this research will provide researchers with clarity into what and how teachers think about childhood ER, bolstering existing quantitative research and offering a window into what is happening in the HS classroom. As well, the work can offer teachers the opportunity to share their voice and to represent their knowledge, which has been largely missing in this field of research.

Phase 1: Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP) Data

The CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) is a longitudinal intervention program tested in inner-city Chicago HS centers. Data were collected in two cohorts during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years and involved the participation of HS children and their families, as well as classroom teachers, asking if the given intervention (i.e., teacher training in teacher sensitivity and stress-reduction, behavior-management skills training,

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[2] See Appendix B, Summary of Data Collection.

the addition of classroom mental health consultants) could effect change to the emotional climate of the classroom in addition to other stated study goals (e.g., the potential of affecting children's school readiness skills through changes in behavioral regulation). Children have been followed from preschool through adolescence, and information from children, parents, and teachers has been collected intermittently over the course of the 17-year study. Findings from various studies using the CSRP data over the years have demonstrated that the intervention programming reduced child behavioral problems, simultaneously improving executive function skills and academic readiness (Watts et al., 2018). Specifically, the CSRP intervention managed to improve upon measures of classroom quality (Raver et al., 2008), student behavior (Raver et al., 2009), and cognitive outcomes for children (Raver et al., 2011).

The scope of the CSRP work demonstrated that although "many measures of poverty-related risk and of children's behavior problems [were] higher in treatment than in control sites at baseline" (Raver et al., 2009, p. 309), these SES and behavior problem differences were not statistically significant between the two site groups. Moreover, post-intervention analysis revealed that when compared to the control group, the intervention group demonstrated fewer internalizing and externalizing behaviors[3] (Raver et al., 2009), as measured by teacher reports using the Behavior Problem Index (BPI; Zill, 1990), for example. Interestingly and relevant to this dissertation study, "teacher's ratings of job demand and job control were both positively associated with child BPI Internalizing and Externalizing scores" (Raver et al., 2009, p. 311), further supporting the idea of the

[3] Internalizing and externalizing behaviors are characteristic of individuals with serious emotional disturbance (SED), the former describing inward emotional displays, the latter describing outward emotional displays (Trawick-Smith, 2014).

relational space of the classroom as dynamic; interactions between teacher and child ultimately bear weight on child behavior and circle back to teachers' feelings and behaviors as well.

The CSRP intervention also affected classroom quality, improving in classrooms where teachers were a part of the treatment group (Raver et al., 2008). Treatment teachers implemented intervention strategies, including weekend training sessions, the presence and input of classroom mental health consultants, and a range of social services. Taken collectively, these intervention strategies served to bolster teachers who were under professional and/or personal stressors, who lacked experience in the classroom (many of whom lacked confidence in classroom management), lacked control in classroom situations, and worked with fewer classroom resources (Li-Grining et al., 2010).

The findings from these CSRP intervention studies matter to the work of this dissertation study. If it is understood that children from backgrounds characterized as impoverished are considered to be at greater risk for demonstrating behavior problems (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Perry, 1999; Li-Grining, Votruba-Drzal, Bachman, & Chase-Lansdale, 2006; Raver et al., 2009), and are being sent to school earlier to deal with pervasive issue of school readiness in order to close an achievement gap, then teacher-child relationships are vital (Pianta, 1999) despite the levels of stress affecting teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Further, if the classroom dynamic can become cyclically and negatively impacted as a result of these stressors (Raver et al., 2008; Zhai et al., 2011), then it becomes imperative to further explore the relationship between teacher and child, and what mitigating factors may exist within the classroom to prevent negative associations. The CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data were

ideal for this dissertation study because it offered information about teacher well-being and psychological health, measures of the classroom environment, as well as child outcomes in school readiness and executive function.

Participants. Demographic, survey, and observational data[4] were collected from a full sample of 543 children in 35 HS classrooms across 18 HS sites in Chicago, Illinois. The 35 classrooms of the CSRP study afforded 90 participating teachers. Schools were selected for participation based on receipt of HS funding, two or more full-day classrooms, location in a high-poverty neighborhood,[5] and a self-nomination process. Head Start centers were matched based on site characteristics. These pairs of centers were then randomly assigned to either treatment or control groups. Within all of the centers, two classrooms were recruited for participation in the study (Raver et al., 2011).

Measures.

Teacher demographic information. Teacher demographic information was collected using a questionnaire rooted in the Cornell Early Social Development Study (Raver, 2003). Teacher demographic information included age, race/ethnicity, and immigration status, for example. Teacher professional demographic information included teacher role in HS program (i.e., lead, assistant), level of education (i.e., Associate, Bachelor), and years of preschool teaching experience, for example. Teacher background information included marital status, family structure, and household income, for example.

Teacher stress. In the scope of the CSRP data, teacher stress was distinguished in terms of type: between personal and work-related (Li-Grining et al., 2010).

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[4] See Appendix A, Table A-2, for a full accounting of the demographic information for the final analyzed CSRP sample of children and teachers (Raver et al., 2011).

[5] Neighborhoods considered for the study were areas in Chicago with high rates of poverty and crime and a low rate of mobility (Raver et al., 2011).

The first stress, the personal, was operationalized to include items like, for example, level of education, years of teaching experience, whether the teacher in question was the primary earner in their household, marital status, number of people in the household, and depressive symptoms. Teacher depressive symptomology was assessed using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6; Kessler et al., 2002). The K6 questionnaire is a measure of self-report, consisting of 11 items: 6 items designed to assess psychological distress (Question 1a-1f; e.g., “During the past 30 days, about how often do you feel nervous?”), and the remaining 5 items designed to assess persistence and impairment (Question 2-6; e.g., “During the past 30 days, how many days out of 30 were you totally unable to work or carry out your normal activities because of these feelings?”). Participants responded to Questions 1a-1f reporting on a 0-4 scale, where 0 represented “*none of the time*” and 4 represented “*all of the time*”; a higher score indicated more stress. Because the instrument used in the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) was truncated (Questions 1a-1f only), the measure was not designed to diagnose depression clinically[6] in the CSRP sample of teachers. Rather, the K6 (Kessler et al., 2002) was used to distinguish differences between teachers in sites. It compared teachers in terms of depressive symptoms—which teachers presented with a greater number of depressive symptoms compared to those teachers who presented fewer.

Work-related teacher stress was assessed using a measure of self-report consisting of four subscales largely drawn from the Child Care Worker Job Stress Inventory (CCW-JSI; Curbow et al., 2000). The abbreviated, 31-item version of the CCW-JSI used in the

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[6] A raw score of 13 or higher on the K6 is demonstrated to be the optimal cutpoint to screen for serious mental illness (Kessler et al., 2003).

CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) measured job control, job resources, and job demands using scales which ranged in from 1-5, where 1 represented "*rarely/disagree*" and 5 represented "*most of the time/agree*" to questions like "I feel like I am teaching the children the skills they need for school." The higher the score, the greater the control, resources, and demands with which teachers contended.

Additionally, teachers were assessed with regard to lack of confidence. Based on the work of Hammarberg and Hagekull (2002) and Scott-Little and Holloway (1992), the participating teachers of the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) were asked to self-report on their confidence in managing classroom child behavior. Using a 5-point scale where 1 represented "*disagree*" and 5 represented "*agree*," teachers were assessed in their "beliefs regarding the causes of children's behavior as well as their confidence in handling that misbehavior" (p. 446).

All teacher stress measures were collected at the fall timepoint, scored according to CSRP protocols, and averaged across items. For the purposes of this dissertation study, the K6 (Zill, 1990) and the CCW-JSI (Curbow et al., 2000) were combined to create a composite variable and thereafter standardized and operationalized as the study's measure of teacher stress.

Teacher warmth. In assessing classroom quality, the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) study used the Emotional Climate subscale of the CLassroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; i.e., teacher sensitivity, behavior management, positive climate, negative climate; La Paro et al., 2004; Pianta et al., 2008), and a 43-item version of the Early Childhood Environment Rating System-Revised (ECERS-R; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998). Using the Emotional Climate subscale of the CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008)

and portions of the ECERS-R (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998), teachers were asked to self-report, and trained observers were asked to observe classrooms, in order to more fully assess classroom quality and elements of classroom emotional climate over four timepoints throughout the school year (i.e., September, January, March, and May; Raver et al., 2011). The CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008) subscale was used to better understand the workings of individual classrooms using a 7-point Likert scale; the higher the score, the more effective observed teachers were rated in each domain. Specifically, teacher sensitivity measured teacher responsiveness to child needs; behavior management measured teachers' ability to structure the classroom in a way that allowed children to better understand what was expected of them in different periods of time; positive climate measured the enjoyment teachers expressed in instructing the children as well as being with the children directly; negative climate measured teachers' "expression of anger, sarcasm, or harshness" (Raver et al., 2008, p. 9).

For the purposes of this dissertation study, three of the four domains of the Emotional Climate subscale of the CLASS (positive climate, negative climate (reversed), teacher sensitivity) were operationalized as teacher warmth (Pianta et al., 2008). These CLASS data were collected in four timepoints during the course of the year, and standard scoring was implemented.

Children's emotion regulation. In assessing children's behavior, the scope of the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) investigations measured child behavior using the BPI (Zill, 1990), the Caregiver Teacher Report Form (C-TRF; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000), the Cooper Farran Behavioral Rating Scale (CFBRS, Cooper & Farran, 1988, 1991), and the Social Competence and Behavioral Evaluation (SCBE; LaFreniere & Dumas, 1996).

Although the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data included measures of children's executive function skills, I chose to operationalize behavioral measures as ER because I believe these latter measures demonstrate how children manage themselves in the classroom, under more naturalistic conditions. The hot and cold tasks of executive function included in the CSRP data, while a direct measure of child executive function rather than a teacher or parent report, do not reflect, I believe, the classroom dynamics that would prove to be valuable a marker of ER. For the purposes of this dissertation study, then, only the BPI (Zill, 1990) and the C-TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) were operationalized as child emotion regulation as these were most closely aligned with one another in their consideration of externalizing and internalizing child behaviors, behaviors that, in my estimation, reflect how successful (or not) a child is in regulating their emotion in the classroom.

The BPI (Zill, 1990) was originally designed as a 28-item parent-report rating scale to capture child behavior. For the purposes of the CSRP (Raver et al. 2011) intervention study, the BPI (Zill, 1990) was modified to include 30 items and to be a measure of teacher-report. The original 3-point response scale was thereafter reversed scored and rescaled so that 0 represented "*not true*," and 1 and 2 represented "*very/often true*" in the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) study. The collected responses were included for analyses as an average item score. The BPI (Zill, 1990) data were collected in the fall and spring timepoints of the intervention study.

The C-TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) was originally designed as a teacher- or daycare worker-report form, asking respondents to complete child and reported demographic information, to rate 99 problem items that describe children, and to

optionally complete a final, open-ended question (e.g., descriptions of child problems, positive characteristics about the child) based on the preceding 2 months. For the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011), however, the demographic and open-ended questions were omitted. Responses were scaled from 0 to 2, where 0 represented "*not true (as far as you know)*," 1 represented "*somewhat or sometimes true*," and 2 represented "*very true or often true*." The collected responses were included for analyses as an average item score. The C-TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) data were collected at the spring timepoint of the intervention study.

While the original CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) investigation was designed primarily to assess the feasibility and success of the intervention itself, it also assessed children's ability to regulate emotion in the classroom. In fact, the authors pointed to their use of effortful control tasks, those hot and cold tasks specific to ER, as a major contribution to the field (Raver et al., 2009; Raver et al., 2011) in that these instruments could be used to measure child ER in the school context. In this same vein, these instruments used to understand children's behavior, those between themselves and their teachers and/or peers, could provide a proxy from which I could investigate the questions of the dissertation study. For the purposes of this study, then, the BPI (Zill, 1990) and the C-TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) were operationalized as child ER.

Analysis. This dissertation study sought to examine existing CSPR (Raver et al., 2011) data for associations among teacher stress, teacher warmth, and children's ER in three steps. First, descriptive statistics were examined to understand the distribution of the key variables used in this study. In order to examine the associations between teacher stress, teacher warmth, and child outcome measures of ER, bivariate correlations were

next conducted. Last, a series of linear regression models were introduced. The first model examined the main effects of teacher stress and teacher warmth on outcome measures of child ER. The second model then applied controls to these main effects. The third model examined the interaction between teacher stress and teacher warmth to test if teacher warmth offered a protective factor on the association between teacher stress and children's ER.

Phase 2: Local Head Start (HS) Teacher Data

Ideally and in accordance with my goal of investigating the relationships teachers sustain while working in high-stress environments, this dissertation would have encompassed the recruitment of teachers and children together in their classroom spaces. However, the global COVID-19 pandemic that has closed schools since March of 2020 limited the scope of this work. Therefore, present-day HS teachers in Chicago, who were amenable to and interested in participating in the multiple facets of the study, were invited to participate. More pointedly, I focused on teachers who not only were willing to participate, but also willing to speak to the ways in which they handled, in whatever ways they knew how, the differing emotions that were introduced into a classroom. This may look different for each participating teacher, but I theorized that teachers would behave in one of five ways as they dealt with emotional children and emotional circumstances in the classroom: Admonish, Ignore, Distract, Explain/Educate, or Reappraise (AIDER). Participation was entirely voluntary.

Head Start classroom teachers were central to this study as they not only mirrored the context of the original CSRP study (Raver et al., 2011), serving children whose families meet several criteria that ultimately label the children as being at risk. HS

classrooms were selected for this study because they remain "the primary early childhood education service provider for low-income families in the U.S." (Watts et al., 2018, p. 3), and HS teachers provide meaningful interactions and lessons. Using introductions to HS granting agencies from faculty at Teachers College, Columbia University, teachers were approached, first, as a sample of convenience (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Once introduced to teachers, I aimed to meet them over a teleconferencing platform (i.e., Zoom), hoping to build relationships with them and their administrators and explain the purpose of my work in their classrooms. Originally, I sought to recruit three HS teachers, but I was fortunate to recruit six (Luttrelle, 2009). As two of these six teachers worked at the same school, I decided that the whole group would be divided into two groups of three teachers to conduct two focus group sessions. Thus, what was originally planned to be a study with one focus group of the three participating teachers resulted in two focus groups, each with three teachers.

While it was difficult during the proposal stage to consider who would be recruited as participating teachers, I hoped that the teachers recruited would not be White women, solely, as was the case in the pilot study—a sample of convenience (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This would not have been an accurate reflection of the original CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) teachers' demographics. While the education level of HS teachers varies nationally, the 2007 federal reauthorization of HS required that 50% of teachers hold a bachelor's degree and all teachers be certified in early childhood education by 2013 (Barnett & Friedman-Krauss, 2016). In 2014-15, however, although 73% of HS teachers nationally had obtained a bachelor's degree, great variation remained: the District of Columbia reached these requirements at 99%, while New Mexico, Alaska, and

Arizona, for example, remained below the 50% mandated threshold (Barnett & Friedman-Krauss, 2016). The participating teachers of this dissertation study totaled 6 women: four of whom self-identified as White, 1 self-identified as Asian, and 1 self-identified as Black. Five of the 6 teachers had a master's degree, the remaining teacher received a certification in early childhood education.

Teacher interviews. I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participating teacher during the study period (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The interviews began in late August. The second interviews took place toward the end of the 2-month study period, in October and early November. Meetings were scheduled for a time during the teachers' day that best suited their work and life demands, including evenings and weekends. The interviews were recorded over an internet-based teleconferencing application (i.e., Zoom). Upon completion of interviews, recordings were transcribed and inductively analyzed for themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Horvat, 2013; Seidman, 2013).

Teacher focus groups. After the first of two individual interviews, teachers were invited to one of two focus groups (Krueger, Casey, Donner, Kirsch, & Maack, 2001; Morgan, 1996) to broaden the discussion among the participating teachers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Completed over Zoom at approximately the sixth week of the 2-month study period, in mid-October, the beginning discussion points for the focus group were drawn from the first analyzed individual teacher interviews. Upon completion of the focus group, the audio recording was transcribed and inductively analyzed for themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Questions for the second interview were determined using the focus group analysis.

These data, and the means by which they were interpreted, depended on my positionality (Peshkin, 1988) (i.e., a woman of color, a child of immigrants, a former HS volunteer, an early childhood educator, a researcher), as well as the conceptual framework of the study (Ravitch & Riggin, 2012).

Analysis. While in the company of HS teachers, and throughout the data collection process, I organized data into two categories: transcribed teacher interview data and focus group interview data. All data were labeled with the collection date, time, location, as well as the participants present; pseudonyms were created to protect the privacy of the teachers involved. Thereafter, the data were stored on a password-protected computer.

As in the pilot study, inductive analysis consisted of the thematic coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) of transcribed teacher interviews as well as the transcript of both teacher focus groups. Pilot study data revealed themes of teacher collaboration and multidirectional learning between teachers, between teachers and children, and among the children themselves. Likewise, the data collected from this dissertation study revealed similar themes around the relationships between teachers and young children in the preschool classroom. However, noting the differences in setting between pilot and dissertation study, I was especially curious to learn more about the ways in which different types of stress played a part in the teacher-child relationships in HS classrooms. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic was weighty as an additional source of stress in the individual interviews and in the focus group conversations.

Once all data were collected, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory became useful in framing the data in such a way to allow for codes to rise naturally to the surface.

With preliminary codes identified, they were thereafter collapsed iteratively in the analysis. Identifying key themes allowed choices to be made in how best to thereafter navigate the discussion.

Researcher's Positionality

As is the case with any study, researchers' past experiences and interactions influence their present work. I expected, then, that my own experiences would inform the work of this study. I anticipated that engaging with participants and collecting and analyzing the data would all become nuanced in this way.

I situate myself as a woman of color, but I must admit that even this assertion is complex, as my phenotype has often led to the incorrect assumption that I am a White woman. It has happened, more than once, while a student at Teachers College, Columbia University that someone will innocently (or perhaps not) assume Whiteness (denying my Hispanic heredity, culture, and viewpoint) when countering my thoughts or suggestions on issues surrounding the education and well-being of children of color: "Well, no offense, but you're a White woman." I still am not sure how to respond to these sorts of comments. In the sting of the moment, I am silenced. While I worry about offending the speaker, my silence ensures that the offense remains with me. Of late, I can say that my perception of these comments has changed greatly. While I may have once kept quiet and been stung, I have learned to approach the individual, privately, to explain my history. It is uncomfortable for me and, I presume, for the speaker, but speaking out against a perceived wrong generally is.

Born into a family of Bolivian immigrants, I grew up with an often-unemployed father and a mother who, to this day, knows what it means to work. However, the work she pursued early in her arrival to the United States with her limited English was in New York City's garment district, despite her sharp mind and cunning skills of organization. In the last year, I discussed with my mother the work I support in the Neurocognition, Development, and Early Experience (NEED) Lab. As a team member of the Baby's First Year's (BFY) Study, I serve as one of several representatives on a telephone helpline for mothers enrolled in the randomized controlled trial on poverty reduction. In conversation with my mother, Lluviza, I learned that our family was, for some time, living near or below the poverty line, dependent on Food Stamps and other governmental services. This is striking to me for three reasons. First, now as a grown woman, raising children in the very city where I was born but in circumstances very different than those in which I was raised, my children have never been labeled at risk for any reason. Yet, for many years, I was most assuredly labeled at risk. Second, given my immigrant and poor background, I now understand that my mother, like the mothers with whom I speak each week, faced daily negotiations on how to spend the money there was in a way that allowed for the greatest yield, following the Investment Model (Conger & Conger, 2008). I can imagine, as do the researchers behind the national BFY study, the stress and worry she faced, the same stress and worry I hear each week while taking BFY calls. Third, it was not until I shared these experiences of working in support of the BFY Study with my mother that I learned this part of my history.

Returning to the present study, these facts of my early life have played a role in understanding this research and its impacts on me, as well as the mark I may leave with

the teachers and children of this dissertation study. I chose to conduct this study in HS classrooms not only because they were a part of the original CSRP study (Raver et al., 2011), but also because they offered a glimpse of my own educational beginnings, of my parents as they navigated their arrival in this country, of my history and culture. I felt strongly that while I would learn much in this process of engaging with teachers and children around the subject of emotion, my work more importantly promised to complicate and bolster the notions of the purely quantitative understandings of ER, the stresses of teachers, and how their lived experiences, histories, stories, perspectives, cultures, and warmth may optimize outcomes more so than an intervention alone. I suspected I would also be learning about myself: who I am as a student, a researcher, an educator, and a maker of change in a world that seems so unflinchingly determined to continue to oppress the potential of the youngest of students, especially those of immigrant, poor, and colored status.

With my mother working outside of the house, that meant childcare for me. I was lucky enough to attend a childcare center under the auspices of the M.D. Anderson Hospital in Houston, Texas, at the age of 4. My memories as a 4-year-old—also the age of the children in my study—are few, but I vividly remember being hit on the leg while unable to settle down during rest time. Were my teachers stressed out, fed up with my antics, incapable of regulating their own emotions, and so hit me? Whatever the reason for the punishment, it worked. I remember, to this day, freezing, laying stock still on that cot, afraid to move. The lesson is perilous, though. The teacher may have gotten what she desired in the moment, but in the end, I was no better at managing my behavior or emotions for the next rest time; I was only fearful. There remains unspoken conflict in

this personal anecdote, and I feel strongly that the work of this dissertation study will begin to highlight some of the themes that go into how teachers and children interact around emotional conflict in a way that improves outcomes for both teachers and children. Further, by working in classrooms filled with students who are multiply minoritized and labeled at risk, the hope is to highlight the larger social, political, and economic circumstances that go hand in hand with the schooling of these children; how the circumstances of poverty impact not only their immediate well-being (e.g., hunger, shelter, clothing, access to medical care), but also their long-term emotional well-being—how they learn to regulate negative emotion.

Twelve of the 20+ years I have spent as a teacher have been in the company and collaboration of preschool-aged children. The experiences and the reflections these years offered as I conducted this dissertation study no doubt also affected the way I approached this work. Peshkin's (1988) *I*'s factor heavily. These past and present *I*'s, as the beginning portion of this section on positionality stated, colored the work at hand in some ways for which I could immediately account, and in others which were revealed as I continued the work of the dissertation.

Validity and Trustworthiness

It was my hope that the explanatory sequential mixed-methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) design of this study would balance out the validity and trustworthiness issues by which the individual quantitative and qualitative approaches were limited. While quantitative data have been criticized for being overly dogmatic, working towards one positivistic truth, qualitative data are criticized for lacking in generalizability

(Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data offered a large, rich, and generalizable sample, but was limited in giving individual voice to its participants. While it could be argued that teacher and children voices were present in the manner of survey/questionnaire data, it was equally true that the reader did not *hear* their words or sentiments or get to know them as they may otherwise with qualitative data. Similarly, qualitative data are often based on small sample sizes, from which there is no option of harnessing the power of statistics, making the data collected ungeneralizable to the larger population. For these reasons, the mixed-methods design of this dissertation study helped to ameliorate some of these limitations, simultaneously providing affordances that neither claims individually.

Chapter IV

CHICAGO SCHOOL READINESS PROJECT REANALYSIS

This first chapter of analysis and results focuses on data collected in the initial years of the Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP; Raver et al., 2011). The chapter begins with a review of the dissertation study's research questions and hypotheses. Next, the chapter reviews the study's three-step analytic plan. The chapter is then divided into three sections, each detailing the results from the reanalysis of the CSRP data.

The overarching research questions of this dissertation study were:

1. Do teachers exhibiting more warmth help children develop better emotion regulation (ER) skills?
2. What are teachers' lived experiences, histories, stories, and perspectives regarding child ER in relation to their own stress and warmth?

As the literature supported the associations between the positive and relational dynamic between teacher and student, especially in terms of self-regulation (Jones, Bub, & Raver, 2014; Raver et al., 2008; Raver et al., 2011), this study hypothesized that among high-warmth teachers, higher levels of teacher stress will not predict child ER, whereas, among low-warmth teachers, higher levels of teacher stress will predict child ER.

Analyses

As previously stated in Chapter III, teacher stress, teacher warmth, and children's ER in the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data were examined for associations in three steps. First, I examined descriptive statistics to understand the distribution of the key variables used in this study. In order to examine the associations among teacher stress, teacher warmth, and child outcome measures of ER, I next conducted bivariate correlations. Last, a series of linear regression models was introduced. The first model examined the main effects of teacher stress and teacher warmth on outcome measures of child ER. The second model then applied controls to these main effects. The third model examined the interaction between teacher stress and teacher warmth to test if teacher warmth offered a protective factor on the association between teacher stress and children's ER.

Missing Data

In order to account for missing data on control variables, mean imputation was implemented in the subsequent regression analyses for a full sample ($N = 547$).

Univariate Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for teacher stress and teacher warmth measures, and child outcome measures, were conducted at the student level. See Table 1 for CSRP student-level descriptive statistics.

Table 1

CSRP Student-level Descriptive Statistics

	N	Cronbach's Alpha	Min	Max	*M*	Standard Deviation
Teacher Stress	602	-	-1.25	1.51	0	.63
Teacher Warmth	602	-	9.17	18.06	15.58	2.24
BPI Externalizing	547	.88	.00	1.33	.23	.25
BPI Internalizing	547	.78	.00	1.20	.15	.19
C-TRF Externalizing	547	.94	.00	1.74	.23	.28
C-TRF Internalizing	547	.87	.00	.88	.13	.14

Note: A z-scored composite of the Fall K6 (Kessler et al., 2002) and the Fall Job Stress Inventory of the CCW-JSI (Curbow et al., 2000) scores was operationalized as teacher stress.
As a reminder, the Emotional Climate subscale (positive climate, negative climate (reversed), teacher sensitivity) of the CLassroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008) was operationalized as teacher warmth. This teacher warmth variable was the aggregate of all available CLASS Emotional Climate scores across the year.
BPI = Behavior Problem Index (Zill, 1990)
C-TRF = Caregiver Teacher Report Form (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000).
Teacher *N* = 89

Teacher Stress demonstrated a moderate amount of variability, with a standard deviation of .63, and scores ranging from -1.25 to 1.51. With regard to Spring BPI (Zill, 1990) and C-TRF[1] (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) scores, both measures demonstrated externalizing and internalizing means close to 0. On average, the mean of teacher warmth across the year was demonstrated to be in the *mid-range*[2] to the *high end* of the

[1] As a reminder, both the BPI (Zill, 1990) and C-TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) scores were reported as average item scores. The 30-item BPI (Zill, 1990) was reversed scored and rescaled from 0-2 where 0 represented "*not true*," and 1 and 2 represented "*very/often true*" in answering questions like "(He/She) has difficulty concentrating, cannot pay attention for long." Each of the 100 items on the C-TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) was scored as either 0, 1, or 2, where 0 represented "*not true*" and 2 represented "*very true or often true*" in answering questions like "Demands must be met immediately."

[2] As a reminder, the CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008) Emotional Climate subscales were each measured on a 1-7 point scale, where 1-2 is considered on the *low end*, 3-5 is considered in the *mid-range*,

CLassroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008) Emotional Climate scale. There was also a moderate level of variability in teacher warmth, with a standard deviation of almost 2.25, and scores ranging between 9.17 to 18.06 across the year. There was a moderate to high degree of variability in terms of children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors, with standard deviations that were higher than the mean in all cases for both behavioral measures.

Bivariate Descriptive Statistics

Associations among the variables of interest demonstrated significant and positive associations.

As expected, teacher stress and spring child outcome measures were consistently associated with one another. As teacher stress increased, so too did child outcome behaviors. Of interest, these data also revealed that as teacher warmth increased, so too did child outcome behaviors. In other words, as teachers' ratings of stress *and* warmth increased, children's behaviors were reported as worsening.

The association between teacher stress and teacher warmth was marginally significant ($r = .07$, $p = .058$), but close to zero in magnitude. This indicated that teacher stress and warmth were not strongly related to one another. These stress- and warmth-child outcome associations were also relatively weak in strength. Table 2 presents correlations among teacher stress, teacher warmth, and spring child outcome variables.

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and 6-7 is considered at the *high end* of scoring, and summed across. Total scores for Emotional Climate could range between 3-21. Therefore, the *low end* for the Emotional Climate subscale was considered between 3-7, the *mid-range* was considered 8-16, and the *high end* was considered 17-21.

Table 2

Correlations among Teacher Stress, Teacher Warmth, and Spring Child Outcome Variables

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Teacher Stress	1	.07	.13**	.12**	.12**	.13**
2 Teacher Warmth		1	.15***	.16***	.10*	.17***
3 BPI Externalizing			1	.65***	.93***	.69***
4 BPI Internalizing				1	.58***	.80***
5 C-TRF Externalizing					1	.69***
6 C-TRF Internalizing						1

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$
Teacher Stress was a z-scored composite of the Fall K6 (Kessler et al., 2002) and the Fall Job Stress Inventory of the CCW-JSI (Curbow et al., 2000) scores.
Teacher Warmth was an aggregate of all available CLASS (Pianta et al., 2011) Emotional Climate scores across the year.
BPI = Behavior Problem Index (Zill, 1990)
C-TRF = Caregiver Teacher Report Form (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000).

Inferential Statistics

Regression analyses. In order to test whether teacher stress and teacher warmth were predictive of spring child outcomes, three regression models were run in the following analyses:

Model 1 (M1) examined the main effects of both teacher warmth and teacher stress alone.

Model 2 (M2) examined the main effects of both teacher warmth and teacher stress, accounting for control variables. These variables included: (a) student characteristics of sex, age, race, income to needs ratio; (b) teacher background

characteristics of education, age, and class size; (c) site characteristics of treatment group (i.e., HS treatment assignment), classroom matches (i.e., dummy variable indicating site matches for random assignment and cohort), number of support workers on staff, number of children aged 3-5 in the program, proportion of teachers with a bachelor's degree, proportion of assistants with college, proportion of families employed, and proportion of families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); (d) fall child measure scores; and (e) mean imputation for missing values on control variables.

Model 3 (M3) examined the main effects of both teacher stress and teacher warmth, accounting for the same previously listed control variables, and the interaction between teacher stress and teacher warmth. Teacher stress and teacher warmth were independent variables and were both measured as continuous variables in the present analyses. An interaction between these two variables therefore measured the change in the estimated slope for each independent variable, as the other independent variable changed. For example, the interaction effect in Table 3 for the BPI (Zill, 1990) Externalizing Behavior outcome was -0.039. Therefore, every 1-unit rise in teacher stress changed the slope between teacher warmth and externalizing behaviors by -0.039.

Table 3

Regression Models of Teacher Warmth, Teacher Stress, and Spring Child Outcome Variables (Standardized)

	M1	M2	M3
DV: BPI Externalizing			
Teacher stress	.127**	-.076	-.068
	(.043)	(.056)	(.059)
Teacher warmth	.142**	.104	.090
	(.042)	(.066)	(.073)
Interaction	-	-	-.039
	-	-	(.074)
Controls			
Student and teacher characteristics	-	Inc.	Inc.
Site characteristics	-	Inc.	Inc.
Fall measures of behavior problems	-	Inc.	Inc.
Mean imputation for missing control variables	-	Inc.	Inc.
Observations	547	547	547
Model R^2	.038	.365	.365
DV: BPI Internalizing			
Teacher stress	.119**	-.046	-.034
	(.043)	(.057)	(.059)
Teacher warmth	.154***	.032	.009
	(.042)	(.066)	(.074)
Interaction	-	-	-.272
	-	-	(.373)
Controls			
Student and teacher characteristics	-	Inc.	Inc.
Site characteristics	-	Inc.	Inc.
Fall measures of behavior problems	-	Inc.	Inc.
Mean imputation for missing control variables	-	Inc.	Inc.
Observations	547	547	547
Model R^2	.040	.353	.353

Table 3 (continued)

	M1	M2	M3
DV: C-TRF Externalizing			
Teacher stress	.119**	-.097	-.095
	(.043)	(.055)	(.058)
Teacher warmth	.097*	.075	.072
	(.043)	(.064)	(.071)
Interaction	-	-	-.005
	-	-	(.052)
Controls			
Student and teacher characteristics	-	Inc.	Inc.
Site characteristics	-	Inc.	Inc.
Fall measures of behavior problems	-	Inc.	Inc.
Mean imputation for missing control variables	-	Inc.	Inc.
Observations	547	547	547
Model R^2	.025	.391	.391
DV: C-TRF Internalizing			
Teacher stress	.121**	-.128*	-.148**
	(.043)	(.054)	(.056)
Teacher warmth	.168***	.062	.098
	(.042)	(.063)	(.070)
Interaction	-	-	.063
	-	-	(.051)
Controls			
Student and teacher characteristics	-	Inc.	Inc.
Site characteristics	-	Inc.	Inc.
Fall measures of behavior problems	-	Inc.	Inc.
Mean imputation for missing control variables	-	Inc.	Inc.
Observations	547	547	547
Model R^2	.045	.414	.416

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
Standard error in parentheses.
BPI = Behavior Problem Index (Zill, 1990)
C-TRF = Caregiver Teacher Report Form (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000)

Main Effects of Teacher Stress and Teacher Warmth on Child Outcome Measures

The main effects of teacher stress and teacher warmth, as seen in M1, demonstrated positive and significant associations with all four spring child outcome measures. That is to say, as both teacher warmth and teacher stress increased, so too did child outcome behaviors when controlling for each other.

It should be noted that these associations were, again, relatively weak in strength and substantively small. Teacher stress and teacher warmth explained merely 3.8% of the variance with regard to BPI (Zill, 1990) Externalizing, for example. This small effect size was consistent in all of the analyses conducted in M1. With regard to BPI (Zill, 1990) Externalizing, a 1-*SD* increase in teacher warmth over the school year predicted a .14 *SD* increase in externalizing problems during the spring. As for teacher stress, a 1-*SD* increase over the course of the school year predicted a .12 *SD* increase in internalizing problems during the spring as measured by the BPI (Zill, 1990). Interestingly, a 1-*SD* increase in teacher warmth, not teacher stress, over the school year predicted a .17 *SD*, the greatest, albeit still small, of all predictive values demonstrated in these models, in internalizing behavior as measured by the C-TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) Internalizing.

Main Effects of Teacher Stress and Teacher Warmth with Controlling Variables

The demonstrated significance of associations between teacher stress and teacher warmth and child outcome behavior were reduced, however, once controls were included in M2. There was one exception. Model 2 demonstrated a negative and significant association between teacher stress and C-TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) Internalizing. In this instance, as teacher stress increased, internalizing behavior

decreased (p = .018). This effect suggested that a 1-*SD* increase in teacher stress led to a 0.13 *SD* decrease in internalizing behavior.

The Interaction between Teacher Stress and Teacher Warmth

There was no significant interaction between teacher stress and teacher warmth with regard to the BPI (Zill, 1990) Externalizing or Internalizing measures.

There was no significant interaction between teacher stress and teacher warmth with regard to the C-TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) Externalizing measure.

Chapter V

CHICAGO HEAD START TEACHER VOICES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

This second chapter of analysis focuses on the qualitative findings collected during the fall of 2020. The chapter begins with a review of the motivating questions, followed by an introduction to the participating Head Start (HS) teachers by way of a presentation of their demographic and socioeconomic data, as well as a more personal vignette. The chapter is then divided into two sections of findings: (a) the many and varied ways teachers exhibited warmth in the classroom, and (b) the means by which teachers attempted to keep that warmth circulating, despite the stressors they encountered.

I sought to consider the lived experiences of present-day Chicago area HS teachers by asking of their lived experiences, histories, stories, and perspectives regarding stress, warmth, and emotion. The goal of the study was to better understand these parameters in order to interrogate how they relate to child emotional regulation (ER).

The Participants

Demographic and Socioeconomic Data

The teachers ranged in the number of years they have worked in the field of education. One teacher (AM) reported that she has been in the field since 1984, while

another teacher (RH) had less than 3 years of teaching experience. The remaining teachers had between 7 and 23 years of experience in the field of education. Five of the six teachers reported their highest level of education as having obtained a master's degree; the final teacher (JM) held a certification in early childhood education.

Their years of experience in HS classrooms varied, but not as widely as did their years serving in the field of education. These teachers served in HS classrooms between 2 and 10 years. Four of the participants were lead teachers, while one (AM) was a Master teacher, and the last (JM) was an Assistant teacher.

The number of years they were employed in their current school also varied, but tended to show stability, with five of the six teachers having only worked in HS classrooms at their current HS school; one teacher (JM) had recently made a move to a different HS program, and this was her first year at her current school.

In terms of annual income, teachers reported earning between $32,000 and $69,000 per year. Three of the six teachers lived alone. Of the remaining teachers, one (JM) lived with, and provided for, her parents. Another teacher (AN) lived with a partner and a child. The last teacher (AM) lived with a partner. Of the teachers living with other adults, only one (AN) declined to provide the total household income. Of the two teachers living with other adults, the teacher who lived with her parents reported no additional household income, while the last teacher, living with her partner, reported a total household income of $70,000, an increase of $38,000 over and above her HS salary.

With regard to race and ethnicity, four of the six teachers self-reported as White. One teacher reported as Asian (RH), and one as Black (JM); none of the teachers reported as Hispanic.

Participants: A Closer Look

This demographic understanding of the teachers speaks to how they compare one to the other. It is important to note their individual differences, the unique qualities that surfaced as a result of deep and meaningful conversations. What follows is a brief vignette of each participating teacher based on the conversations of the study.

The eldest of the teachers (AM) swelled with fervor in conversation. Her determination in getting her point across for the benefit of the children and teachers with whom she worked was remarkable. She offered her voice, heavy with a native Chicagoan accent, and participated in this study because her vantage point and memory were both long. She remained hopeful at the end of our time together that in speaking out, and in speaking on behalf of children, families, *and* teachers, progress to better the lives of all three constituencies could be affected.

A mother of a 2-year-old, AN spoke with a calm and patient affect throughout our conversations, despite times when the topic at hand made her bristle or recall anecdotes that were uncomfortable. She often spoke of her two families, each valued and loved: her family at home and her family at school. Both were shepherded by her steady, solution-finding, make-the-best-of-what-you've-got attitude.

Disillusioned, JM was vulnerable in the conversations she shared with me and with the other participants of this dissertation study. Yet, she remained joyful, filled with humor, and honest about her struggles. She sought advice and encouragement and was equally quick to offer the same to her fellow focus group members when it was necessary. JM was as earnest as she was dedicated.

The least experienced of the teachers (RH) eagerly met and tackled each question presented. She furiously took notes in both individual and group interviews, never wanting to miss a point or forget something she wanted to share. RH looked to this study experience, I believe, as a place to collaborate, to think together, and to find solace and solutions for the tribulations of her everyday school existence, new as it remained to her. She may have been a new teacher, but she gained daily experience, both positive and negative, that undoubtedly shaped her into an educator who spoke out in efforts to better child, family, and teacher circumstances.

Reluctant to begin, SB wound up being a prominent voice by the conclusion of our time together. So reticent was SB when we first began that the first interview was conducted with her camera off; I stared for the entirety of the conversation at an empty screen. Her words were so sparse, so intermittent with a halting and hesitant affect, that I worried whether this experience might be too uncomfortable for her. What was scheduled to be an hour-long interview was concluded in less than 20 minutes. I was convinced she would not continue with the study. As it turned out, SB not only engaged more in the successive focus group and second interview, but she concluded her time with the study by asking how she could be of help in the future. SB's insights, while voiced in a timid manner, provided a glimpse of a young teacher making it on her own—working to put together a career and life while also making sure to bolster her students.

Never thinking she would become an early childhood educator like her mother, SS met the classroom challenges she described with the tenacity and audacity of someone who, perhaps, always knew she was born to be a teacher. She was equal parts funny and sincere, someone who knew what needed to be done and how to get it done. This did not

make her indomitable, however. She spoke of her personal and professional vulnerabilities as facts of life, a part of who she was, and also as a driving force for making the days of small children bright and filled with joy.

Collectively, it is without question that what mattered most to each of the teachers who were generous enough to participate in this study was the well-being of the children with whom they worked. Their individual school situations and life circumstances all colored their school days, their levels of stress, and the amount of warmth they could generate at differing moments. Nonetheless, I am confident they did, as my mentor once said to me, the best they could in every instance.

Finding 1: Teachers Exhibited Warmth in the Classroom in Various Ways

Teachers Engendered Warmth in the Modeling of Emotion and Its Regulation

> I definitely want to voice the words that I'm feeling so [the children] can see it accurately. (SB, Focus Group 1)

The teachers recognized the importance of modeling emotion and its regulation. RH reported that she expressed her emotions with her students in an effort to display the wide range of emotions that permeate the classroom space. She not only attempted to normalize her emotional experiences, but in doing so, she also demonstrated that adults, too, had feelings and emotions. "Adults also not only feel, you know, happy or they're not always calm. They might feel upset, too, or they might feel frustrated and they might feel annoyed at times, just like everybody else" (Focus Group 1).

SS continued in this vein, relating an anecdote shared with the children: "Right now I'm feeling frustrated. I need to do the breathing. Will you help me do the breathing?" (Interview 1). Not only did SS model the emotion she was feeling, but she

also gave the emotion the necessary vocabulary, "frustrated" being more nuanced than sad or mad, offering the children one acceptable strategy (curricular breathing exercises) for overcoming the negative emotion she felt (Interview 1). SS continued:

> They can see that it's okay to feel frustrated. It's okay to feel annoyed and that there's nothing wrong with feeling these things. And I might talk about how like, "Well, right now I want to scream. Right now, I want to pound. Right now, I want to…but that's not okay. It's okay to do the breathing right now," or "It's okay for me to stomp my feet," and showing [the children] that these are the okay ways to express this frustration. (Interview 1)

JM added:

> I start really small. I'll show facial expressions, I'll use me for an example. I'll take, I have to take my mask off sometimes and [say,] "Look at my eyes, look at my face. I'm not happy." Or I'll say, "Well, you know, you need to look at your classmate because they have something very important to say to you," and I may stand there for support. And I'll say, "Well, look at her face. Is she.... What is she.... What's happening? What do you see? Is she happy or she's sad? She's sad. And I wonder why…why don't you talk to her about that,"…you know, and somehow get...my students to have a dialogue about what happened and...and teach them how to play with one another. (Interview 1)
>
> RH noted that it is important to
>
> be calm and express that "I'm just a little bit frustrated right now, so I'm going to...do a little breathing exercise right now [and] I'm just going to have my little moment...that's going to calm me down." And the kids can see, "Okay, adults do the same thing." (Focus Group 1)

RH also noted that adults, both teachers and parents, can benefit children by narrating an emotionally upsetting event.

> When you do get frustrated that the kids are hitting each other and hurting each other, you do really want to express, "I'm really sad to see that you guys are doing this to each other." Modeling, using the words...I think that's really important for kids to see. I feel like kids learn from observation really quickly. They're really aware of their surroundings, and they're always watching...even if you think they're not watching or hearing. (Focus Group 1)

RH continued, returning to the importance of showing children that teachers are human, too. "[The children] put teachers on a pedestal. If you see [the children] at the grocery

store, they're like, 'Wait, what are you doing here? This is not the classroom. Why are you grocery shopping!?'" RH brought to the surface the distinction that children hold for their teachers in everyday acts like going to the grocery store, but maybe more importantly in the relatability to emotion, its instruction, and its regulation, it is important for teachers to be "vulnerable," showing them that "you're human just like them," as RH concluded (Focus Group 1).

The teachers in this dissertation study were adamant about the importance of emotion, and emotion regulation, to the well-being of the children with whom they worked. AN related her teaching of emotion and its regulation to her own life and the importance of recognizing and acknowledging emotion in *others* as equally paramount as understanding one's own emotions. AN noted that while speaking to how she was feeling in a therapy session, her therapist began to cry. She connected this story to her classroom and her children, understanding that when someone else feels a person's emotions, the emotions are validated. AN explained how and why this was important in the HS classroom and that she was not afraid to let the children see how she feels.

> I was thinking about...this one time I was in therapy and I made a therapist cry and I felt so terrible that I made her cry, and I was like apologizing and she was like, "No. That was a very sad story, and it made me…it made me sad." And I was like, "Wow, that made me feel like my emotions are really, like, validated from that experience." And that's what I think about with the kids. (Focus Group 2)

Teachers regarded the instruction of emotion and its regulation as paramount in maintaining the classroom as a safe space. Further, the learning of emotion made for an opening of discussion with the children and their families. RH (Focus Group 1) noted that children would benefit if this type of modeling were consistent from school to home.

Further, AN (Focus Group 2) connected the idea of finding help when it was needed with the larger and ongoing mental health debate in the United States.

> Yeah, I just let the kids know when I'm having a bad day. I'm like, "Listen, I'm pretty cranky today. I don't want to spend my whole day yelling, so let's do something to feel better because I don't want to feel like this. It doesn't feel good." I do think there's just such an importance of letting kids know it's okay to feel…because mental health is not…a priority in our country, even though I think it is slowly becoming more of a priority. (Focus Group 2)

AN continued:

> I think the kids know when I'm having a bad day and when it's hard and when I'm tired and at the same time though, like, I am definitely...I learned that early on in my career to talk to kids about that stuff. And I will straight tell them, "Miss A's tired today. So, you need to do this, and if you don't want to hear me use my...angry adult voice, just do what I ask." You know, and I think…you know, I try to be honest as much with the kids and just talk to them about what's going on. (AN, Interview 1)

Teachers Considered Differences between Modeling and Teaching

> It's almost like a close[d]-ended question to an open-ended question. (AM, Interview 1)

When asked to consider the difference between teaching and modeling, AM began her interview by stating, "Being a teacher is a close[d]-ended question. They are missing the opportunity" (Interview 1). AM distinguished the teaching versus modeling of emotion and its regulation in these open and closed terms, comparing how teachers teach factual material. "A triangle has three sides and three points," for example, compared with "What can we do to make [the children] feel better?" AM expressed that emotion learning is not as didactic as a lesson describing a triangle and argued that *nothing* in an early childhood classroom should be as didactic as that, especially the understanding of emotion (Interview 1).

SS reported that teaching and modeling were two sides to the same coin.

> I don't think it's the same activity because "teach" is taking an active…. "This is how you do it...this is how you do it, you need to watch me, are you paying attention?" It's kind of [a] stand-in-front-of-the-classroom, circle-time type thing. Model is more of a passive trait, a passive activity where you can be doing it constantly, whether good or bad or whether [teachers are] doing [it] consciously or not. And the children are absorbing it constantly. (Focus Group 1)

SS believed that children learn more through modeling than direct "in-your-face" teaching strategies. She noted that it was harder to see results from modeling, however, and there was no assessment to see progress with regard to things being modeled. She concluded by stating that "a teacher has to plan for both" (Focus Group 1).

RH agreed with SS's assessment that "modeling is intentional, and [that] teaching and modeling are integrated and not just [for] teachers. Parents are teachers, too, and they're the first teachers for the kids before anyone else" (Focus Group 1). To this anecdote, SS replied directly to RH, saying that she had been "called mom so many times" (Focus Group 1). Here, RH added:

> You know, [children] think of [teachers] as another mom figure...sometimes the safety haven for the kids is school. Sometimes they don't get food at home, they don't get love at home. They don't get attention at home. So, when they come to school, it's their safe place, so teachers are also like a mom. I mean, families or guardians, parents, teachers, they're all essentially doing the same thing, which is teaching and modeling just in a different setting. (RH, Focus Group 1)

SB added that in addition to being a model and serving in the role of mom, teachers offer more to their students. She noted that teachers are "the friend, the counselor, the playmate. It's really a big role and at the same time, not a big role at all" (Focus Group 1).

Teachers Engendered Warmth by Engaging in Respectful, Direct, Honest, and Vulnerable Conversations with Children

> And it's figuring out what [the children] need to calm down so that they can talk about it…if they can't talk about it, that's, for right then, that's okay. (SS, Interview 1)

In light of the importance of open and honest conversations, AM reported:

> All emotions are valuable, that they're all to be respected. That it's okay to...and if they're strong, too. That it's okay to feel angry and anger can be so, so frightening to kids, but that's okay. I get…I get angry, too. And sometimes when I would say that to kids, they'd be like, 'What?' 'Yes, I get angry too!' So, the more feeling things you can talk about, the more feeling faces you have in your classroom and the understanding of it, I think it'll…it'll help the children feel better about themselves. (Interview 1)

SB spoke to the importance of helping children learn to name their emotions (Interview 1), while SS noted that that might be too great a task at this age or in a particular moment.

> If they need to cry, if they want to, like, scream or whatever, screaming, it's like...I might…be like, "You can scream in the pillow if you want," but…letting them experience that emotion whatever the negative emotion is, that's fine as long as no one's getting hurt. And trying to make a plan for later. (Interview 1)

According to SS, "Find out how they communicate and what their passions are. And use their interests to communicate with them. [Because] at the early childhood age, at the young ages, everything is education...and everything is every kind of education" (Interview 1). SS continued to report that she suffers from migraine headaches, which can occasionally overcome her. When they occurred during the school day, SS shared her needs with the children.

> I tell them, "My head is hurting" or "I'm not feeling good." Then they usually [say], "Oh, oh, can I take your hand?!" and it usually transitions to playing doctor. They know that this is what you do [to care for another], that when you're not feeling good, you go to the doctor or when you're not feeling good that you help take care of other people and it facilitates those conversations. (Interview 1)

Moreover, children learn that

> you can take care of your class...classroom family. We have to be calm, we have to move quietly, that maybe we have our listening ears on a little bit. [It is] more clear that these are the times, a lot of times, they teach each other and it gives them the opportunity to model the language of "Oh, are you okay?" or "Can I give you a hug?" or, for those that aren't aware of spatial boundaries, "No, no that isn't a pat on the back. That isn't a hug, that's a squeeze." These experiences provide practice for the children. So, when I share that I'm not feeling good or that I'm frustrated, they can practice these things a lot more safely with me than they can with each other. (SS, Focus Group 1)

The teachers acknowledged the understanding that their job title obliges them to teach, yet that the work of their day is centered on helping the children learn about emotion.

Teachers Engendered Warmth by Helping Children Learn about, and Regulate, Their Emotions

> [I] get to know the students a lot more, communicating with their families, meeting their struggles and needs…understanding their struggles and challenges. (RH, Interview 1)

Teachers noted a number of factors that play a role in a child's dysregulation: hunger, tiredness, being rushed (AM, Interview 1). By relating and engaging with the children, the teachers collectively spoke to strategies they enacted to diffuse an escalating situation. They may have:

- read books with the children;
- offered a cup of water;
- engaged in breathing techniques;
- enlisted the visual and cognitive recognition of emotion by using a feelings chart;
- applied deep pressure;
- closed certain areas of the room (e.g., blocks) if behaviors became unsafe;
- offered a quiet cube;
- offered soft materials to hold;
- offered a teacher's lap in which to sit;
- offered a pillow into which a child could scream;

- offered a “safe zone” or a “quiet zone” where children could recenter their emotions and bodies, meditation;
- allowed a nap;
- offered materials for the child to draw a picture, other arts;
- engaged the child with other children, those distinct from any with whom the child may have become dysregulated;
- offered a puzzle;
- employed routines, reminders, consistency, and schedules to alleviate uncertainty ahead of potential dysregulation; and
- engaged the child in large motor movement, exercise, or yoga.

Some, but not all, of these strategies were related to more formal curriculum programming found in each teacher’s school, introduced by the school to support student well-being, learning, and growth.

AN elaborated on a classroom yoga and meditation practice, an example of the means by which teachers integrate strategies into the already-structured school day.

> So, when we already sort of have a plan or a basis or foundation for that plan, I think that really helps [the children]. We start off the day with a very strict routine. I mean, obviously, to meet individual needs, we can vary that for certain children, but I find that really helps my students kind of settle into the classroom. We teach yoga. We’ve taught that for like five years now with our students. I started teaching...we started doing meditating outside of the yoga. And then, yeah, when it comes to the yoga and the meditating, I mean…the yoga, we always start off with talking about breathing. And so, when kids are having those breakdowns, it’s like, “Let’s use our yoga. Let’s use our bunny breaths. Let’s use our bee breath to calm ourselves down.” And with the meditating, too, I did kind of start meditating with my students more because parents are always complaining about focus like, you know, “My child can’t focus for long periods of time.” And I wanted to not only demonstrate to the parents, like, you know, we’re going to start really small. We literally started with ten seconds…. By the time we went into, you know, quarantine the pandemic, we were only up to like fifty seconds. We were slowly adding and some days we could do...we could only do ten seconds again. But just showing, like, how that is how attention works. You know, you start small and you slowly build on it. And then also, I did find it really helps children focus. I mean, I read research on how important meditating can be towards focus. (Interview 1)

In instances of child dysregulation, AM spoke to the importance of her team in making necessary accommodations, whether following official curriculum or not.

> We have a little girl in our two-year-old room that has these tantrums that you say "white," she'll say "black." If you say, "white," forget it. There you go, and she's having her tantrum and things like that. So, it's like [the other teachers and I]…"Let's strategize how to make her feel better. She's got to cry a little bit. But you need to sit right there and let her know that you're there until she's done crying and you'll be there for her. But in the meantime, you and you and you, you need to kind of take care of the rest of the classroom. And basically, what we came up with was my...my assistant teacher and myself, we...we met and we came up with a plan that the classroom isn't going to go smooth and nothing's going to get done until [this child and her emotion dysregulation] is attended to, and that is settled down or whatever is happening. That child is going to...is going to disrupt the classroom for an hour, type of a thing. And so, in meeting with the social-emotional person and with my...my co-teacher, it was...we needed to...we needed to assign roles within the classroom. And should the child become dysregulated, then he is going to be my responsibility until he gets himself... so he's in a better place. But in the meantime, [co-teacher's name], you're in charge of seventeen other kids and getting stuff going. So, just kind of keep them happy, have them work on through activities and things like that until this [child] gets regulated again. (Focus Group 2)

Teachers Engendered Warmth by Implementing
School-mandated Curriculum and Intervention Strategies

> I really like [the curriculum]. I like the framework of it, it gives me ideas. (SB, Focus Group 1)

For reference, the teachers mentioned the following curricula which were instituted in their various school programs:

- Creative Curriculum,
- Pyramid,
- Conscious Discipline,
- Continuity of Care,
- New Beginnings,
- Active Supervision, and
- HS Curriculum.

RH agreed with SB when noting that Creative Curriculum offered teachers an "outline" for its use; she appreciated the formula and noted that this curriculum outline could be further customized for students. "You can really dig deep into it and [personalize] and individualize it to your students—what they really need to know, how

they're going to be learning." She continued to say that her center allowed her to be as creative as she wanted to be, to "really make it [my] own, how it will fit [my] class" (Focus Group 1). She contrasted Creative Curriculum with the traditional HS Curriculum, however, which RH noted to be matter of fact and a tangible learning arc. Creative Curriculum allowed for teachers to move beyond worksheets or workbooks in how they approached materials for students while the HS curriculum was less flexible.

SS also reported her school allowed her to "tailor [the curriculum] to the children, [and] to the families." She noted that the school "allow[ed] me to create my own lesson unit if I want to, as long as I meet all the needs and hit all of the categories and learning disciplines" (Focus Group 1). However, SS noted that "most of the teachers were not interested in moving beyond the structured formula of the given curriculum." Rather, SS related that the other teachers would rather "plug and play and do whatever [the curriculum] says." They asked her, "You want to make your own units from scratch?" SS replied that, "Yes, because the kids want to [learn] about transportation, [for example, with] actual vehicles, and that isn't a unit that Creative Curriculum has" (Focus Group 2).

This flexibility was not always present in each school or in the teacher's classroom. It depended greatly on coworker (supervisors and aides) support, the means by which school faculty talked and collaborated over the curriculum, and how comfortable teachers were with advocating for such flexibility.

Teachers Acknowledged Inherent Challenges with Implementing School-mandated Curriculum and Intervention Strategies

> Any teacher who is following everything that's on her lesson plan, is not talking to the kids. (AM, Interview 1)

AM recognized that interventions or curricula instituted in schools are designed to assist teachers, but she also spoke to (what were to her) obvious problems. She noted that an increasing amount of curriculum is being developed for HS classrooms, specifically around social and emotional learning. She inherently recognized this focus on social and emotional learning to be a positive. However, AM noted that the continued institution and layering of intervention and curriculum into classrooms served to distance teachers from children's individual needs, as well as was more inhibitive of the teacher-child relationship (Interview 1). AM opined that the fabric of Creative Curriculum suggested that no two classrooms should look, sound, or feel the same. According to AM, different needs come with different children, resulting in different classrooms. Yet, a tension between curricular goals and reality existed (Interview 1).

RH spoke to what it sounded and felt like when she was called upon "to do lots of 'Mighty Minutes,'" one component of Creative Curriculum, to meet administrative demands or requirements. While these flashcard-type aids were designed to be a quick and easy means of introducing objectives for learning and development (e.g., clap with friends, jumping activity, dancing, letters, numbers, social and/or emotional learning), their use in the HS classroom had unintended consequences for children and teachers (Interview 1).

AN picked up on this notion of Mighty Minutes and how they may have served as a divisive point between teachers and administrators.

> It's thinking about like Creative Curriculum, when we were being, like, super harped on about like "You had to follow the curriculum, you have to show me you're doing a Mighty Minute every second of the day and doing those instructional teaching cards." That was when Head Start was doing their review. And it was like, "If we don't get this, we will not have funding." That was like at the beginning of last year, and it was really interesting. So, I'm like, "Well, I

> wasn't able to get to that. I don't know what...I don't...I'm not going to just ignore my students and do something that they're, like, not into." That, to me, seems like a terrible teacher. (Focus Group 2)

Here, the teachers diverged in thought. RH began:

> Not that it's not going to happen, but before [a child's dysregulation] escalates, you want to make sure that it doesn't get there because once it's already escalated, you've already lost the rope. You lost the control already because [the children] are already at this lowest moment where it's like whatever you say, they're not going to listen to you. They're not...it's not going to register in their system because they're so upset already. They're already at the…that low, low point. (Focus Group 1)

RH added: "You are taking steps to make sure they don't…get there…[that the situation doesn't] escalate and, really, having Mighty Minutes or the break time, breathing time, cup of water...this is also [where the] teacher plays a big part." She concluded, "I'm not going to make this torture. Let's not make this torture for both of us" (Focus Group 1).

The manner in which RH used Mighty Minutes suggested that these cards are tools to abate the escalation of emotion. SB reported that part of the problem for teachers was not knowing what the problem was in the first place. "You do get to know your kids and how to prevent [dysregulation]. I think the challenge would be before the dysregulation, knowing the problem" (Focus Group 1).

SS extended this topic by noting that if she met resistance from the administration in her objection to teach without relying on items like Mighty Minutes, she would "do lip service [to] the supervisors, but…not actually…do that, and my kids will be better for it" (Focus Group 1). SS would rather break with her administration than teach in a rote and, in her estimation, disingenuous and potentially dangerous manner.

AN reported that when curriculum was brought into the classroom, it may belittle or ignore how well teachers know their own students (Focus Group 2). AN suggested that

teachers already perform the suggested action items instructed by the curriculum but are not recognized for their work.

> They were trying to implement Conscious Discipline into my classroom, and so we had a meeting about it. And my issue was that our mental health consultant and our disabilities coordinator, they would go to the meetings about [Conscious Discipline] and then they were supposed to teach us about it. And whenever they would bring up a different aspect of it, I'm like, "Oh, yeah, I do that. See, right there. Oh, yeah, I do that. I do it like...through this." And so, I was like, "Wow, I'm already doing these things." And that made me feel like they didn't see my strengths as a teacher and really because they were never in my classroom. So, I'm like, "You don't know what we do." And so that was frustrating. And I felt like it was more like second-hand information, rather than me being like trained on it. (Focus Group 2)

Further along in this strand of the focus group conversation, it was revealed that teachers are not personally trained in curriculum. Instead, others go to conferences and then train teachers in after-/before-school professional development (PD) upon their return. It was the HS grantee who both mandated the curriculum and went to conferences to be trained; not everyone was included.

Despite this tension, JM revealed that a benefit of a curriculum like Conscious Discipline was that it could serve to benefit teachers first and the children thereafter. JM made a connection to the oxygen mask in an airplane—travelers are instructed to apply their own mask before helping those around them (Focus Group 2).

Three teachers (SS, JM, AN) discussed using the curricular techniques themselves, not simply to benefit the emotional regulation of the children. SS demonstrated in Interview 1 how she used her hand as a tool to illustrate breathing techniques: Her right index finger slowly traced the hill-like slope and curvature of her outstretched left hand, narrating the motions. As her right finger rose against the left

hand, she inhaled deeply; as the finger fell between fingers, she exhaled deeply (Interview 1).

> The teachers first need to regulate themselves before they can regulate others. And so, there's four different breathing techniques for when you're…you're feeling bad. There's the [1] STARS, so "Stop, Take a breath, And Relax your Shoulders or Smile." And then. And then [2] DRAIN, so when you're feeling really frustrated, you put your arms out...you squeeze and then you relax… and…and then the [3] BALLOON, you take a breath, and the fourth one is [4] PRESS, you squeeze in [breathing noise]. [Demonstrated all on video.] There have been times where...usually it's only when the children are causing the frustrations, not when another teacher is, but when the children are causing really frustrations, I'd be like, "I'm feeling very frustrated. I need to do my drain breathing" [breathing noise]. (SS, Interview 1)

SS elaborated:

> There are times where it's harder to access the warmth at times. That doesn't mean the reservoir isn't there. It's just I need to access for myself like the Conscious Discipline and practice the breathing, and then remember that I don't want all that they hear for me being the censorship and the…the correction and the behavioral modification. (SS, Interview 2)

To alleviate these moments of intensity, the teachers noted ways in which they coped. AN began:

> But I mean, I think that a strategy I think I've used over time is like...you know, if I'm not feeling great, then I know my students aren't going to be feeling great. And we spend a lot of time at work and it is a job. And if I'm going to be here, I would rather be having a good time....I do try to you know, Fridays we do a lot of, like, cooking activities or something, just like we try to do more like special things on Fridays where we all want to be, since we're already there, let's have fun together. (Interview 1)

AN concluded, "Some days, I guess I'm better at coping than other times. I mean, the yoga and meditation lesson definitely help me throughout the day" (Interview 1).

JM used humor not only to address issues, but also to alleviate stress and chaos.

> The kids have, as I would say, somewhat...and they may not realize it, of course, because the students are so young...kind of stressful living situations. So, when it comes to routines and the kids don't remember the routines, I just try to make a joke out of it. And if they laugh because of me being silly, that's great.

> For example, we have to pick up our sheets and put them in the laundry bin [after their nap]. And I see a sheet on the floor. I say, "Okay, who left the sheet on the floor?" "I don't know, wasn't me…wasn't me." "Okay, then it must have walked out of that bin." You know, [inaudible] the kids were laughing, you know, I don't know. Some people might consider that sarcastic, I hope not. But I'm thinking I just need to learn how to help the kids to laugh a little bit, you know, in a funny way. (Focus Group 2)

Teachers Engendered Warmth by Establishing Sustaining Relationships

> I think at the time I definitely overlooked that I was the person that had the strongest relationship and bonds with the kids. I was the one that was… that didn't change and didn't leave, or come and go. (RH, Interview 1)

Relationships were at the heart of the HS classrooms for the teachers of this investigation. Each teacher was candid in describing the many ways in which she centered relationships between herself and her students.

AM spoke at length about giving the child deserved respect and honoring their voice, their needs, and their feelings (Interview 1). AM opined about why it was important to respect a child:

> A teacher hopefully has a trained ear to hear what the child is saying, to allow the child to have a voice and an opinion, and to be respected. And if the teacher respects that child, it could be the teacher might be the only one respecting that child. (Interview 1)

She spoke about one student in particular and how the student's older siblings talk to him every morning at drop-off.

> That sister and that brother tell him, "You better eat all your food. Eat all your food today." I said, "That's what he hears every single morning from them," you know? And I said, and I try, I say, "How about we say," you know, "have a great day. We'll see you later," you know? And then they usually do end up saying that as well, you know? But I said, "So that's what he's left with." He's…he's the little guy in a family of five. What kind of voice does he have? So, I said, "So you have to think of ways to quietly let him, if he's not going to use a speaking voice, how can he physically show you with a…with a quiet voice or a silent voice what his needs and wants are, what his desires are?" (Interview 1)

Additionally, AM claimed that teachers needed to help the child find their voice without overwhelming them.

> There has to be conversation in here, so people know what's going on and all of these little lives and stuff like that but…but that's now, now you've got to know how to start building this relationship with this little guy. Maybe just go sit quietly next to him. Don't…don't bombard [him] with a lot of questions. You know, maybe give him a choice. You've got to kind of let him kind of start controlling a little bit, maybe give him a countdown, you know? You know, "In like five minutes...we're gonna have to start cleaning up after breakfast. If you need some more...make a mark on this piece of paper for me or move this teddy bear over here or something." I said, "Find a way to get a voice with that child so that he can start getting some confidence that way." (Interview 1)

AM continued to note that this same respect is owed to the families of the children she served as well.

> If [we] all start from a point of respect, respect the children, respect their families, you know, and that is really turned around at this center. When I first started, there was a lot of, "Oh their mother does this, their mother…" You know what? I don't want to hear that. We're not...we're going to respect the parents. We don't know what baggage they're carrying. You can't [ask the] child. You know we don't… "Do you do this at your house?" You can't say that to them. You have to respect that their home is their home. (Interview 1)

AN noted that this all-important relationship necessitated a level of honesty between teacher and child as well. When thinking about Kindergarten in particular, AN continued speaking about the children's and families' real-life next steps and the means she undertook to prepare the children.

> You know, we do, our kids who are going to kindergarten, we do like a special small group with them every day and we call it "Kindergarten Corner." And, it is a way, because the kids were feeling so stressed out about kindergarten that...we kind of start off with Kindergarten Corner of like, "This is what a kindergarten classroom is like." We show videos about classrooms and we talk about how they're the same and different from us...from our [HS] rooms. And then we do like more direct instruction where we, you know, we go over like letter sounds and we do rhyming games and…just, you know, higher-order thinking activities with them. And I do think that's really helped our students because their parents...I know at home they're like, "You have to do this because you have to be ready for kindergarten." (Interview 1)

AN claimed that she was raised to be honest, and she likes to be as honest as she can with the children in all aspects of the school day. She noted that some parents may have a hard time talking about issues with their children and felt, therefore, that this was an important part of her job. She continued to say how honesty is a form of preparing children for the real world because they are "little people" (Interview 1).

> I think because that's real life, right? I think that…I think if anyone knows that, it's my students. You know, kids who are, you know, I've had kids who are homeless, kids who have experience [with], like domestic violence, gun violence. And I see in the classroom those kids whose parents aren't good at talking to them about those issues and how that comes out. You know, the anger and the fear and, you know, the anxiety. And so, I think in a lot of ways, that's how I was raised too, you know, my parents were very honest with me and I think, you know, kids are little. They are people, right? They're just smaller, and it's our job to teach them. (Interview 1)

Most powerfully, SB focused attention on the fact that, in time, children may forget what a teacher taught them, but they will not forget how a teacher made them feel. Paraphrasing Maya Angelou, SB spoke deliberately, albeit with halting, hesitating, and limited words, in her descriptions of why the way teachers made children feel matters. SB reported that warmth allowed a child to ask for what they may need, arguing that this was the whole purpose of early childhood education—for children to learn to need from others and to collaborate in that knowledge and, ultimately, to ask for what was needed. That teachers were "approachable" was of paramount importance; that "children feel that [teachers are approachable and warm]…is a really important aspect of being a teacher" (Interview 2). SB determined that this approachability was fundamental in the relationship between teacher and child—the relationship that fostered, in her opinion, all other good things that occur in a classroom. The responsibility of this relationship fell to

the teachers to uphold the integrity of the relationship with children and to meet children where they were, teaching to their learning styles and needs.

In this vein, teachers spoke to several means by which they told and showed the children they were being cared for, hoping to make them feel important and supported. AN noted how important it was to show excitement when seeing the children (Interview 2). SB added the importance of focusing on the children when in their company, rather than being distracted by external factors, whether personal or professional (Interview 2). AN continued to add on the importance of remaining consistent in interactions, even when holding the children to high expectations (Interview 2).

The teachers also noted, however, that there are inherent limitations in their ability to form and sustain these relationships. Pivotal to this dissertation study, the teachers of this investigation delineated four impediments to building relationships: (a) the differences in disposition and personality between teacher and child; (b) how engaging, by nature, children in the classroom were; (c) a teacher's confidence in knowing what to do and how to do it; and (d) a lack of time, which brought to the surface a tension between the academic and the emotional.

First, AM suggested that the natural, beginning, and baseline states of a relationship between teacher and child can vary. When considering different teachers and different children, each unique in disposition and personality, relationships between the two may be hindered by these differences (Interview 1). It followed, then, how well established the relationship between teacher and child was may thereafter affect how well a teacher was able to help the child in times of emotional dysregulation.

Second, AM also noted that the degree to which children were open and engaging could affect the continued development of the baseline relationship between teacher and child.

> You're always going to have kids, they're going to talk to you, no matter what…they're going to do this with you, and that with you. Those are the easy kids to [make] connections with. But a teacher needs to look around the room for the child who is quiet, makes your day rough, leaves some bruises on you. There can still be something in there...and those are the kids that you will always remember. There are some you have to go inward and work with yourself in order to be a better you to help that child. And then there's growth all the way around. (Interview 1)

Third, JM reported that she can be conflicted in how to approach an upset and dysregulated child. Speaking to the limitations of her program and the school's curriculum, but also her own personal feelings of insecurity, she reported:

> There's a saying…letting your students know that your classroom is a safe spot. And I have a safe spot in my classroom. What exactly does that mean? I mean, I tell them, "Okay, if you want to cry, it's okay. Why don't you sit in the safe spot so I could see you and I'll be right there." I mean, I don't know exactly what to say. Does Johnny need to be held? For how long? That's a whole 'nother lesson right there. So, it's giving a child something I may not have to give. (Focus Group 2)

Fourth, AM noted that "building relationships with the children takes time" (Interview 1). Time, however, was something the teachers of this investigation noted was limited. AM (Interview 1) previously commented on curriculum implementation serving as one limitation in time when attempting to build relationships with children in classrooms. In conversation with one another, SB added that, yes, "the relationship has to be built." To this point, RH added:

> Relationship building is very important. And I think it's definitely the foundation. I think it's a struggle, you know, it's academic versus building that relationship or [the] social-emotional aspect of it. I feel like, okay, [do I] close their academic gap or build this relationship [and] work on their regulation and social-emotional aspect? (Focus Group 1)

JM continued this thread by stating that in the throes of an emotionally upsetting interaction with a child, she was thinking:

> "Okay, I got to give my students that what they need. The child goes [to the safe spot], *that's* fine, but I have a group here. That's okay. I've got to give them what *they* need and remember everything I'm supposed to teach them. You know, how? What? Oh, right...Johnny's in a corner." I have literally seen kids cry for an hour straight and we just left them because we had…you know, and there were three teachers in a classroom. But what can we do? (Focus Group 2)

RH and JM both commented on a teacher's inability to do it all even if, as JM noted, there were three teachers in the room. There was an impossibility to the task of building relationships with the most-needy of children in their most-vulnerable moments, especially considering the lessons or rigors of academics that must be accounted for per a school's curriculum or administrative mandates. When the teachers were probed further about the idea of a trade-off between the academics and the building of relationships, the teachers ventured to opine on the definition of a "good teacher." RH brought the revealed tension to the fore of the conversation, asking how a good teacher is defined.

> Making [the children] achieve to a gifted point; they know all their ABCs, their numbers, addition? But they might not know how to regulate themselves or [be aware] of themselves. Parents wonder, "Why aren't my kids learning? Why don't they know this, this, this?" I feel like they're accusing you, "What are you doing in the class if they're not learning this?" (Focus Group 1)

SS added onto RH's commentary: "The problem that I see is that the social-emotional aspect of [school] isn't viewed as an academic skill, as preparing for Kindergarten, when it should be seen…as the most age-appropriate and most important preparation for Kindergarten skill" (Focus Group 1). She continued:

> So, when I'm sitting and I'm doing all those social-emotional development and communicating and building that relationship with my students, that isn't me ignoring the preparing-for-Kindergarten in any way, shape or form. That's just [me] focusing on the aspects that will let us then be able to sit down and work on the colors, work on the more academic, more testable skills [to] figure out how

> [the children] will learn it. Will they learn it through seeing them? Will they learn it through hearing them? Will they learn it through games? (Focus Group 1)

In addition to the degree of the relationship teachers were able to develop and maintain with their students, the teachers expressed an understanding that the relationship, moment to moment, could also depend on the degree of dysregulation. They asserted that a stronger relationship with a child would more greatly aid a dysregulated child, using children's interests to help communicate with them. SS considered how dysregulated a child may be in the following excerpt:

> You need to have...it's possible to address a dysregulated child without having any relationship, without having a strong relationship. But you'll obviously get farther the stronger the relationship is. And it depends on what kind of dysregulation behavior they're presenting. If they're throwing furniture and kicking everyone…that's one thing versus huddled in a corner crying. I've had both. And I've had both with children that I've had really good relationships with and children that I've had where they've been…that are...been dropped off and this is their first day. (Interview 1)

SS made a distinction between the children she knew well and those that she may not have known well, asserting that the latter may have been in an instance in the early days of entry into a classroom. It could be imagined that there could be children as well who have been a part of the classroom for some time, yet still do not have as strong as a relationship as SS might deem necessary to really be able to help them in moments of dysregulation.

Regardless, the teachers expressed a tacit understanding of what children needed. For some teachers, it was simply a matter of years of experience that allowed them to engage a child and begin to quell the upset, the specifics of their engagement having been previously noted (e.g., a cup of water, large motor movement, humor).

Teachers Engendered Warmth with Children by Noticing a Child's Strengths and Limitations and Finding Creative Ways to Bolster the Child

> You know, I want them to…to be the best that they can be and to feel proud of what they can do. (AM, Interview 1)

The participating teachers in this dissertation study sought to help children feel good about themselves and be better prepared to voice their needs and feelings so they would not become overwhelmed. In addition to giving children the respect they deserved, to honor their voice (Interview 1), AM noted that it was imperative to offer tools to elicit that voice. She continued by speaking to a particular child in her classroom who was having a hard time finding, and using, his voice.

AN began by asking:

> How do you help these children?... I read somewhere that a common language is baby sign language. So, I downloaded the baby sign app...on my phone. And so, then for, like, emotions and for simple directions, there's baby signs for this. And so, I was...I was...I was doing something in the classroom, and I would always do the sign for, like, *when you were angry*, and, you know, or *you're feeling sad*, or...or *I'm trying to listen*. I'm trying to...*it's my turn to talk*, and things like that. And there was this one little boy who would...he'd never...he'd never push a point. He'd never…if somebody started to talk he would always just kind of stop talking and things like that. And there was one time he was trying during our sharing time, he was trying to make his point, and somebody talked over him and he turned to them and he's like, "It's my turn to talk!" And he used the sign as well! It suddenly occurred to me that for children that are dual-approach learners, it's not just the word. But when he used the sign for it, the child that was talking quieted down, and it empowered [the child who had had a difficult time using his voice] in a different way, I think. (Focus Group 2)

AM spoke to the power of a child's voice in a previous anecdote, and her role in having empowered a child who had otherwise been overlooked by his classmates.

> I want the child to, first and foremost, have a good feeling for themselves. I would like the child that leaves [this HS program] to have such a positive feeling about themselves when they do get out there in the world, even though they might be knocked down, their feelings are still strong enough that they can maintain that, that they can maintain that sense of who they are. So, I want them to be strong that way. I want them to be able to voice their needs and their feelings so

> that they don't get overlooked. You know, I want them to…to be the best that they can be and to feel proud of what they can do. (Interview 1)

AM concluded by stating, "We all have different strengths. We are all alike and yet we're all different" (Interview 1).

Teachers Recognized Relationships with Other Adults as Both Positive and Potentially Troubling, Sometimes Serving as an Obstacle to Teachers Building Sustaining Relationships and Warmth with Children

> The "classroom only works if everyone is on the same page.
> (AN, Interview 1).

Positively, the participating teachers in this dissertation study acknowledged the importance of their peers, the role each member of their team played in the classroom work of learning, and also the role one another played as colleagues. SB noted that having an effective team was paramount (Interview 1). AN noted that

> as a lead teacher, I feel like I do a lot of, like…I create, I create curriculum, I implement it. I assess it. I teach other teachers how to do it. I feel like I'm more like a master teacher at that level. And then our master teachers are definitely more like directors. And because of that, we have a lot of meetings where we are able to talk about these things. We do age-level meetings. (Interview 1)

She continued:

> And then three, four- to five-year-old classrooms who would kind of work together. And while we would do different studies, you know, we could bounce ideas off of each other. You know, when we have difficult students, we have...we do have a disabilities coordinator, and we have staffings, and we do case consults. We do family-child reviews where we come together with our family support, and we talk about needs children have and how we can support them. And, yeah, we do a lot. We do a lot, so I feel like in some ways I do feel very supported because I have a lot of avenues where I can discuss issues or, you know, "How are we going to meet these needs?" (Interview 1)

Specifically, AN spoke to the teachers who worked within her classroom as a family:

> I think I've been lucky that I have had the same assistant teacher, my whole time where I work, and she's a very strong assistant and that she is super open to learning and, like, we learn from each other. Like, there is, like I mean, at this point, we're family. Like, she's…she's my family. (Interview 1)

Not all the teachers had this same type of working relationship with their school or with their team of teachers. In fact, AN was the only teacher for whom this sentiment held. In Interview 1, SS reported how challenging her relationship was with her assistant teacher and also with other teachers in the school. As for her assistant teacher, SS reported suffering from a lack of support at best. At worst, SS reported that the assistant would occasionally fall asleep during the school day. Most tellingly, SS reported that she would rather let him sleep than deal with him; it was only when she could not continue running the classroom without the assistant that she would wake him (Interview 1). She noted:

> But when the flip side is when that child and that behavior will domino and cause four or five of my other students to have almost the identical behavior at the same time, and it's either me alone or me with one other coworker who likes to fall asleep when there are other teachers around, other students around. Sorry, they will literally sit at the table while the children are playing and fall asleep. Sometimes I'll just be like, "Okay, I need to keep everyone else safe." And it's a lose-lose situation. (Interview 1)

In an effort to alleviate some of the stress of long hours in the school day, AN reported that teachers work in shifts to give one another breaks. This, ideally, allows for the ability to combine rooms with other teachers for support (Interview 2). However, even this measure of institutionally created teacher support may have negative consequences. In these circumstances, for example, SS reported that other teachers will impose their standards or will on her students: "The other teachers may say, 'Stop crying, and stop doing this...you're fine now.'" SS continued to explain that in an instance such as this, she would make a point to refute these support teachers by saying, "No. They're

having a hard morning, it's okay. We have it [under control], this isn't your class, I appreciate what you're trying to do, and yes, I'm alone right now, [but] get out of my room. Just leave, go away'" (Focus Group 1). Other times, SS reported having to

> let [the support teachers] do their thing because I can't watch seven kids having a meltdown right now. Those are the days I go home feeling like a terrible teacher because I've had to leave some of these children who are having a hard morning in the care of the teacher that tells them to "stop crying and be quiet," and "you need to stop." But I only have two arms and two eyes and I can't...if I have three having a meltdown and I'm supposed to be serving breakfast and changing a pull-up and this woman's willing to come in and help, I can't say no for the safety of all the children. Those are the days it's really hard to stay positive for the rest of the day because I feel like I failed at least some of the kids. (Focus Group 1)

In another thread, SS reported that the social relationships between teachers within the school building suffered from a negativity centering on gossip and negative talk towards children, families, and other teachers.

> And I don't gossip, because it has caused...not because I have gossiped, but there has been lots of gossip that has come and caused me lots of problems in the past, and the community environment is very like, "Oh, did you hear about this?" And, "Oh, what's happening about this and this?" And that's very much the social community. And since I won't share, they won't share. (Interview 1)

JM echoed this sentiment, adding that the gossip occurring centered on other teachers, their practice, and personal facets of their lives (Interview 1). JM offered conversation that alluded to a solution, but also a greater problem—that of burying her own emotions.

> My wonderful job, school offered workshops on conflict resolution…So whenever there's an issue, we could always go to the NAEYC [National Association for the Education of Young Children] Bible and look at those standards and say, "Okay, so what is it that we're not doing?" But other than that, it was me just holding it in and want to try to keep a peaceful environment for my students. (Interview 2)

The teachers reported several reasons why these divisions in the social fabric within a school were thought to be occurring. First, both race and cultural identity,

according to SS, were factors that prevented a community within the school's teacher faculty (Interview 1). SS opined:

> I perceive it, and one hundred percent of this could be totally my perception, and I'm very aware of this, but that it's read as "Oh, she's the White girl who thinks she's too good to share what she knows." So, because I just…I don't like the gossip, so I just…I don't go into those environments. And then it's harder to like, "Well, no, I do respect you as a teacher, as a person. Let's talk about that" or "I want to learn from you" or "Why do you do that. I don't quite agree, let's discuss" and/or "Let's talk about," like, "the fun things you do over the weekend, not about how you think this child is terrible." It's like there's a difference on what social conversations I'm willing to have with you or like what social conversations are okay to have in front of the children. And those lines aren't really respected like at some other centers, like the social lines were understood about what could happen on break and what couldn't. And while the gossiping would happen on break, it wouldn't happen in front of the kids. And those lines aren't really understood or respected, at least often here. (Interview 1)

Age presented as a second reason for the lack of community among teachers. RH suggested that, as a younger teacher, she understood "career" teachers to be a part of the problem by exhibiting "problematic behaviors" (Interview 1). JM, too, spoke to the fact that some teachers are in the field of early childhood education "too long," resulting in an unhealthy and negative competition among teachers (Interview 1). JM revealed that she was considering leaving the classroom.

> There's nothing wrong with the school. It's not even my colleague, it's not her. I think it's, I'm at that point where this is my second career choice. So, I'm really thinking about doing something different. So, like in other words, I've been thinking about coming out of the classroom for some time. And at times, it's hard for me because the old school comes back and instead of letting the students explore and be themselves, I feel like stopping them, telling them, "No, no, no, that's wrong. Do it this way." And I realize, too, when I do that, that will shut the student down. And I'm like [snaps fingers], "Dang...I can't believe I said that. I can't believe I did that." (Interview 1)

JM continued to describe the competition she felt in the context of her administration's expectation of academic readiness for Kindergarten entry:

> Maybe I'm comparing myself to other teachers or maybe I am being compared to other teachers and how they get their kids to produce...getting the kids to produce, right away, letters sounds [when] letters is not [the kids'] focal point. The school that I work for is, like I said, it's Head Start, and we are in a...a community that is deprived. (Interview 1)

SS added:

> They've been...[there are some] assistants that have been there for years, for far way too long…way, way, way too long, and are not open to change [in] any way shape or form. And…but [administrators] go through them way too quickly. And so, like, I feel guilty looking for some place else [another job] that just respects what I have. That would just…would be a healthier environment for me. (Interview 1)

SS concluded with an understanding that as troubling as her situation was at the moment, it could always be worse. "I make a point to engage [him] positively, regularly, and ask him for help, and constantly give him opportunities to lead. So…when I see him sleeping, 'Oh, Mr. John,' I'm making up names...'What do you think about this?'" SS attempted to engage the less-than-involved assistant by reaching out to him.

> I don't know whether he's aware that's what I'm doing or why I'm doing it, but I don't want.... I had someone before…[Mr. John's] my second employee assistant and the one before him was worse. Especially in her treatment of the children. So, knowing that I could have a lot worse, I do my best to create a positive environment with what I have. (Interview 1)

A third thread in this conversation on teacher community offered by both RH and AM indicated that high turnover in the teaching faculty made building relationships with children challenging. She noted that the inconsistency and turnover deprive the children of the necessary warmth they deserve, as well a lack of individualized attention. She continued that the "new faces" the children are met with, sometimes hour to hour, are at best people with whom the children are not familiar or comfortable. At worst, these

changes result in a team of "floaters" who may not understand each child's individual needs (Interview 1).

RH noted that the frequent lack of staff, changing of staff during the day, and staff turnover affect her ability to build relationships with her students:

> With my specific class, four teachers left within one year. So, [it] was a lot of…a lot of changes for the kids. They're like, you know, they're wondering like "What happened to Miss blah blah blah...or Miss X, Miss Y." And the new person comes in, they're like, "Oh, who's that? Who's that?" And it's a whole different, you know, they have to...the teacher that comes in or the floater that comes in has to build a relationship with the kids, and kids need to get to know them, too. But that's a whole process which, you know, takes...it doesn't...it's…it's not like a short process. (Interview 1)

RH reported that it was the case in her classroom that a floater became so overwhelmed with the process of trying to navigate the new classroom, the new teacher, the new children, that she walked out.

> One of my floaters literally walked out the classroom. In the middle of the day and went to my admin[istration] and be like, "I'm not...I don't want to be in that classroom anymore. I want you to switch me," because she was so overwhelmed in my classroom. I totally, totally get it. I get it, I, I was overwhelmed myself, so I get that she was overwhelmed, that she wanted to be, you know, she's just like walked out and didn't want to be in my classroom anymore. (Interview 1)

AM also reported the high turnover rate of teachers as being a problem in her school (Interview 1). SB stated it succinctly:

> We can't help the children unless we're working with each other. We have to be able to work with other adults...accept where they are, what their learning is, what their teaching style is, and then make sure it...translates...to...giving the children what they need. (Interview 2)

This sentiment was easily understood by all the participating teachers but remained harder for them to implement.

Teachers Recognized That Their Relationship with the School's Administration May Be a Source of Tension When Considering the Necessary and Sustaining Relationships between Teacher and Child

> Okay, I'm going to go into this meeting, I'm not gonna say anything. I'll just listen to what they're going to say. (AM, Interview 2)

Here again, the teachers in this dissertation study brought up their administration's focus on the academic as problematic in sustaining a relationship, not only with the children but also with their administration. These teachers made the point that their schools wanted the curriculum to focus more on the academic—"holding a pencil," for example—rather than on the socioemotional needs of the children (RH, Focus Group 1). Feeling that their voices were not heard by their administration (RH, Interview 1), that it could be challenging to ask questions of their administration (JM, Interview 1; SS, Interview 1), and that they were excluded from conversations and decision making (SB, SS, RH, Focus Group 1; JM, AN, Focus Group 2) were top among the noted grievances the teachers reported.

Further, teachers noted that being excluded from conversations and decisions was a multifaceted issue. In one instance, the teachers noted that the administration and the delegate agency of their school decided who was allowed to participate in off-campus PD training. "As far as I know, it was like a Head Start or what...it was like, our Grantee, it was their mandate and they only wanted specific people to go to [trainings]" (AN, Focus Group 2). JM added: "In the beginning, I was privy to those conferences. Actually, I had more opportunity to attend them [when] we were at home; it was virtual learning. Now that we're in the center, I don't have it anymore...when we really need it [in the time of COVID]" (Focus Group 2). The teachers noted that teachers who did not personally attend these PD conferences or seminars were often the same teachers who were not

responsive to outside intervention or strategies. PD, then, became something that had to be completed rather than something that could be useful or informative (Focus Group 2).

A second aspect revealed in this conversation regarding being left out was the desire teachers had to be informed about what happened in the Kindergarten classrooms where their students ended up. Teachers reported feeling that the Kindergarten curriculum was unfairly pushed down to them, a familiar grievance that accounted for their administration's push of the academic over the socioemotional. The teachers, however, felt as if there should be a spiraling-up of curriculum from HS to these Kindergarten classrooms.

> I also would like to sit down with Kindergarten teachers, first grade teachers to see what they've seen in their students and how maybe we could really sit down and change our approach. And it could, like AM said, we may have to go back to where we started. Work on the social-emotional field. Teaching, you know, how to get along, how to play together. (JM, Focus Group 2)

They noted, however, that such a scenario would require that they be included in the conversations happening between Kindergarten classrooms and HS administration. Teachers felt left out of the processes for which they were hired to carry out—that is to say, they felt like a cog in a wheel rather than a valuable contributor to the betterment of child outcomes.

One teacher, AM, cited her tenure as a benefit to many of the issues raised by younger, less experienced teachers. "I'm an old horse. I've been doing this a long time" (Interview 1), reported AM. She stated that her tenure as a long-time HS teacher afforded her the power to put what she knew to be good for children ahead of curricular or administrative demands and, sometimes, tacit expectations. As well, AM remarked that

her tenure afforded her the confidence to speak her mind, even when she knew it would not be received well, popular in estimation, or appreciated.

> I'm kind of fortunate in my position because I am the assistant director and I am an infant toddler specialist. So, every time I have sat in meetings and there was talk of this, my hand always goes straight up and I'm always to the point where I'm sure they're like, "Oh, no, not her again. We don't want to hear from her again." You know? So, I mean, there's times I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to go into this meeting, I'm not gonna say anything. I'll just listen to what they're going to say." (AM, Interview 2)

AM further stated:

> However, I am not the educational coach from Head Start, but I have over the course of the years that we've been with Head Start I have talked to them about... about the curriculum, about Creative Curriculum, about how I see Creative Curriculum going too academic as opposed to being social-emotional, which was its first intention when it first came out. And I think part of the problem is I've been around so long, I have seen the change. I've lived the change. I started Creative Curriculum when it first came out, when it was all about getting your centers set up so that the children can have control over...so that they're their centers, really. They're not what I am putting out, they're their centers. So, the writing center in my room would look different than the writing center in AN's room or JM's room. So, it is...it's geared towards the children in that classroom and it's meeting what those children want. So, I have...I have spoken out about that, and I will always, because of all of the training that I went through when [Creative Curriculum] first came out on the importance of the social-emotional. (AM, Focus Group 2)

AM continued to comment on the way that administrators could promote teachers in the course of their work. She reported that it was not uncommon to hear administrators speaking to their school communities as serving X number of children and families. AM accepted this as an accurate reflection of the function of HS, but she pushed here to suggest that teachers are also a part of this fabric of community. "When administrators include teachers in the count of a school building, they are sending a signal of teacher importance to an audience. To say, 'Our school serves 35 teachers and 250 children [and

their families],'" for example, spoke to HS being about the holy trinity in schooling: children, families, *and* teachers (Focus Group 2). According to AM:

> Since the pandemic there has been this...there's been more of a push of the employees, and [my director] now…[states] that [my] center employs eighty-five people and we serve so many families. Just right there, by turning your statement around that way, you're giving the importance of your employees and your teachers the respect that they need. (Focus Group 2)

AM noted, however, how rare this type of communication and elevation of teachers actually was (Focus Group 2).

Yet, RH acknowledged that sometimes the administration's ability to support teachers was beyond their control:

> So, I'm just like I was so stressed that I'm like, "I need to...I need this license basically to work here. If I don't get this, I can't work, technically, or anywhere else, like, that requires a license. I'm just like stressing out, trying to get it done, and...just yeah, like and I had a little conflict with the admin[istration] trying to get that support. But, then it's not also…it's like at this time, I kind of resented the situation—my co-teachers leaving, the other teacher assistant leaving, admin is like, you know, they're not really giving me support, but like they're also understaffed. What can they do? (Interview 1)

Teachers Acknowledged That Families Can Be a Source of Both Positive and Challenging Instances and Interactions

> We're focused on…talking of building community, talking about our families. (AN, Focus Group 2)

Positively, the teachers acknowledged the importance of HS being centered on children and their families. A rich cultural uptake of this model was demonstrated in how the teachers in this dissertation study openly communicated with parents about the classroom and individual children's needs (Focus Group 2). Conversely, the teachers also noted that there was a reality to the number of families they could reach in a school year. SB reported that this discrepancy was a barrier in her work with the children in her

classroom; she felt less than fully informed about understanding and helping her students in moments of emotional dysregulation (Focus Group 1). SB continued to say that this sort of missing information has caused her fatigue: “That’s really draining. That burned me out a long time ago” (Focus Group 1).

Additionally, school funding and resources played a part in determining, according to the teachers, exactly how well they were able to meet the needs of their families (Focus Group 2). The teachers agreed that the background of some of their students may have negative implications in the context of the HS program, meaning that the two are not on the same page. Teachers were not sure if the families they served were able or willing to follow teacher suggestions, advice, or instruction. Specifically, RH spoke to how it could be the case that children arrived at school already upset or dysregulated because of a parent-child interaction that may have been less than optimal. “You know your students, you’re going to know when they’re already acting...or even when they come in the morning, maybe mom or dad yelled at them or maybe mom and dad said no to a toy or eating a doughnut.” These types of unseen and perceived parent-child interactions factor into how a teacher may approach the learning of the school day. RH continued, “Having that conversation [with them], knowing they came in with a bad mood, they’re not going to want to sit down and do a journal and write ‘What’s the weather today,’ or whatever we talked about in circle time… recycling.” RH continued to say that teachers needed to communicate with families and especially so, if able, in moments of distress for either child or parent (Focus Group 1).

Finding 2: Although Teachers Attempted to Engender Warmth in Their Classrooms, Stress Could Overwhelm These Processes

Teachers Experienced Personal Stress

> It's one thing too many, and I'm praying that we have no kids [in the classroom]. (SS, Interview 2)

The participating teachers in this dissertation study easily recognized the various factors of stress that impinged on their daily lives. Some teachers reported physiological symptoms of stress. JM reported both high blood pressure and weight loss as a result of personal stress (Interview 1). SS reported migraine headaches as well as psychological symptoms of stress: clinical depression and social and general anxiety (Interview 1). SS also reported that in the most stressful moments in her life, she loses the ability to speak—the words needed to express herself physically completely escape her (Interview 1).

Additionally, other teachers spoke to financial stress. AN reported that the current COVID-19 pandemic has created a stressful atmosphere. She recalled:

> Because…I don't know, my job is very…they did lay people off over the summer, but it wasn't at [my] school. I think that they may have laid people off if people didn't go on the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security; S. 3548, 2019) Act. I think that really saved people's jobs. (Focus Group 2)

SS reported that a family member had been hospitalized since early September, although not because of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Some days," she noted, "going to work has been kind of a relief because I couldn't focus on…my mother, and other days, I'm on-call. My phone is with me [in the classroom]. I have to be mindful of being with the kids" (Interview 2).

RH spoke to how teachers themselves were raised, and the context in which they were raised, as factors that affected how one taught and the means by which a teacher may or may not be able to engage warmly with the children. This, to RH, was understood to be a stressful personal dialogue in relation to her teaching potential:

> I think the way teachers grew up, their childhood also affects how you teach, what your philosophy is in your head. I grew up in a very strict environment where it's like you're crying, and it's like, "Okay, stop crying, let's keep moving." So, I have to be intentional with my own self. And that's why I feel the most rewarded with the social-emotional part [of the early childhood school day or curriculum] because I was never taught those skills of how to deal, how to express [my emotions]. We all kind of brush it under the rug; we don't talk about…express how we feel. (Focus Group 1)

RH continued to say that she was learning from her students and the children offered her an opportunity to reevaluate her own thinking. She sympathized with other adults who have not yet made a realization of the power of emotion, what it could do to free one up to empathize with students. She was trying to work on herself in this process of working with the children and other adults in her school orbit.

> That's, like, one of the biggest challenges in, almost like a challenge and blessing in disguise, basically, that I face every day...always trying to correct, reverse the negative way I was taught in my own head. But it's a work in progress. Teachers aren't perfect, they're also human. They have their own paths, they have their own struggles and challenges. And they're battling that *and* going into the classroom trying to help others, you know? (Focus Group 1)

Teachers Experienced Professional Stress

> And there is tension on us or there is stressors placed on the teachers. (AM, Focus Group 2)

The teachers noted that they stay in the profession because of the children, but the rewards of working with children and families in HS classrooms could result in a heavy, pressure-filled experience. The interviews revealed two sides to this pressure: that which

stems from dealing with the children and that which stems from other factors of the early childhood landscape.

The Children

Emotional suppression.

> I think those stressors…I feel, like, really impact the way...your mood... the way you think...certain days, it's just how you…how you respond to children. (RH, Interview 1)

With regard to the children, the teachers noted that they felt a deep, personal, and abiding responsibility to their students. "I have to be the best for him, the best for all the kids," reported SB. "Children know love. They're not going to remember PreK, but they will remember the love" (Interview 2). Yet this understanding of the necessity of care and "love," as SB noted, was also tense for teachers as there was a tacit expectation of super-human ability to care while suppressing one's own emotions, worries, concerns, or stress.

SS spoke to this theme of emotional suppression by explaining what she has seen occur between children and parents, at drop-off, for example, to which teachers are witness and from which they have to make decisions about the children and their day. "I have fought with parents who have sent their kids in [to school] and, like, yelled at them to, 'Stop crying...because you got in trouble at home.'" SS continued to note that when the referenced parent was pushed by the child to understand the actions that caused the disruption in the first place, the parent responded, "Well, you need to stop doing that" (Focus Group 1). SS also noted that although she did not ask her students to behave in a way that suppressed their emotions for the sake of ease, expediency, or moving beyond the situation, their parents did. She noted that these differences in approach to emotion,

so dissimilar between home and school, were problematic for both children and teachers (Focus Group 1).

RH added to SS's thoughts when describing teaching as "unnatural." As she understood teaching, teachers were asked, perhaps like the children, to

> step into the classroom, you need to pretend, you need to forget about it. I feel like that's very unnatural...you want to cry, you feel upset, but when you go into class, you have to keep the calm, you have to pull it together. You can't fall apart because you're basically running the ship. If you fall apart, the kids are going to be confused, so you have to pull it together…let's start this lesson. (Focus Group 1)

She continued:

> Like, you know, you're just so frustrated, but it's not really about the kids. I think those stressors…I feel, like, really impacts the way...your mood...the way you think...certain days, it's just how you…how you respond to children. Certain days, you're just like, "I just cannot sit with you today. I'm going to go over there to the other side [of the room]." That's just what...has to happen. You know, I'm not gonna sit here and say teachers are so patient and so, you know, you have a great day every single day. Like how, you know, movies portray preschool teachers like that. Like it's not like that every single moment, and I think that was a misconception I had, like coming in...I thought that's how it has to be. And that you're supposed to be nice all the time. But then I kind of realized the hard way that [the children] are going to like you if they feel safe and everybody's safe. Yes, sometimes they might not be happy with, like, they ask you and they ask you certain things, and, you know, sometimes you just have to say "no" or you just have to redirect them to something else. And yeah, they're gonna be upset, but that's just...you just have to be okay with that. For me, the bigger picture is, you know, just because, quote-unquote nice, you know, you're not giving them everything that they want, doesn't mean you're a bad person or that you're a bad teacher for not giving them everything that they want at the time. The bigger picture is that consistency and having that boundary with kids know, like, "Okay, she's," you know, [the children understand] "this is what [is] going to happen, and this is the expectation." (Interview 1)

Kindergarten readiness.

> There's just such an incredible amount of pressure on Kindergarten prep, I think in every single neighborhood in Chicago. (SB, Focus Group 1)

Kindergarten preparation and readiness were sources of apparent tension for the teachers in this dissertation study. SS reported that there was tremendous pressure to have children ready for Kindergarten entry.

> Considering the fact that my school is in one of what's considered one of the worst neighborhoods in Chicago, I often feel pressured to be getting them the farthest ahead. And there are sometimes, not all the time, but there sometimes [are] teachers, master teachers, that get fired. There's a high turnover. I have been [at my school] the longest at about two and a half years. (Focus Group 1)

SS continued to note that

> when you compare the kids when they get to Kindergarten, the kids from other classrooms are going to look so much more academically proficient than my kids, but I believe, I don't know, but I believe that my kids will be able to sit longer; my kids will be able, when they get into a disagreement, will be able to articulate their thoughts better. My kids, when they get to second grade, will be ready to learn the letters and read the words. Because I've laid a stronger foundation, my kids will have it while the kids in the other room might, some of them, they're not...ready. (Focus Group 1)

Here, SS spoke to the visual and curricular differences between her classroom and those of other teachers in her school. She felt a tension, previously noted in this chapter, between the aesthetics necessary to *claim* that learning was happening in a classroom space and the focus on social and emotional learning which, according to SS, *was* the actual basis for learning in a classroom space. SS provided an example:

> One [teacher] turned her classroom into the Paleolithic [Era], and there were dinosaurs, and it look[ed] so gorgeous. There's another one that her kids do all of these really fancy science [activities], and both of these classrooms, they look so nice and fancy and it is so teacher-led. The kids have to do it *this* way, it's very rote learning. And they leave there knowing a lot of letters and how [to] write their name beautifully, but I don't quite know from my experience whether they have this social-emotional education. They definitely don't really have the comfort with the teachers that my kids have with me. (Focus Group 1)

SS continued: "But seeing all those fancy and pretty things [of the other classrooms] and doing all that" made SS worry that "I'm doing the wrong thing by sitting and just

[reading] that book. ‘We’re gonna sit down. Okay, you’re turning the pages. Well, you tell me the story, and tell me about your dream, and oh, you want to build?! Okay!’” (Focus Group 1).

Following SS’s lead, SB reported that Kindergarten prep is a trigger for her. “There’s an incredible amount of pressure on Kindergarten prep, I think in every single neighborhood in Chicago. I do have a high low-income population and I’m in Humboldt Park, but there’s still, blocks away, there’s much higher-income folks” (Focus Group 1). This pressure comes with high expectations.

AN spoke to the stress that she endured when considering the responsibility of preparing her HS students for Kindergarten readiness. She explained a series of events that speak to this tension.

> One thing I was thinking about, just reflecting on our last interview, and I think it sort of speaks to this question, too...you kinda were ending on it. About how as the year goes on the kids’ outcomes, like, lower, but the teachers…I forget what the exact thing was. And it just it made me think of a lot of things of like, you know, I think as we get to know our kids more, and we’re around them so much, and you’re just like, “You know how to use the bathroom to wash your hands,” like, “You did it yesterday, you did it two months ago. Why am I fussing about it with you in March?” And you’re just like, “I expect more of you.” (AN, Interview 2)

AN continued:

> So, I think there’s just been a very big push for like school readiness and making sure kids are ahead. This past year especially, I had pretty much all my kids who went to kindergarten, their parents wanted them tested for being gifted…or for the magnet schools, because here you have to take a test and you have to test eighteen months ahead of kindergarten. (AN, Interview 1)

When asked to clarify, AN confirmed my suspicion that she was preparing her students for the middle of first grade—preparing a nearly-5-year-old or a 5-year-old to be at the same stage of learning as a 6.5-year-old first grader.

This type of mandated teaching has two sides, according to AN. On one hand, there were the school's and parents' demands for academic learning for Kindergarten testing, placement, and entry; on the other hand, a level of expectation was revealed to be incommensurate with the child's typical development—they are still "babies," according to AN (Focus Group 2).

> And it's just this weird thing…we get to know the kids. I just…I feel like I do have to remind myself a lot that they are, like, babies, really in reality, as you see how…how much they can do, you know? And, you have all these expectations of them and forgetting that, like they're not going to write their name perfectly every time. And it can be so frustrating because you're like, "I know you can do this." (AN, Focus Group 2)

Additionally, AM voiced concern over how teachers at different stages of their own career may be able to respond to these described demands; that other, younger teachers may think, "'I can't just sit here and talk with these kids, and laugh with these kids, and play with these kids. I'm supposed to be doing beginning letter sounds'" (Interview 1).

Here again, the teachers in this dissertation study pointed to the fact that they were not involved in any conversation with Kindergarten teachers to talk, plan, or strategize in how best to prepare HS students for Kindergarten entry (Focus Group 2). Most saliently, AM pleaded with the school administration from the safety of the focus group, seeking reassurance and support from the other teachers who partook in this focus group: "Let us do what we know [how] to do!" (Interview 1). JM continued on AN's thoughts:

> As [AN] was saying…the other focus is academics, academics, academics. Which should be an inappropriate term to use in...in preschool because it is social-emotional learning here. So, teaching them how to get along with each other, teaching them how to express themselves, language skills, as well. But on that pyramid, the top thing is, "Can your child express how they're feeling, regulate

> their emotions? Do they trust us?" And a lot of centers don't understand that. And because of that, I would go to the next year or the next school thinking, "Okay, I've got to focus on if they know their letters, if they can understand letter-sound recognition, are they able to count, recognize it's, you know, *that*. Which definitely leaves very much...never left me much room, to help the child get acclimated. Help the child express themselves, learn how to play. That took a backseat seat. (Focus Group 2)

JM continued:

> You can still hear the tinge [in the voices of other teachers], "Well, I have four-year-olds. We've got to get them ready for Kindergarten. We have to get them writing. We have to get them into shapes, colors and writing their name and reading a book, *War and Peace*." You know, we need to stop and reflect, and it's a problem as well, because if a child is not where we think they should be in certain goals and domains, we label them...already. We label them as flawed... And I'll say, "Okay, Okay." You know, consensus rules that this child may have some red flags. But now, I'm looking at the whole child, which once you take that time to do it, once you really stop and reflect, you see some of the strengths that that child has. That...if there's a problem...can compensate for what the child doesn't have. You know, so it is just...taking the time to really brainstorm and see, like AM said, "Is what we do...Is what we're doing right? Is it appropriate?" (Focus Group 2)

The teachers reported a lack of flexibility in the need to focus on Kindergarten readiness and academics at such a young age. AN (Focus Group 2) and SS (Focus Group 1) spoke to the competition among teachers and HS programs to enroll their Kindergarten applicants in the best Chicago city schools, those which help to advance the academic and life-long trajectory of the child.

Personal issues the children carry into school.

> I mean, it happens. I know in my head, like, 'Okay, these things happen.' But it's just like another reality. (RH, Interview 1)

Teachers spoke to the stresses that children wear, so to speak, as they work through their school day. The teachers noted trauma, homelessness, living without health insurance, and unstable parental relationships as factors that might weigh on the children in their care and, therefore, weigh on them as teachers. RH noted:

> Like, you know, it seems that other kids are facing maybe witnessing abuse or they're coming from a really difficult family background where they're missing a parent and things like that. And I, you know, those are the reasons why they might be having trouble within the classroom, behavior-wise or social-emotional-wise, which makes a lot of sense. So that...that was kind of very shocking to me...I mean, it happens. I know in my head, like, "Okay, these things happen." But it's just like another reality. And it's just like putting the puzzle pieces together. You kind of wonder, like, "Okay, why is this student acting like this?" And then you kind of get the background story of what's going on and you're like, "Okay, that's why." And then you have to go from there to figure out, "Okay, how can I help this student?" (Interview 1)

Other Issues That Resulted in Teacher Stress

Matters of the school day.

> It's like when it was like [a] stressful day, it would be all over my face and I should have done better at, like, kind of masking that, but I wasn't able to. (RH, Interview 1)

AN previously noted that she did receive support from her school through collaboration, frequent and relevant meetings, consistent and strong assistant teachers, a plethora of resources, and less reliance on temporary teachers. The other teachers in this dissertation study, however, reported a much different situation.

Teachers reported that they found the courage to speak up only in areas where they suspected they would receive support. For example, teachers felt free to voice their concerns among peers, and especially when voicing children's strengths, their needs, and appropriate goals for the children. They were less inclined to speak out in areas where they would not find support—teacher needs, for example (Focus Group 2). More frequently, however, teachers reported that the school itself, how it was managed and organized, caused stress in their day.

Previously, it was noted that AM spoke to how a young, less experienced teacher may not have the gumption, or moxie, to stand up to an administration when asked to

prioritize academic learning over emotional learning. Here, specifically, AM referred to the task of lesson planning, standards and demands as parts of a day that may prove problematic for teachers as they strive to form and sustain relationships between themselves and their students. Lesson planning, she noted, was mandated by the school, yet "learning through experience" was not included in that planning (Interview 1).

RH corroborated AM's thinking on early-career teacher stress and uncertainty, adding:

> From my experience, [my] first year coming in, I know people tell me, "You need to have a schedule and you need to stick with it," and all that stuff. You know, I have it in my head, but when it's time to actually, like, I guess to set it and then set those boundaries, it was really hard for me because I didn't know what the boundaries were, but I still wanted the kids to like me. (Interview 1)

AM continued to note that early-career teachers experienced more pressure to deliver curriculum, to follow the rules, while trying to ascertain what rules were in place and how to carry out the day, week, year; that their inexperience and youth implied a tacit belief that what the school wanted, the school must get (Interview 1).

Last, teachers in Focus Group 2 spoke to the role that classroom observations played in the stress they experienced. Oftentimes, AM, AN, and JM noted that these observations occurred without notice. Further, these observations necessitated the addition of several adults in the room (e.g., members of the school administration, delegate agency[1]), which served to overstimulate the children in their care. In instances when observations were carried out with prior notice, the teachers reported that they would not attempt a novel lesson. Rather, RH reported in these instances that she would

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[1] Head Start programs are funded, in large part, by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This funding is earmarked for a Grantee, a public or private nonprofit, or for-profit, agency that has been designated a HS agency. Each Grantee then delegates responsibility for operating a HS program to the Delegate Agency (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.-a).

rerun a lesson with which she was comfortable; one that the children knew, understood, and with which they were familiar, proficient, and confident with its activities (Focus Group 1).

> And with the observation also, I think with that score, I think it's kind of like unwritten. But you kind of have to take into consideration that observation is just like once a quarter or like once every couple months. And also when the observations are...they're coming, teachers know. So, teachers are like, "We're gonna be on the best," you know, "best classroom positive with my best behavior," you know, and then you are basically running that day with a practice routine. It's not…you're not whipping something new out that day because the scores are coming. If I'm being a hundred precent honest here like, you know, the kids' assessment or CLASS assessment, they're coming…they're coming to observe you. You kind of do the practice routines, you kind of do what…what you've already done before, so [the children] are not, like, confused, "What are we doing now?" and then that...that brings up more problematic behaviors or like, you know, they're like confused or they're out of routines or they're like, "What's going on?" Like, "This is different." And, you know, of course, you know when the kids' observation scores come, you want the best score, you want the high score, you want them to rate you at the best. So, I think that...with that score, it's kind of unwritten, but you kind of have to consider...[take] into consideration teachers are trying to put up their best, you know, best self, you know, best classroom-self because that…that one day of observation is coming. (RH, Focus Group 1)

Here, for the first time, RH spoke to her work in the classroom as that which demanded masking for the sake of teacher assessment. Further, RH continued to report that this self-masking also related to teacher relationships with parents. In an effort to keep parents from realizing how stressed she was, RH reported that her true self could not, and should not, be made visible. It was better to wear a mask, perhaps, to conceal the uncertainty, stress, and fatigue plainly visible on her face.

> It's like when it was like [a] stressful day, it would be all over my face and I should have done better at, like, kind of masking that, but I wasn't able to. And, you know, parents can see my face, and I looked stressed out and I [look] drained, and they're probably thinking, like, "Ugh, does she not like [her] job?" (Interview 1)

She continued:

> I guess dealing with that stress, speaking solely from my experience, dealing with the stress, I feel like now I reflect back and I think I didn't...handle it very...I didn't handle it very well because sometimes I will have a very stressed face… and families will come in and see that, like see on my expression that I'm stressed, but it's not because I don't love the job...or I don't love the kids or I don't want to see them...it's just like there's just so many changes that need to be, you know, that are happening that I need to quickly be flexible and adapt. I'm just like, "Oh my god." (Interview 1)

Along this line of thought, there was mention of teachers wearing masks, which created a disconnect between co-teachers—neither in sync with the other—and, as a result, the students perhaps were thrown off-kilter. JM reported:

> [When] it came to my co-teachers, who were typically old school, they would wear the mask. Okay, so we had like two hundred, I don't know, how many days of school, where [the lead teacher is] being herself [no mask], but when the observers come in, she knows she...she switches. So, she would wear the mask, and that bothers me. And I'm trying to tell her, you know, "Maybe we should try to implement this all through the year, so we won't confuse the kids." So...and I think the observers see it. They will see a disconnect with me and her because you can't....Even though she's wearing a mask, they could tell that she's wearing a mask, and that's not real and we're not in sync. (Focus Group 2)

JM echoed RH's sentiment in a follow-up interview:

> It's like when you think about the students' performance decreasing, even though there's warmth in the classroom [CSRP results discussed with the teachers], apparently there's something that that student is missing. And maybe that warmth that they see, I guess when the...the evaluators come in and they see it, we might be just putting on the mask. Because we're not, like I, aren't dealing with the real issues involved. One thing I think that warmth comes with being honest and being real. Because in a…in a…in a community, in an environment, is the relationship. In a relationship, there are gonna be problems. There're going to be fights. There's going to be friction. And just yesterday, I told my kids that, you know, "We're working together and we're gonna...we're gonna disagree." The kids, we're going to disagree, but there's a way we have to learn how to disagree. (Interview 2)

Institutional financial pressures.

We will not have funding. (AN, Focus Group 2)

The teachers in this dissertation study reported feeling pressure from their administration with regard to the institution's financial obligations and stressors. The teachers were acutely aware, or were made aware, of the financial stressors under which their institution operated.

In addition to the previously mentioned funding pressures AN noted with regard to curriculum during a period of HS review (Focus Group 2), AN additionally reported that the HS program director at her school was being told by her supervisor that the school was not permitted to drop children from their rolls during the COVID pandemic upheaval of virtual learning. Despite absences and a long wait-list for these seats, the school would not allow children to be removed from the rolls because they feared a loss of funding (Focus Group 2).

AM continued to report that parents at her school were told that should they not report to online (e.g., Zoom) classes for 3 weeks, they would be placed on a wait-list, allowing other families to take their place. AM interpreted this as a threat because it was well understood in her program that these working families did not want, nor could they afford, to lose their child's HS seat (Focus Group 2).

The CARES Act, legislation instituted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, was credited previously in this chapter with saving HS jobs, according to AN (Focus Group 2). The implication was that, without this additional federal funding, HS programs would not have been able to continue to open their doors to both children and teachers.

Lack/quality of training.

> I don't want to waste my time doing this. It's not helpful.
> (AN, Interview 2)

In addition to the limited availability and selectivity of in-person training previously mentioned in this chapter, AN continued to report that "sometimes it feels like [the in-person] training [that was received was] a waste of time" (Interview 2). She continued, speaking to the disconnect between classroom teachers and those who were guiding the PD: "When I'm in these trainings, I'm in these trainings with other people who haven't worked with kids in a long time [or] been in the classroom, so I'm like, 'Yeah,…some of this stuff,' I'm like, 'This is stupid'" (Interview 2).

JM reported that despite having received training, obstacles remained in implementation:

> We have the Conscious Discipline model, okay. I've attended a couple of trainings about it...of what it is and what it's supposed to do, but not how to implement it yet, unfortunately. I have the book. I have to read the book. There are groups that meet, and I haven't [met] because of COVID. It's really hard for me to get into those meetings as well. (Focus Group 2)

Alternatively, AN was specific in her reporting that work done with the Erikson Institute in Chicago—a group that traveled to schools to train teachers on how to be reflective in their practice, among other things—was particularly helpful to her (Interview 2). AN discussed how Erikson emailed teachers after their programming to remind them of the work they accomplished, and the various goals and achieved outcomes of completed programs. AN reported this to be different from the previously described training programs that were conducted second-hand, in-house after administrators or certain teachers attended particular off-site programs. Erikson, she reported, followed up with

her and the other teachers who participated in these PD opportunities to continue to prompt them to think deeply about that which was discussed.

Despite the multiple means by which teachers reported being continuously trained, the training, it seemed to them, was to bolster scores on standardized measures of teacher outcomes. Rather than focusing the training in an effort to better the well-being and daily success of students, the teachers noted that they believed the training was instituted instead to remain eligible for funding. For example, the CLASS (La Paro et al., 2004; Pianta et al., 2008) is seen as the gold standard of teacher performance, and it was with regard to this measure that AN noted a pressure to receive the highest possible score in each domain of observation, a 7. AN reported that measures of teacher assessment, like the CLASS, are relied on for administrative and/or delegate agency funding decisions.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The teachers in this dissertation study reported both the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and some of the surprisingly positive effects they have experienced with regard to their teaching. A fear of getting sick, the extended length of the workday, and teachers not being given “slack” were among the first experiences shared individually by AN (Interview 2). Collectively, the teachers in this dissertation study spoke together to include additional areas of concern: a decrease in parent-teacher communication, fewer breaks for both the children and teachers, the virtual format of school negatively affecting teachers and children (e.g., class structure for teachers, decreased socialization for the children), teacher layoffs, and children’s attendance issues.

Virtual learning.

It was a hot mess. (RH, Focus Group 2)

Perhaps most glaringly, the virtual learning in which teachers and children have been forced to engage has been problematic. At best, RH reported that virtual teaching is "a bit odd and it's definitely a lot more work and in different [ways] than in-person teaching." More troubling, RH noted that the technical challenges she faced were equally as egregious as the spatial and temporal challenges of virtual learning the children faced. RH described the beginning of the move to virtual learning as "a hot mess." There were "no guidelines, it [was] uncharted territory, so no one knew." No one was able to tell her, "This is what you should be doing, so do this, this, this, this. So, we [were] all just winging it. Of course, there were many questions, but 'what are we supposed to do?'" RH reported that "for a couple of weeks, we weren't even doing anything video-chat-wise" because the thought at the time was that the effects of the pandemic would be short-lived. RH reported that the faculty were "waiting for [the pandemic] to die down" in "two or three weeks. It didn't happen, so at one point [the teachers] were just sitting and doing nothing. Now,...there's a bit more guidelines" (Focus Group 2).

More troublingly, SS reported that virtual learning caused the children to miss out on the consistency that teachers were able to offer in a typical classroom and in a typical school year (Interview 2). RH echoed this sentiment, noting that spatial and temporal challenges have added to the disconnect between teachers and families (Interview 2). "The learning difference [in] distance learning, what [the children] are expected to do, makes no sense for three-year-olds" (SS, Interview 2).

For those children who attended school virtually, the teachers noted that the experience of working and playing with other children was, detrimentally, absent. For those attending in-person schooling, it happened that there were so few children that teacher time was overabundant, setting up a conundrum for SB; she noted the importance of children experiencing alone time, too (Interview 1). "I don't know. So [virtual learning] helped...We...[the children in school] get a lot more one-on-one time from me. And then hindered—they don't get as much interaction with other children" (Interview 1). In either paradigm, the teachers reported that the children understood their classmates to be missing yet could not fully comprehend the distinction.

SS continued to note that there was confusion for children around the topic of the pandemic. For example, there existed different messaging between home and school on when or how to wear a mask. SS likened this disconnect to healthy eating habits or smoking. The children received messages about these topics at school that may have varied greatly from the example they were experiencing in their homes (SS, Interview 2).

Not only did the children suffer from an uncertainty, but so, too, did the parents. SS reported that parents were uncertain of the expectations that virtual learning required. She continued to say that

> parents are expected to have children ready to go, sitting them in front of a screen, expecting crazy months of learning...a lot of [the parents] don't understand what's going on, and it's not explained to them. Families aren't being given [the] learning stories to help educate the kids on what's appropriate [with regard to COVID]. (Interview 2)

Further, SS independently corroborated AN's thinking that there was little or poor communication with families, and this was partially to blame for the confusion families felt. This became particularly relevant, given the many ways that teachers had become

dependent on parents to make virtual learning a success (Interview 2). Teachers were dependent on parents to have materials ready and reported on children's progress for school purposes (reporting to administration/delegate agencies, taking photos), for example. JM reported:

> If the parent chooses to do virtual, for record keeping, they're gonna have to write down everything the child does: details, be objective, send photos. And, this has to be done on a regular basis. I don't know if it should be daily or weekly, but it's going to have to be done on a regular basis. (Interview 1)

RH noted that everyone was struggling: teachers, parents, children. Specifically, teaching remotely has been challenging with regard to parents as they seemed singularly focused on self, "my problems, my problems, my problems," instead of on the collective group, the classroom, or even their own children. Parents were focused on "me, me, me" (Interview 2).

Kindergarten readiness.

> There's definitely…this push for us to, like, get them ready *now*, because who knows what could happen in the winter. We might not be at school and we don't want them to be behind. (AN, Focus Group 2)

According to AN:

> Like this in-between…wanting the kids, I really want the kids to be kids, but also the parents want their kids to be ready for Kindergarten. I think where there's less flexibility is...and I think it's even worse…because of the pandemic, that we are working so hard to get our kids ready for Kindergarten. The kids who will be leaving us at the end of the year and they didn't get...they were gone, they've been gone since March. And we're in Bronzeville, in Chicago, Illinois. So, my kids are fighting for small spaces, small, like not a lot of seats at schools in the south side where, you know, historically the Chicago Public School [system] has underfunded those schools. And my kids' parents...my parents that I work with want the best for their children. So, it's hard 'cuz I understand that. I understand that that's what they want. And so, trying to balance that is hard and it's definitely hard in a pandemic. (AN, Focus Group 2)

AN reported that COVID was exacerbating the stress she felt about getting the children ready for Kindergarten testing and entry because the teachers were working more (and differently) and the children were in school less (Interview 2). AN reported that her students were "already behind" in Chicago Public Schools that were "de-funded or underfunded," and additionally because

> parents work a lot, don't have money to take [their children] places, and they live in crappy apartments and don't get outside, and they have less resources...less nutritional food, poor health care. We're afraid for the kids not getting what they deserve, and [we want] them to be overprepared. It's a balance, and it's hard to find that balance when you're scared. (Interview 2)

AN reported that there was "no slack or understanding of what it means to be in a classroom for nine hours a day with a mask on"—never mind that, as AN reported, she has dealt with the "stress of...I could get sick every time [I] come to work."

Most ironic, JM spoke specifically to the previously noted all-important curriculum, Conscience Discipline. She noted that parts of this curriculum could no longer be implemented in a time when it was, perhaps, most needed. JM mentioned that certain dolls, toys which were designed to be used for social and emotional learning and were especially needed now in the time of COVID-19, could not be used.

> And some things we had to put away, like those little tools, little dolls, we were given the dolls. We have to put those away because of the germs that they could spread if the kids touched them. So, I guess it's kind of...certain aspects of it is kind of [inaudible], you know, due to COVID. (Focus Group 2)

These dolls and other soft materials or items intended for social and emotional learning have been put away as they are unable to be properly cleaned and sanitized between the times children use them (Focus Group 2).

Further, SS reported that COVID-19 has taken away the freedom with which children can enter the classroom in their own time and way—a small act, the teachers

reported, that was crucially important for the children and their day (Focus Group 1). There was a mandate now to wash hands as soon as a child entered the classroom, which could be difficult if a child has had a tough drop-off period or separation from their parent. They may want to retreat to a quiet corner or quiet cube, but instead they must immediately wash their hands. This potentially sets the beginning of the day up as tense and oppositional.

Personal stressors. SB commented on the accumulation of little grievances that added up to frustration and unhappiness. She noted being “annoyed [at the] millions of little things,” as she described them, which served to take away from the joy, warmth, excitement, and happiness she described as a large reason why she stayed in the field of early childhood education (Interview 2).

The teachers expressed a deep sense of grief when discussing the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the children, the time lost together, and the children’s lost opportunities. This grief extended to their own experiences regarding the pandemic as well. SB continued to cite the loss of a normal, typical schedule as one of these million little annoyances—specifically the challenges she incurred with something already perhaps anxiety-provoking for children and teachers, a fire drill, for example (Interview 2). It can be imagined if a fire drill were a challenge before the pandemic, this activity has become more difficult since the pandemic began. SB noted the necessity to place shoe covers over the children’s shoes, not to mention contending with masked faces in the classroom (Interview 2).

To SB, masks were another one of the annoyances that ultimately became a major hurdle in the school day. She described the frustration with masks at mealtimes, taking

them on and off the children's faces. Further, she pointed to the fact that oftentimes, masks would slip down from covering the nose and mouth of a child. She asked, "Who puts them up?" (Interview 2), wondering if this close exchange of contact would be harmful to either the child or her.

Personal and professional resilience. Positively, SB concluded that, despite the understood and experienced challenges, she was "learning how to work differently" (Focus Group 1).

Remarkably, the teachers in this dissertation study also noted some positive effects revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic. AM, AN, JM, and SB all noted that teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic required greater focus on the social and emotional learning which they, as early childhood educators, have made clear they value over the academic rigor imposed by their schools. AM noted that this pandemic has created an environment where children's feelings were seen as paramount, given the increasingly uncertain conditions in which they lived and operated (Interview 1).

Although not all teachers agreed, AN added that she has felt an increase in the potential with which she was able to reach and teach the families of the children with whom she so closely worked. There was a sense of gratitude for the ability to speak with, explain, and reassure the parents of the many ways that the teachers of her classroom were working with the children to facilitate their day and their learning (Interview 1). In Interview 2, AN continued to note that, to her, a smaller class size had been well received and positive. Fridays had become days where her center would close and teachers carved out much needed time to meet and plan, discuss children and their progress, and meet with families or participate in training sessions.

Some teachers reported that the benefits they noted with regard to their classroom and some facets of their personal well-being occurred largely, and only, as a result of the current pandemic. SB spoke to the fact that because her HS center closed for a period of time early in the pandemic's effects, she was allowed to find respite. Upon the center's reopening, she returned "refreshed, more focused," and able to build better relationships with the children as a result of the break (Interview 2). In this vein, RH reported that she has felt fulfilled at the end of a day: "I feel very happy with it. I'm going to sleep happy every night" (Focus Group 2). Part of this relief RH sensed was reported to stem from not having to deal with child-behavior problems with nearly the same level of duty (Interview 2).

Class size.

> It's a blessing to only have seven to ten [children now].
> (SS, Interview)

According to the teachers in this dissertation study, smaller class size, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, produced both positive and negative effects. AN reported that smaller classes were a benefit of the COVID pandemic, allowing warmth to be more easily maintained throughout the day. AN reported that with a class size of 8-10 children, those children with (dis)abilities or suspected (dis)abilities—and there were several in her classroom—were cared for with greater warmth and ease (Interview 1). SS agreed: "Specifically, in my room the smaller numbers, the smaller ratio," has alleviated, even temporarily, the feelings SS previously shared about her pressures.

> The thought of having this group of kids, or any group of kids really in this community, with the help I have, with the levels of stress that I'm currently going through, with the need that they have and how much I feel that they deserve, how much of me they deserve to have, I can't see myself doing it. (Interview 2)

Like AN, SS reported that the smaller numbers of children have provided a needed break, a respite, from the realities of her HS routine, allowing for more individual time between teacher and child and the bolstering of teacher-child relationships (Interview 2).

SB concurred, noting that there was more interaction between teachers and children, allowing for individualized attention (Interview 2). Conversely, however, AM worried that although there is more time to work on the social and emotional aspects of the children's development, this work was taking place in a vacuum without other children with whom to interact (Focus Group 2).

A social and emotional mandate.

> One of the positives of COVID, if there can be any, is there is a huge push on social and emotional. (AM, Interview 1)

In her program, AM cited an increase in the use of social stories: "Why we wear a mask, what a germ is…," for example (Focus Group 2). AM understood the importance of offering the children in her care the *why* for wearing a mask—in the same way a teacher was compelled to explain the *why* when having to deny a child's request or bid. She noted that it was imperative that a teacher explain the *why*; that the children deserved to understand the reasoning behind the actions teachers took or the decisions made. As a result, AM noted that the children were not afraid in school; they felt safe at school (Focus Group 2). School was understood to be a safe place for the children to work on emotions dealing with the pandemic as the teachers did not know what was going on in the lives of children at home with regard to COVID-19 (AM, Focus Group 2).

The facet of virtual learning given the current COVID-19 pandemic also created an opportunity for teachers to gain insight into their students' home environments, almost like daily home visits, as the teachers reported. This can be both a boon and a trying

experience, however. The teachers reported feeling worried about some home scenarios to which they were witness. RH reported that seeing parents as caregivers has been eye-opening; there was a wide range of parenting that has been elucidating for the teachers, giving perspective on school experiences for certain children. These glimpses, according to RH, have helped to explain certain children's behaviors while at school. RH described it as "that fight or flight response" (Interview 2).

Positively, these glimpses into home life and parental caregiving interactions have also served as models for the teachers themselves. The ways certain parents worked with their children have informed how RH could work with that child, too, for example. While she contended that there was a distinction between what may work at home and what may work at school, the child was expected to transition between what they experience between the two sites.

RH continued to note the necessity for institutions like HS to be more flexible with how different children learn and operate during the school day. When seeing one child's mother place a small, circular trampoline next to their workstation for virtual learning, RH asked, "Why aren't we doing that?" (Interview 2).

Chapter VI

DISCUSSION: INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The previous chapter closed with a powerful thought from Participant RH, who questioned the work she had undertaken on one particular day, in one particular setting, with one particular child. Her pointed question, however, raises more challenging issues surrounding education writ large. Indeed, why are we *not* pursuing many of the revealed findings in this study for the benefit of teachers and children? In the spirit of making change, this chapter begins with a brief review of the research goals and the data collected. Based on these, study interpretations and implications are discussed.

The goal of this dissertation study was to reconcile the demonstrated importance of Head Start (HS) in the lives of children considered to be at risk for school failure (Magnuson et al., 2004; Tout et al., 2010, as cited in Pianta et al., 2018; Watts et al., 2018), with the stress under which early childhood education teachers in HS classrooms operate (Buettner et al., 2016; Gagnon el al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2016). The study was focused on the sustaining nature of teacher warmth and the importance of relationships that exist between teachers and children in HS classrooms and whether these elements were sufficient to combat the known stressors teachers face as well as the ramifications of stressed teachers regarding child outcomes.

First, I reanalyzed data from the initial year of the Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP; Raver et al., 2011) for associations among the variables of interest: teacher stress, teacher warmth, and child emotion regulation (ER). It was hypothesized that among high-warmth teachers, higher levels of teacher stress would not predict child ER, whereas among low-warmth teachers, higher levels of teacher stress would predict child ER. That is to say, it was hypothesized that teacher warmth could buffer the effects of teacher stress on child ER. To understand more fully teacher stress, teacher warmth and child ER, I then interviewed present-day HS teachers in the Chicago area to collect their lived experiences, histories, stories, and perspectives.

The quantitative results and qualitative findings speak individually and collectively. When considering the means by which HS children understand, take up, and regulate emotion in their classrooms, teacher stress and teacher warmth each carried weight. However, it was warmth, in unexpected ways, that dominated the data results and findings. It was warmth that revealed more precarious truths about teacher stress.

Interpretations: The Chicago School Readiness Project

What's Up Is Down

Results from the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) analyses did not fully support the hypotheses of Research Question 1.

Stress, when applied as the independent variable in Model 1 of the regression analyses of these CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data, served as a statistically significant and positive predictor of childhood behavior. That is to say, as teacher stress rose, teacher report of negative child externalizing and internalizing behaviors also increased, as

measured by the Behavior Problem Index (BPI; Zill, 1990) and the Caregiver-Teacher Report Form (C-TRF; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). The strength of these predictive values, however, was weak. Subsequent regression models, which controlled for relevant variables (e.g., teacher characteristics, child characteristics, school site characteristics), failed to demonstrate that teacher stress remained a predictive factor. In other words, teacher stress became a less salient determinant in child outcomes as more and more conditions were added into the model for consideration.

Perhaps most interestingly, an unexpected directionality of association was demonstrated when examining teacher warmth and child outcome variables. In the classrooms of the original intervention study, the emotional climate of classrooms continued to increase positively across the school year. However, children's outcomes in terms of behavior were reported as declining over this same period of time. In other words, contrary to the hypotheses of this dissertation study, children in classrooms with higher levels of teacher warmth, on average, were reported as having increased incidence of behavioral problems. Warmth, as a hypothesized mechanism of improved child ER, was not supported in the association of these data.

In regression analyses, teacher warmth proved a predictive factor in negative child ER outcomes—as teacher warmth rose, teacher report of negative child externalizing and internalizing behaviors also increased, as measured by the BPI (Zill, 1990) and the C-TRF (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). As with teacher stress (noted above), however, the strength of these predictive values was weak. Subsequent regression models, which controlled for relevant variables (e.g., teacher characteristics, child characteristics, school site characteristics), failed to demonstrate that teacher warmth remained a predictive

factor. In other words, teacher warmth became a less salient determinant in child outcomes as more and more conditions were added into the model for consideration.

Based on these quantitative results as a starting point, and engaging the qualitative data, three central implications can be discussed herein. The first is the unanticipated association between teacher warmth and child outcomes in the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data. The second is the fact that teacher stress, well reported in the literature as a relevant contributor to child outcomes, no longer served as a predictor of child outcomes in the CSRP data, once controlling factors were included, as was originally hypothesized. The third speaks to these outcomes at face value—that perhaps warmer, more supportive caregiving by teachers actually gave rise to more outward expression of emotional issues and/or behavioral dysregulation by the children. The remainder of this chapter harnesses the qualitative findings to examine the reasoning behind these three implications.

Implication 1: Theoretical and Practical Complications of the CLassroom Assessment Scoring System

The quantitative data are limited in allowing one to understand fully the demonstrated relationship between teacher warmth and child outcomes. The data cannot explain the nuances behind these unexpected results. What best informs this question of higher teacher warmth and worse child outcomes may be the individual interviews and the focus groups of the participating teachers that were conducted in the qualitative portion of this study.

When the participating teachers were made aware of the quantitative results, they were at first understandably confused, yet were readily able to provide an accounting for

the outcome. Rather than an anomaly, teachers explained the demonstrated results as a part of their lived and typical experiences in HS classrooms.

The following section delineates the results by describing the CLassroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008) as a tool that (a) captures a prescribed form of warmth but may not account for all and varied forms of warmth circulating in a classroom; (b) may be overexposed and overemphasized, no longer serving as a trustworthy measure of classroom and teacher warmth; and (c) may counterproductively induce teacher stress.

Some types of warmth "count" and others do not. The data suggested that warmth was indeed circulating in the classrooms of the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) study. Instances of great warmth across the initial year were, in fact, demonstrated (i.e., a maximum score of 18.06/21 was demonstrated when assessing the teacher warmth variable). Yet, there may be other forms of warmth for which, perhaps, the CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008) does not and cannot account. Because the CLASS was developed in alignment with normalized standards, and because of its strict Likert scale scoring, I argue the CLASS may miss positive coding for variances of warmth that may not reflect what is prescribed in its manual. This may have pronounced effects in HS classrooms for teachers who are often of differing cultural, ethnic, or racial backgrounds and may not readily identify with the CLASS's normalized standards composing the Emotional Climate subscale.

For example, Ware (2006) examined qualities of teachers considered *warm demanders*, describing the exemplary traits of African American teachers to include "an ethic of caring, beliefs about students and community, and instructional practices"

(p. 428). The Warm Demander pedagogy is further expanded by Irvine and Fraser (1998) to include teachers who "provide a tough-minded, no-nonsense, structured and disciplined classroom environment for kids whom society had psychologically and physically abandoned" (p. 56). These descriptions trouble the notion that a teacher who is considered a disciplinarian cannot simultaneously be caring or warm. This bears out as particularly relevant in the African American communities of teachers and children, communities for whom research that bolsters their relationships and work has been lacking. Ware (2006) argued that "there are unique and culturally specific teaching styles that contribute to the academic success of African American children and other children of color" (p. 428). Bondy and Ross (2008) were more specific in their argument that "a teacher stance that communicates both warmth and a nonnegotiable demand for student effort and mutual respect…is central to sustaining academic engagement in high-poverty schools" (p. 54).

As an additional example, Falicov (1999) demonstrated the use of authoritarian speech among children in Latinx families as a part of their cultural community. While authoritarian speech differs from the type of speech used in the construction of the CLASS (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Pianta et al., 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993)—namely, that of predominantly White families, it is nonetheless understood to be common and inoffensive in the Latinx community. However, given the strictures of the CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008), these sorts of authoritarian comments and speech directed toward children in assessed classrooms may be misinterpreted as negative. These types of speech, both demanding and authoritarian, would most assuredly count against teachers being assessed using the CLASS. Yet, this reveals a tension for HS classrooms given the

changing demographics of our country (Colby & Ortman, 2015) and current HS child demographics (44% White; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.-b).

A body of literature has, in fact, been dedicated to the approach of early childhood education as being multicultural in nature and in deed (Arzubiaga, Noguerón, & Sullivan, 2009; Souto-Manning, 2013). Further, there exists a theoretical viewpoint of development as not so singularly focused on White and Western framings, but rather as more encompassing and accepting of the differences of non-White and non-Western children and families (Rogoff, 2003). This distinction offers unique and important perspectives and affordances for children who are not White as well as for their classrooms and their learning.

In addition to these theoretical arguments in critique of the CLASS's (Pianta et al., 2008) ability to measure the varied and culturally differing forms of warmth, certain practical arguments can also be made in considering the trustworthiness of the CLASS.

The CLASS as overused and overly relied upon. The CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008) is an assessment tool that is in wide use in the early childhood context (Gordon & Peng, 2020). Teachers are not only instructed about their strengths and weaknesses when their CLASS scores are reviewed, but when the assessment is reconceptualized to be "comprised of a monthly cycle of video-based self-reflection, peer coaching, and mentoring and bimonthly workshops focused on selected…CLASS dimensions," it can also be used as a tool for year-long professional development (Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2014, p. 93), for example. Further, HS espouses, describes, and promotes the CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008) on its government-sponsored website. Unfortunately, the many and varied ways in which the CLASS is instituted to promote the betterment of the classroom

environment may have also created unanticipated consequences for HS teachers and children. These consequences, discussed below, may fuel unexpected results between teacher warmth and child outcomes, such as those demonstrated in this study's reanalysis of the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data.

The teachers who participated in this dissertation study presented the CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008) assessment as a given in their yearly experiences. They described it not only as a predictable event, but also as an event that predictably induced stress. Recall RH's vulnerabilities around discussing the CLASS when she reported:

> If I'm being a hundred percent honest here like, you know, the kids' assessment or CLASS assessment, they're coming…they're coming to observe you. And, you know, of course, you know when the kids' observation scores come, you want the best score, you want the high score, you want them to rate you at the best. So, I think that...with that score, it's kind of unwritten, but you kind of have to consider...[take] into consideration teachers are trying to put up their best, you know, best self, you know, best classroom-self because that…that one day of observation is coming. (RH, Focus Group 1)

This desire for the idealized "best score, the high score" (RH, Focus Group 1) revealed the impossibility of the pressure teachers put upon themselves. RH continued to describe the stress in more detail:

> I guess dealing with that stress, speaking solely from my experience, dealing with the stress, I feel like now I reflect back and I think I didn't...handle it very... I didn't handle it very well because sometimes I will have a very stressed face... and families will come in and see that, like see on my expression that I'm stressed, but it's not because I don't love the job...or I don't love the kids or I don't want to see them.... It's just like there's just so many changes that needs to be, you know, that are happening that I need to quickly be flexible and adapt. I'm just like, "Oh my god." (Interview 1)

Feedback loop: Wearing a mask of warmth to hide stress. Simply being observed is enough to induce stress, thereby reducing the ability of the observed to perform tasks (Hills, Dickinson, Daniels, Boobyer, & Burton, 2019). The teachers

participating in this study levied the same charge in their description of the CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008). However, their stress was not only induced as a result of being observed; rather, the teachers were further stressed by what the observations came to represent. To their understanding, the observations tacitly and explicitly conferred job security and HS program funding.

For example, AN noted her administration's focus on training its teachers, both generally and specifically with regard to the CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008). This training, as well as subsequent assessment outcomes, was connected to funding for her HS program to continue with its mission.

> And same thing with the CLASS assessment that we all have to do. It's you know, the director is like, "We need to be at seven[1]!" And I'm like, "Yeah, you're not supposed to be at seven. Like that is like literally impossible. So, I don't know what to tell you." But, you know, I get that her job is about the money. She's trying to make sure we all have jobs and I appreciate that. And then it's up to us to be like, "Well, this is the reality." (Focus Group 2)

With these priorities and strain centered in their understanding of the CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008), the teachers of the qualitative phase[2] of this dissertation study felt compelled to act accordingly, becoming disingenuous and performative in their acknowledgment of and participation in CLASS assessments. They admitted to doing so, despite their vocal assertions that the best way for children to learn emotion and ways to regulate that emotion was to have honest conversations about—and to name and to model—real emotions with and for the children in their care.

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[1] Recall, the CLASS is scored on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is "at the low end" and 7 is "at the high end" of assessment (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004; Pianta, 2003).

[2] CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008) scores for teachers participating in the CSRP (Raver et al. 2011) intervention study were study-collected and not used for the purposes of accountability.

RH described her practice of running previously instructed lessons to be able to maintain a classroom that was functional, cooperative, and warm.

> You kind of do the practice routines, you kind of do what…what you've already done before, so [the children] are not, like, confused, "What are we doing now?" and then that...that brings up more problematic behaviors or like, you know, they're like confused or they're out of routines or they're like, "What's going on?" Like, "This is different." (Focus Group, 1)

Both RH and JM spoke to this performativity as wearing a mask when needed, in front of both the children and their parents, for the sake of good scores and amenable working circumstances.

> It's like when it was like [a] stressful day, it would be all over my face and I should have done better at, like, kind of masking that, but I wasn't able to. And, you know, parents can see my face, and I looked stressed out and I [look] drained, and they're probably thinking, like, "Uuh, does she not like [her] job?" (RH, Interview 1)

JM similarly reported:

> [When] it came to my co-teachers, who were typically old school, they would wear the mask. Okay, so we had like two hundred, I don't know, how many days of school, where [the lead teacher is] being herself [no mask], but when the observers come in she knows she...she switches. So, she would wear the mask, and that bothers me. And I'm trying to tell her, you know, "Maybe we should try to implement this all through the year so we won't confuse the kids." So...and I think the observers see it. They will see a disconnect with me and her because you can't...Even though she's wearing a mask, they could tell that she's wearing a mask, and that's not real and we're not in sync. (Focus Group 2)

Further, JM echoed RH's sentiment in a follow-up interview.

> It's like when you think about the student's performance decreasing, even though there's warmth in the classroom [the revealed CSRP results], apparently there's something that that student is missing. And maybe that warmth that they see, I guess when the...the evaluators come in and they see it, we might be just putting on the mask. Because we're not, like I, aren't dealing with the real issues involved. One thing I think that warmth comes with being honest and being real. Because in a…in a…in a community, in an environment, is the relationship. In a

> relationship, there are gonna be problems. There’re going to be fights. [There’s] going to be friction. And just yesterday, I told my kids that, you know, “We’re working together and we’re gonna...we’re gonna disagree.” The kids, we’re going to disagree, but there’s a way we have to learn how to disagree. (Interview 2)

The CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008) was designed to assess and support teachers in their efforts to provide warm and nurturing classrooms in which children can learn about, and learn how to regulate, emotion. Yet, administrator and delegate agency reliance on the CLASS for the purposes of funding, as well as the imposed expectations and stress around the assessment itself, caused these teachers to pretend. They pretended to be warm, calm, and in control while they were observed in order to attain good scores which, ultimately, translated to administrative reward, job security, and program continuity.

Likely these teachers did receive high scores on their CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008) assessments and even understood the importance of that high score. In obtaining that high score, the teachers demonstrated not only an earnest care for their students’ well-being, but also an understanding of what the program means in their students’ lives. However, the question remains: What good is a high mark on the assessment if it serves as a tangible stressor in the lives and workdays of teachers; minimizes the truth of their experiences and their justifiable worry; and misleads children, parents, and administrators? To JM’s point, warmth was best transmitted in a classroom that was honest and conversant in all the many forms of warmth, and perhaps especially in instances when warmth can be elusive. Perhaps there are other, more honest, ways to look at the issue of classroom warmth and teacher-child relationships.

Implication 2: Teacher Stress Is a Less Salient Factor for the Development of Children

The regression analyses results demonstrated that main effects between teacher stress and child outcomes as expected. These results are well-established in the literature (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; Miller et al., 2008; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). The teaching stresses within the classroom for the teachers were of particular relevance (Buettner et al., 2016; Gagnon et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2016). Specifically, the literature also further examined HS classrooms regarding teacher stress to reveal issues that distinguished them from other preschool programs (Driscoll et al., 2011). What was surprising in these data, however, was the fact that although teacher stress did serve as a predictor of child outcomes initially, teacher stress no longer remained salient with regard to child outcomes once controlling variables (e.g., teacher characteristics, student characteristics, site characteristics) were added to successive models.

This is good news. Returning to the theoretical framing of this dissertation study, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory may help to contextualize these results more fully in the positive light of my interpretation here. It may be the case that other, more positive (or simply less negative) circles of influence under which children in HS classrooms were operating may render teacher stress levels as less salient factors in determining behavioral outcomes. Although the stresses the HS teachers of this study described were real and tangible and affected their daily performance and well-being, I put forward two ecological circles (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), or mechanisms, by which teacher stress may have become a less salient factor in child outcomes.

The first mechanism might operate as a function of what teachers themselves can personally affect to mitigate the effects of their stress on child outcomes. The second mechanism might operate as a function of what they cannot personally affect. The former mechanism, hereafter called Internal Mitigation, considers three scenarios—each emerging from the teachers' own words in their interviews—which may have served to ameliorate the impact of their stress on students: (a) teachers proactively reduced daily classroom stress in a variety of ways, (b) teachers leveraged their age and experience to reduce stress, and (c) teachers relied on personal and social supports to combat stress. In the latter mechanism, hereafter called External Mitigation, ecological forces were applied *upon* teachers; they had little to no control over these forces which may, nonetheless, still have served to reduce stress for their students.

Mechanism 1—Internal Mitigation: That which teachers can personally affect to mitigate the effects of stress on child outcomes.

Daily, personal and professional, means of managing stress. The qualitative findings revealed that teachers interacted with, and affected, several circles of influence, as defined by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of development. They may have been able to minimize their own levels of stress and, by maintaining the integrity of the classroom in this way, the salience of stress for the benefit of their students.

It is worth remembering some of the multiple and varied stressors with which the participating teachers dealt: ill family members (SS, Interview 2); dependent children (AN, Intake Interview) or parents (JM, Intake Interview); physiological (JM, Interview 1) and psychological (SS, Interview 1) well-being; financial stress (AN, Focus Group 2; AM, Intake Interview); emotional suppression (RH, Interview 1); job security (AN,

Focus Group 2); and the current COVID-19 pandemic (all participating teachers, Focus Groups 1 and 2). Negotiating any one (let alone many) of these stressors while also managing and conducting an early childhood classroom would be challenging.

Yet, the participating teachers managed their daily, personal, and professional levels of stress in multiple ways. For example, the teachers reported reducing their stress levels by having honest conversations about their own emotions with the children (AN, Interview 1; Focus Group 2); taking up curricular measures of emotion regulation (e.g., yoga and mindfulness themselves [AN, Interview 1], practicing breathing techniques [SS, Interview 1]); adjusting their teaching team as needed (AM, Focus Group 2); adjusting timing and type of classroom activities for the mutual benefit of teachers and children (AN, Interview 1); implementing humor as a tool (JM, Focus Group 2); and fortifying their relationships with their students (RH, Interview 1).

Age and experience in managing stress. The findings revealed that teacher age and experience in the classroom were factors in mitigating stress. The older, more experienced teachers dealt with stress differently and were, therefore, better able to cope with the day-to-day stresses of their HS classroom. This finding is supported in the literature. For example, Short and Reinhart (1993) demonstrated that teacher age and experience were predictive of teacher empowerment in the school setting. Similarly, Schwarzer and Hallum (2008) demonstrated that teacher age was associated with self-efficacy and, thereafter, with resistance to teacher burnout. Bay (2020) demonstrated that teacher age and seniority, among other variables, were associated with self-efficacy and classroom management.

From the data, AM boldly proclaimed herself "an old horse" (Interview 1), someone who because of her age and experience was strong enough to push back against her school's administration, against the doings of fellow colleagues, and against families in circumstances that devalued children's needs as the first priority. In this way, she protested her administration's push of the academic curriculum over and above the emotional needs of her children and, especially in the time of COVID-19 (Interview 2), against colleagues' casual dismissal of children's questions or demands (Focus Group 2), as well as the manner in which some families speak to their own children (Interview 1).

Likewise, AN used her considerable years of teaching experience to push back against the ways curriculum was being mandated in her classroom without the appropriate conversation with or investigation by the administration to understand that she was already successfully implementing it (Focus Group 2).

SS, too, pushed back against the administration and colleagues in instances where she deemed them to be out of bounds. She did so, however, in more subtle—perhaps passive-aggressive ways—that were not as effective in making lasting change for herself or for her students, compared to the ways AM or AN dealt with these pressures. For example, rather than having an open and honest conversation with her administration about the school's focus on the academic as opposed to the emotional, SS refused to partake in certain curricular expectations, like Mighty Minutes, which she saw as a meager substitute for learning. Instead, she paid "lip service [to] the supervisors, but…actually…do [what I feel more important] and my kids will be better for it" (Focus Group 1). Regarding her colleagues and their (in)actions which were often complicated and controversial (i.e., falling asleep in the classroom, imposing harsh and emotionally

controlling tactics on the children), SS merely carried on without their help until she was incapable (Interview 1), going so far as to ask colleagues who were not following her lead to leave her classroom (Focus Group 1).

Conversely, the younger and less experienced HS teachers struggled mightily with stress and did not have a voice to advocate for themselves. (RH, Interview 1; JM, Focus Group 2; SB, Focus Group 1).

Social supports in the context of managing stress. The relationship between social supports and teacher stress is well established in the literature (Abbey & Esposito, 1985; Brenner, Sörbom, & Wallius, 1985; Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017; Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987; Schonfeld, 2001) and was evident in this dissertation study, as well.

The same three older and more experienced teachers reported a greater number of instances of personal and social support (e.g., life partners; AM, AN, SS) when compared to their younger, less experienced teacher counterparts (JM, RH, SB). The former group indicated there were people in their lives with whom they could share stress and rely on for support. For example, AM reported being married (Intake Interview), AN lived with a partner and her child (Intake Interview), and SS recently moved in with her partner (Focus Group 2). When asked to discuss any positives that may have come out of the COIVD-19 pandemic, SS stated, “I’ve moved in with my boyfriend and our relationship is looking a lot more serious than it was when [the pandemic] started. And so, yeah, that…that’s very, very happy.” Although the question was meant to elicit positive aspects around her HS classroom, SS looked inwardly and personally to find a source of support.

Perhaps it was the case that she could not find a silver lining in her school context, but only in her personal affairs.

Conversely, younger and less experienced teachers self-reported as being alone and supporting themselves (SB and RH, Intake Interview), or in a position where they were supporting other dependents (i.e., parents; JM, Intake Interview).

Mechanism 2—External Mitigation: That which teachers have little to no control over, yet still may mitigate the effects of teacher stress on child outcomes. The formerly described means of mitigating teacher stress were all centered on the teachers' actions or circumstances. Another important avenue of consideration of how levels of teacher stress were theorized to decline in salience, however, could be one in which they have little say or involvement. Here, I interpret (a) the decisions made by teachers' administration and (b) the role played by parents as two such factors which may have reduced the salience of teacher stress on child outcomes.

Administrative decisions in the context of teacher stress. Perhaps administrative decisions about the placement of children in classrooms (Burns & Mason, 1995; Paufler & Amrein-Beardsley, 2014) also contributed to the results and findings of this study. It may be the case that more challenging children are placed into classrooms where more experienced and tenured teachers were presumed to know how to deal with the stress of these challenging children and/or families. The children were perhaps assigned to classrooms with teachers who were better equipped to deal with the known stresses of their jobs (Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Nieto, 2003; Riley, 1998).

This scenario of classroom assignment represents the potential of selection bias (Berk, 1983; Cuddeback, Wilson, Orme, & Combs-Orme, 2004) in the CSRP (Raver et

al., 2011) data and in the present-day HS classrooms of the participating teachers. Adding controlling variables to subsequent regression Models 2 and 3 accounted for this selection bias as demonstrated by the loss of statistical significance from Model 1.

Parental role and involvement in the context of teacher stress. Another avenue for consideration of the reduced saliency of teacher stress on child outcomes was parental involvement. It is possible that some parents—those who were more savvy, more able to interpret and act against the marginalization that labels them, their children, and their families as socioeconomically disadvantaged or at risk—acted on behalf of their child, having a say in which classroom and with which teacher (i.e., those most experienced, able to deal with stress) their children were placed. Those parents, who were more effective and direct in dealing with their school and its administration or who perhaps were more mainstream (Doucet, 2011; Hasan, 2004), were able to negotiate their child's place in classrooms with the "best" teachers. This notion was not explored in the quantitative data, but in interviews and focus groups, the participating teachers did speak to the (conflicting) role of parents in their classrooms. It may well be worth the effort to explore this theme further.

Implication 3: Warmer, More Supportive Caregiving by Teachers May Give Rise to More Outward Expression of Emotional Issues and/or Behavioral Dysregulation by the Children

There exists the possibility that the results and findings of this dissertation study ought to be interpreted at face value. That is to say, perhaps a warmer, more supportive emotional classroom climate promotes and encourages the expression of child emotional dysregulation. It could be the case that as teachers foster a more supportive classroom environment, children are more comfortable in a) their ability to express behavioral

issues and to act out, and b) in their teacher's ability to accept these displays as valuable and important opportunities for learning. This may explain why, when controlling variables were added into the regression analyses of the Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP; Raver et al., 2011) data, results no longer demonstrated associations between either teacher stress or warmth and child outcomes in behavior. If this is the case, then what is happening in the classroom—at least with our ability to detect it—may not have as much influence on the children in the moment.

This possibility of warmer classrooms allowing for greater child dysregulation also highlights an opportunity in my opinion. Rather than viewing child emotional dysregulation as a liability in the classroom, these outbursts or issues could be viewed as favorable. The repeated experiences of emotion dysregulation, like repeated experiences in any domain of learning (e.g., reading, tying shoelaces), afford expertise to the child. When children engage in and act on these bouts of emotional dysregulation, it is their way of practicing the necessary skills of navigating emotion and its regulation. It could be the case, as with any domain of learning, that children are gaining practice in what these negative emotions feel like and look like, how they engage others (or not), and how they can be managed (or not). I would go so far as to argue that these instances of emotional upset and outburst are the most valuable lessons children have when it comes to issues of social and emotional learning; yet, according to the teachers in this dissertation study, these experiences are restricted in classrooms because of limits in time and space, and the promotion of academics over and above the emotional.

Head Start Classrooms: A Series of Competing Priorities

This dissertation study can be summed up as a series of binary choices teachers needed to make in working with, and acting on behalf of, the children in their care: (a) social-emotional learning or academic learning, (b) emotional expression or emotional suppression, and (c) children's right to play or Kindergarten readiness. Although each value was demonstrated as important, teachers understood the former values (i.e., social-emotional learning, emotional expression, play) to be most influential in the long-term success of children and, ultimately, in contention with the latter values, the priority of the powers that be. This dichotomization, then, became a series of competing priorities for teachers. Rather than the values working in harmony, these values became contradictory to one another, evidence of the oppositional forces at hand in HS centers and in the daily workings of both teachers and children.

On one hand, teachers reported prioritizing the former values as a means to the latter values. They demonstrated that when children *first* learned about and engaged in social and emotional learning, they were being prepared to take up the academic instruction afterwards. According to the teachers, learning to attend, to sit for longer periods of time, and to work collaboratively necessarily preceded the aims of letter awareness or numeracy (Blair & Raver, 2015), for example. Similarly, emotional expression and play served as gateways to emotional suppression and Kindergarten readiness. The repeated experiences of—*and perhaps especially the failed attempts at*—these former values served as the foundation for learning the latter values. Yet, the curriculum was heavy in their classrooms, filled with means to avoid child emotion and to limit that emotion should it present itself.

On the other hand, however, outside forces (e.g., administration, parents) prioritized the latter values as those which served to close the achievement gap. According to the teachers, not only were these values most effectively delivered to children in the formerly described serial nature (e.g., socio-emotional learning *before* academic learning), but by preferencing or mandating the latter values before establishing the former values, the teachers became limited in their ability to build relationships with the children in their classrooms. The push to have children ready for Kindergarten was coming at the expense of the skills which teachers estimated to be more valuable for long-term well-being: forging trusting, mutually reciprocal (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) relationships, knowing how to be a part of the group, knowing how to deal with an emotionality that may be dysregulated, and playing in a manner that constituted genuine curiosity and learning.

Ideally, HS classrooms would operate in a manner that best supported the former and the latter values equally, each serving to promote a child's growth and development. There are, however, structural issues (e.g., testing, accountability, efficiency; Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Kliebard, 2004; Pinar, 2012) in education writ large that make this more challenging for teachers and result in institutional preference for the latter values of academic learning, emotional suppression, and Kindergarten readiness in HS classrooms. There are clearly evident benefits from these values. However, if these are the *only* or the *first promoted* goals of a HS classroom for extrinsic reasons (e.g., assessment, funding, closing the achievement gap), as seems to be the case according to these teachers' lived experiences, the outcome may have exactly the opposite of desired effects for children. That is to say, what is intended to be dismantled in a HS classroom

(i.e., stressful learning environments, learning by rote and scripted activity, disconnects facts) may inadvertently and unintentionally continue to exist and be advanced.

All the while, these teachers felt ignored. The individuals who worked most closely with the children were told what to do and how to do it in a way that constricted their personal or professional growth, causing teachers to fail in the development of the necessary relationships between teacher and child for long-term child well-being (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). In this study, the participating teachers demonstrated a desire to be a part of professional development, not merely to learn second-hand. They demonstrated a desire to be a part of the administrative processes that determined the classroom experiences of their students without having to be subversive in their intent and deed. The teachers demonstrated their desire to work with Kindergarten teachers to whose classrooms their students were promoted, but instead were left without a connection or say in their students' next steps. By being more involved, teachers hoped to create conversations that stop the top-down push of curriculum and expectations into HS classrooms and instead spiral up from HS classrooms to Kindergartens (and successive grade teachers) to inform these grade-school teachers of what occurs in their HS classroom spaces and how to build on these activities and experiences for the sake of continuity (Stipek, Franke, Clements, Farran, & Coburn, 2017). Yet, these desires were too often and too easily dismissed by administrative requirements, despite the glimmer of promise they may offer. This may have been the case because HS teachers were generally undereducated (at least less so than those making decisions on their behalf or the Kindergarten teachers to whom their students would be promoted), often came from the communities that HS programs served, and perhaps were generally undervalued.

Children are certainly not afforded the promised great start in HS programming if the mandate singularly remains to close the achievement gap rather than build nurturing and sustaining relationships with teachers. In fact, exacerbated childhood behavior problems, remediation, and/or Special Education, for example, may have some root in the binary choices that HS teachers are forced to make in these HS years. Teachers frequently experienced pressure to perform, to promote their students, and to hide their own feelings while consciously knowing they need to teach children about emotion so that the children can successfully grow and move along in school. Without more comprehensive training, competent classroom support, or access to the levers that may alleviate stress, teachers are relegated to repeat what is required but not, perhaps, most effective. As long as closing the achievement gap remains the mandate, despite research noting the importance of relationships and emotional well-being (Pianta & Walsh, 1996), children will continue to miss out and teachers will continue to burn out.

Professor Sharon Lynn Kagan recently addressed the world standing of the United States with regard to early childhood education and care, saying that the country is detrimentally limited in its scope (personal communication, February 25, 2021). Countries, like Sweden and England, which Kagan described as “social welfare states” (personal communication, February 25, 2021), were touted as more encompassing in their approach (e.g., prenatal care, family leave, parent coaching), while the United States remained focused on one system of care—that of early childhood education. The findings from the data of this study align with her conclusions. Relying on one circle of ecological and developmental influence (i.e., Head Start) without also attending to those which prove to be equally, and perhaps more, influential (e.g., familial support, poverty

reduction, teacher education, teacher agency) may continue to limit children rather than lift them up.

Chapter VII

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Concluding Thoughts

The hypotheses of this dissertation study asserted that among high-warmth teachers, higher levels of teacher stress would not predict child emotion regulation (ER), whereas among low-warmth teachers, higher levels of teacher stress would predict child ER. To understand teacher stress, teacher warmth, and child ER more fully, data from the Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP; Raver et al., 2011) were reanalyzed, and the lived experiences, histories, stories, and perspectives of present-day Head Start (HS) teachers in the Chicago area were collected.

In summary, both the quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated several facets of teachers' experiences that problematized the notion of more school and school earlier via HS programming for children deemed at risk of school failure. Reanalysis of the CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data revealed that *both* teacher stress and teacher warmth were associated with, and predictive of, child outcomes in externalizing and internalizing behavior, as measured on the Behavior Problem Index (BPI; Zill, 1990) and on the Caregiver-Teacher Report Form (C-TRF; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). These results served as an entry point to the qualitative investigation with the six present-day Chicago

HS teachers recruited for participation in this dissertation study. Interviews revealed that teachers were not surprised by either the anticipated results regarding teacher stress or the unanticipated results regarding teacher warmth. They did, in fact, personally account for these results with their own experiences, histories, and stories via individual and focus group interviews.

Collectively, then, results and findings from this explanatory sequential mixed-methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) design allowed for the deliberation of a number of implications when considering child ER in the HS classroom. First, there appeared to be potentially problematic issues around the measurement of teacher warmth: how can one best quantify and qualify warmth as a construct which honors the types of warmth that may be circulating in racially and ethnically varied classrooms? How can one best use the CLassroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008) in a way that neither forces an ethos of pretense nor creates a level of additional stress for teachers working in classrooms? Second, teacher stress may not be an ecological circle (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) transmitting as great a risk in the life and work of HS children as was previously understood. Considering the two proposed ecological circles of influence of this dissertation study, Internal and External Mitigation, teachers, and potentially their administrations and parents, have illustrated the ways each party may dampen the effects of personal and/or professional teacher stress for students.

These interpretations drawn from the results and findings of this dissertation study add to the literature on teacher stress, teacher warmth, and children’s ability to regulate emotion by adding nuance to each of these variables. It is not enough to concede that teacher stress is negative for children without further examining other circles of influence

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that may ameliorate effects on child outcomes. Nor is it enough to assert warmth as wholly beneficial if that warmth is inaccurately or inarticulately measured—the assessment itself serving as an instrument that further induces teacher stress. Last, this dissertation study affirmed the work of HS teachers as vital, although arguably more complicated than perhaps previously noted.

Children in HS programming do readily benefit from early introduction to school in many ways. This dissertation study illuminated (a) HS teachers' understandings of social and emotional growth as imperative to academic growth, (b) the ways in which HS teachers preferenced and prioritized the social and emotional domain of growth for their students in the confines of their classrooms, and (c) the risks teachers potentially assumed in advancing the social and emotional in opposition to the administrations' positioning of the academic as the first priority. Teachers revealed that they prioritized that which was not the mandated curriculum in order to close the achievement gap existing between children of circumstances that label them as at risk and their more affluent peers. The study revealed that although teachers understood their relationships with children to be key for whole-child well-being and they actively worked to subvert the reported and understood mandate, many facets of the school day continued to impede these relationships.

I conclude the study by urging readers to continue questioning the wisdom of more school and school earlier if the school day, curriculum, school assessments of teacher quality, and teacher input and value are not considered when making decisions purported to benefit children who are marginalized. Moreover, the reader is advised to question the likelihood of HS programming success, no matter how early it is begun in

the life of a child, when the current design does not consider and align with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) theory of ecological development. For optimal development for the child at the center of these circles of influence, there must be "progressive accommodation" (p. 513) between teacher and child. As it stands today, the HS teachers of this dissertation study revealed there is little in the way of accommodation, rather there is a mandate for both children and teachers to conform to imposed standards, rules, and regulations. For optimal development for the child at the center of these circles of influence, both child *and* teacher should remain active rather than passive. As it stands today, the HS teachers of this dissertation study revealed that neither children nor teachers were allowed much latitude in their activities. Rather, the administration and delegate agencies' focus on closing the achievement gap forced teachers into a scripted passivity, resulting in a performativity that was dishonest. Children, too, were thereafter equally limited to experiencing passive encounters. Moreover, for optimal development for the child (and teacher) at the center of these circles of influence, the multiplicity of environments must be carefully considered. As it stands today, the HS teachers of this dissertation study revealed that HS continued to focus narrowly on the closing of the achievement gap instead of on the many, perhaps more influential (some proximal, other distal) circles of development (e.g., poverty, homelessness, health, violence) that impinge on the development and well-being of children in their classrooms.

Head Start teachers, like the parents accounted for in Conger and Conger's (2002) Family Stress Model, seem to be simply doing the best they can, given the circumstances under which they operate. As with the Family Stress Model, HS teachers were negatively affected by the demonstrated stresses, and these stresses have the potential to in turn

affect their behavior and strategies in dealing with the children in their charge, which in turn may affect child outcomes. With more school and school earlier, merely adding a greater number of years of this type of climate will not close the achievement gap for children labeled at risk. However, perhaps bringing these issues to light, repeatedly and purposefully, will begin to turn the tide, ultimately benefitting the children meant to be served.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with any investigation, limitations existed in this study. First and most glaringly, the two data sets of this dissertation study were of disparate samples. The CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data were collected in two cohorts during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years, while the interviews and focus groups were collected in the fall of 2020. Roughly fifteen years separated these two data sets, and this dissertation study did not account for the differences which may have taken hold in HS classrooms in the intermittent years. Not only does the space between participants matter, but so too do the effects of time, the zeitgeist, on the lives of teachers who may have taught in 2004-2006 and those who were teaching in the fall of 2020. Most concretely, the teachers of 2020 were living and working through a global pandemic. This once-in-a-century phenomenon was a constant presence in conversations with the current set of HS teachers, which could not be accounted for in the 2004-2006 CSRP data. Ideally, a future study will combine the two phases of this dissertation study in one sample. In this way, the interpretations and implications drawn from both the quantitative and qualitative studies can be more

closely linked, proving more valuable for policy measures or intervention studies dealing with the variables of interest.

Second, the assessments used in the original CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) data set to collect information on teacher stress, teacher warmth, and child ER were either measures of self-report or of observation. This dissertation study thus may have been limited by the biases inherent in each of these methods of assessment, whether one is assessing oneself or an outsider is assessing another (teacher or child). A direct measure of teacher stress in the moment-to-moment happenings of the classroom would likely be more informative (e.g., heartrate, galvanic skin response). It is also possible that a physiological measure of stress, such as hair cortisol, may be more informative, given that psychological and endocrine responses to stress may not be aligned (Schlotz et al., 2008).

Last, this dissertation study failed to account for HS teachers' understanding of childhood development. The teachers spoke of their professional development and their curricular expectations around emotion and regulation, but they were not given the opportunity to engage further in the study of human development. The value teachers place on developmental science and understanding how developmental science may influence their work with HS students would be useful aspects of a future investigation—perhaps an intervention study to include 100 teachers who made concerted efforts to incorporate the science of development for their use in the day-to-day workings of their classrooms. Given the developmental research that suggests that HS children are often at risk, perhaps it would be wise to work with teachers to gauge their level of interest and understanding regarding development and the scope of their interactions and relationships

with children. This future study design may also aid to inform next steps regarding policy measures or means of implementation, for example.

Researcher Reflections

In conclusion, I close where I began, with the idea that teachers and children do the very best they can in every instance, given the contextual circumstances, the ecological circles (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), under which they operate. There is no easy formula to account for more school and school earlier in efforts to close the achievement gap, as I argue that closing the achievement gap is a much more complicated task than those in positions of power and decision-making presently acknowledge or demonstrate. As well, the at-risk label is not so easily remedied by academic outcomes; rather, the remedy is based on the slow accumulation of time and experience, offering small children the repeated and necessary understanding and regulation of emotion in domains of learning defined by play, free in expression and without suppression (for both child and teacher), and unthreatened by negative consequences. If it is expected that teachers make a difference in the lives of these children who are deemed at risk, if families are told that more school and school earlier can move the needle in their children's long-term outcomes, then perhaps it would be wise to work *with* teachers. While it seems teachers' present-day position of agency and power remains limited, the knowledge and desires of teachers are real, and articulately stated in this study, as they persevere in their work to enact real change for their students.

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Appendix A

Table A-1 and Table A-2

Table A-1

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Terms and Definitions

Ecological Term	Bronfenbrenner's Definition
Microsystem	"1. *A* microsystem *is the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person* (*e.g., home, school, workplace, etc.*). *A* setting *is defined as a place with particular* physical features *in which the participants engage in particular* activities *in particular* roles (*e.g., daughter, parent, teacher, employee, etc.*) *for particular periods of* time. *The factors of place, time, physical features, activity, participant, and role constitute the* elements *of a setting*" (p. 514-515).
Mesosystem	"2. *A* mesosystem *comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life. Thus, for an American 12-year-old, the mesosystem typically encompasses interactions among family, school, and peer group…In sum, stated succinctly, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems*" (p. 515).
Exosystem	"3. *An* exosystem *is an extension of the mesosystem embracing other specific social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found, and thereby influence, delimit, or even determine what goes on there. These structures include the major institutions of the society, both deliberately structured and spontaneously evolving, as they operate at a concrete local level. They encompass, among other structures, the world of work, the neighborhood, the mass media,*

	agencies of government (*local, state, and national*)*, the distribution of goods and services, communication and transportation facilities, and informal social networks*" (p. 515).
Macrosystem	"4. *A* macrosystem *refers to the overarching institutional patterns of the culture of subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems, of which micro-, meso-, and exosystems are conceived and examined not only in structural terms but as carriers of information and ideology that, both explicitly and implicitly, endow meaning and motivation to particular agencies, social networks, roles, activities, and their interrelations. What place or priority children and those responsible for their care have in such macrosystems is of special importance in determining how a child and his or her caretakers are treated and interact with each other in different types of settings*" (p. 515).

Table A-2

Child and Teacher Characteristics of CSRP (Raver et al., 2011) Data

Characteristic	Child (n = 467)	Teacher (n = 90)
Analyzed grouping		
Treatment	238	
Control	229	
Sex		
Male	48%	
Female	52%	
Race		
Black	66%	71%
Hispanic	26%	
Other	8%	
Residing in single-parent families	68%	
Living in a home with four or more children	26%	
Parents who speak Spanish	19%	
Family receives Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	31%	
Education		
Bachelor's degree		65%
Age		
Mean age		40.72

Appendix B

Summary of Data Collection

Data Type	Description	Frequency and Quantity	Purpose
Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP) Data Set	The CSRP data set is derived from a cohort study comprised of demographic, survey, and observational information collected from 543 children, their parents and 90 teachers, in 35 Head Start classrooms in Chicago, Illinois.	Not applicable. Previously collected data.	The CSRP data set was analyzed to investigate associations amongst teacher stress, teacher warmth, and children's ability to regulate emotion.
Teacher Interviews	Each teacher was asked to participate in two individual, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were audio- and video-recorded using a teleconferencing platform (i.e., Zoom), transcribed, and coded for emerging themes.	Each teacher was individually interviewed twice in the course of the two month time period of the qualitative study.	Allowed researcher to better know and understand teachers' perspectives on the topics of this study: teacher stress, teacher warmth, and children's ability to regulate emotion.
Focus Group	After each teacher participated in the first of two individual, semi-structured interviews, the teachers were invited to gather together for a focus group. The focus group was conducted to further discuss thematic topics and questions that arose from the analyses of the first set of individual interviews. The focus group was conducted via a teleconferencing platform (i.e., Zoom), and thereafter analyzed for themes.	There were two focus groups conducted, each focus group included 3 participating teachers. Teachers participated in one of the two focus group. In this way, teachers who worked at the same school were in differing focus groups.	Allowed researcher a way to hear how teachers, collectively, perceived emotion, its regulation, understanding of their own levels of stress, ability to provide warmth to their students, and perceptions and understandings of children's ability to regulate emotion.