

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER-CARING BEHAVIORS AND READING  
ACHIEVEMENT**

A Record of Study

by

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## ABSTRACT

State assessments have shown English Language Learners (ELLs) seem to significantly trail native English-speakers in reading. Teachers need to find pedagogical practices that improve all students' reading achievement to close such disproportionate gap. Research has demonstrated that, in general, when students feel their teachers genuinely care for them, their grades are positively influenced. This correlational study examined whether there was a statistically significant relationship between caring behaviors of upper elementary reading teachers and their students' reading achievement, whether there was a statistically significant difference in the degree to which ELLs and Non-ELLs perceived teacher-caring, whether there was a statistically significant difference between the reading achievement of ELLs and Non-ELLs, and whether there was a statistically significant difference between the way reading teachers perceived their own caring behaviors and the way their students perceived their teachers' caring behaviors. *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* was used to measure the teachers' caring behaviors, and the students' reading achievement was measured by calculating the growth students demonstrated on the pre- and post-STAAR reading benchmarks. The study included 138 students and 10 reading teachers. Data from this study revealed a positive statistically significant correlation between teacher-caring behaviors and student reading achievement; there was no statistically significant difference in the degree to which ELLs and Non-ELLs perceived their reading teachers' caring behaviors; ELLs' reading achievement was statistically significantly lower than the reading achievement of Non-ELLs; and the students' perceptions of their reading teachers' caring behaviors were statistically significantly lower than the teachers' perceptions of their own teacher-caring behaviors.

## **DEDICATION**

This record of study is dedicated to my family, for they have always supported me in all my endeavors as challenging and as impossible as they may have seemed. Mom and Dad, I love you and thank you for your patience and encouragement; this project is not only my accomplishment, you made it happen by giving me the confidence to trust that I could get to the finish line.

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### **Contributors**

This work was supervised by a record of study committee consisting of Professor Robert Capraro, Chair, Professor Mary M. Capraro, Co-chair, and Professor Juan R. Lira of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture and Professor Randel D. Brown of the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy.

All work for the record of study was completed by the student, under the advisement of Professor Robert Capraro of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 sought to improve the quality of education for all students while, at the same time, close achievement gaps among demographic subgroups such as English Language Learners (ELLs) who, traditionally, have lagged in reading achievement when compared to their Non-ELL peers. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 allowed states to regulate their own assessment programs and to develop their own standards, thus resulting in multiple interpretations of what it means to be at a “Proficient” level on a given subject (U. S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009; Zinshteyn, 2015, July). NCLB, which updated ESEA, increased the accountability of schools for students’ progress in reading, language arts, and in mathematics; additionally, it required all states to bring all students up to the “proficient” level, based on their own state standards, by the 2013-2014 school year (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Nonetheless, by the end of 2015 no state had reached the goal of having 100% of their students obtain the proficient stage based on their own state assessment programs and proficiency standards (Klein, 2015, April); additionally, achievement gaps among ELLs and Non-ELLs continue to be noted on the Nation’s Report Card (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, May).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) represents the Nation’s Report Card, and its scores are used as the benchmark standard for measuring student achievement and for state comparisons. NAEP reading scale scores for ELLs in grades 4 and 8 have continuously

been much lower than the scores of Non-ELLs from the year 1998 to the year 2017, as can be noted on Table 1.

Table 1

*NAEP Reading Results by Year*

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Percentage of Students at or above “proficient” in NAEP Reading

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<u>Year</u>	<u>Grade 4</u>		<u>Grade 8</u>	
	<u>ELLs</u>	<u>Non-ELLs</u>	<u>ELLs</u>	<u>Non-ELLs</u>
2017	9	40	5	38
2015	8	39	4	36
2013	7	38	4	38
2011	7	37	3	35
2009	6	36	3	34
2007	7	35	5	33
2005	7	34	4	32
2003	7	33	5	34
2002	5	33	4	34
2000	3	31	-----	-----
1998	6	30	3	33

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*Note.* No data were reported for grade 8 reading in the year 2000. Data obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics (2018, May).

Although data presented in Table 1 show some gains on the reading achievement of ELLs in grades 4 and 8, the trend continues to be that ELLs score significantly lower than Non-ELLs in reading. In 2017, 40% of Non-ELLs in grade 4 scored at or above “Proficient” in reading, while only 9% of ELLs in fourth grade scored at or above “Proficient”. ELLs in eighth grade were also outperformed by Non-ELLs in reading in 2017 with 38% of Non-ELLs at or above “Proficient”, and only 5% of ELLs in grade 8 scoring at or above “Proficient” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, June; 2015, Dec.; 2017, Dec.; 2018, May).

In search of continuing to improve the quality of education for all students, ESEA, modified through NCLB to include a more rigorous accountability system, has been adapted one more time with regards to accountability and ELLs. On December 10, 2015, President Barack Obama signed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the most recent reauthorization of ESEA. ESSA continues to seek progress towards closing achievement gaps and offering educational equity and excellence for all (Executive Office of the President, 2015, Dec.). One of the major changes impacting the education of ELLs is the fact that, for the very first time, the English language proficiency of ELLs is being incorporated into the accountability system; ESSA requires the inclusion of long-term goals and interim measures of progress for the percentage of ELLs who advance in attaining English language proficiency. Another major change involves the inclusion of ELLs who meet exit criteria and are reclassified as non-ELLs in the ELLs subgroup for accountability purposes for the subsequent four years after they are reclassified (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016, Feb.). Nonetheless, accountability alone will not necessarily bring the improvement needed. Researchers have stated that such educational accountability has fostered schools and school districts to become systematically centered on numbers, statistics, and state-ranking (King & Chan, 2011; Noddings, 2005b); therefore, placing

unwarranted stress on teachers and resulting in a paradigm shift in their pedagogical practices from student-centered to primarily data-driven (Powers, 2010). Powers (2010) investigated teachers' perceptions of the relationship between NCLB's accountability policies and instructional practices taking place in the classrooms. Powers (2010) observed that although teachers supported accountability, they conveyed great concern regarding the importance emphasized by NCLB legislation on testing and test scores over student learning. Teachers reported the current high-stakes, test based accountability-driven atmosphere pressured them into confining the curriculum to the tested subjects; furthermore, teachers stated NCLB's demands have resulted in diverting their instructional practices to more directed and teacher-centered, consequently impeding student-centered practices and experiential learning that incorporate a more well-rounded curriculum.

In an effort to comply with the current national mandates holding teachers accountable for the academic success of all students, educators must reverse their instructional practices and re-incorporate a learner-centered pedagogy. Decades ago, the teachings of theorists such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky promoted student-centered classrooms focused on the students' needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles, with teachers acting as facilitators (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Most recent investigations have demonstrated student-centered classrooms continue to be optimal for academic achievement in general. L. Davis (2010) posited children's classroom literacy experiences influence their motivation to learn as well as their motivation to read; consequently, their academic achievement is also impacted. The ethic of care in education promotes caring learning environments, nurturing caring classrooms where student-centered instruction and positive teacher-student relationships provide all students with optimum

educational experiences that may result in improved reading achievement (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Davis, H. A., 2003; Davis, L., 2010; Gallagher, 2013; Navarez, 2011; Sha, 2009).

### **Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study**

The demographics of the United States population is not stagnant; it changes over time due to immigration. As a result, teachers are faced with challenging multicultural classroom settings in which students arrive at schools with diverse language, affective, and cognitive needs. During the last ten years, U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) naturalized over 6.6 million citizens (USCIS, 2014, Nov.; U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2016). In fiscal year 2013, the U. S. Department of Homeland Security reported that 990,553 individuals received lawful permanent resident status. 1,016,518 persons became permanent legal U. S. residents during the 2014 fiscal year, and 1,051,031 individuals obtained legal residency during 2015 (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2016). An increase in immigration resulted in an increase of ELLs in our public-school system.

The ELL population has grown substantially throughout the Nation over the last two decades; as per the U. S. Census Bureau, there has been an increment of 11,884,500 ELLs from 1990 to 2015; that is, the ELL population has grown by 85% in those 25 years (Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, n.d.b; U. S. Census Bureau, 2015, Oct.). ELLs are the fastest-growing student population in the United States, and currently, ELLs of ages 5 and older constitute 8.6% of the total population in the United States (MPI Data Hub, n.d.b). This notable growth in ELLs has been challenging, for ELLs conform a very diverse group of students, and their needs vary significantly. Some ELLs may enter the United States as refugees, asylees, victims of human trafficking, or entrants from Cuba and Haiti (USCIS, 2014, Nov.; White House Task Force on New Americans, 2015). While some ELLs enter the United States with their families as legal

immigrants, others may be unaccompanied children and youth who have been detained by the U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services while crossing the Mexico-U. S. border. Some of these unaccompanied children come to the U. S. to reunite with their families, but many are forced to abandon their countries due to a severe upsurge in drug trafficking and gang violence in Central America. Across the Nation, these children strive with building their lives, struggle with immigration hearings, and face the imminent possibility of deportation (Brown, 2016, Feb.; Deruy, 2016, Aug.). However, ELLs are not only new immigrants; ELLs are also children who are born in the United States, but whose native language is other than English.

Being a native of the United States does not warrant proficiency in the English language. A vast number of native-born American students struggle with the English language as they move from grade level to grade level (Zinshteyn, 2014, Dec.); in fact, most ELLs enrolled in U. S. public schools are born in the United States. Zong and Batalova (2015, July) stated 85% of ELLs enrolled in PK through fifth grades and 62% of ELLs in grades 6-12, during the 2012-2013 school year, were native born. Texas, which is one of the states that services the most ELLs in public schools, had a total K-12 ELL population of 3,638,400 students in 2015, that accounted for 14.3% of the total student population in Texas (MPI Data Hub, n.d.c; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, Dec.); nevertheless, only 14.9% of school age children of immigrant families in Texas were born outside of the United States (MPI Data Hub, n.d.a). In Texas, over 2 million children, ages 18 years old or younger, are second generation immigrants (MPI Data Hub, n.d.e); more than likely these children, although born in the United States, might be raised speaking their parents' native language. Data gathered from the U. S. Census Bureau indicate most ELLs in Texas speak a language other than English with Spanish and Vietnamese as the



languages spoken the most; almost seven million ELLs speak Spanish in Texas, and 193,000 ELLs speak Vietnamese (MPI Data Hub, n.d.d).

In general, newcomer ELLs and second-generation ELLs enter the public-school system uninformed of classroom expectations, demonstrate varying degrees of English language proficiency, and often times, given their experiences while traveling to the United States, require specialized instruction to be academically successful (Brown, 2016, Feb.; Deruy, 2016, Aug.). To accommodate for the diverse needs of ELLs, public schools offer specialized programs. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported 4,460,956 public schools in the United States offer programs for ELLs, and 9.3% of students in the nation's public-school system participated in a program for ELLs in the 2013-2014 school year; that same school year, 15.5% of students enrolled in Texas public schools participated in a second language acquisition program (NCES, 2015, Dec.). Conditions such as the ones mentioned previously, present challenges for elementary school teachers in providing all students with an education of sound quality (Bracey, 2002; Devlin, Kift, Cook, Nelson, Smith, & McKay, 2012; Kindler, 2002) and in closing achievement gaps among ELLs and Non-ELLs.

In 2001, Haycock affirmed that public schools across the United States were not being successful at facilitating the literacy achievement for ELLs; thus, placing ELLs at an academic disadvantage given their low literacy level in the English language, and subsequently, becoming at risk of failure. As per NAEP's data mentioned previously, 17 years later, the Nation seems to remain in the same situation; Non-ELLs across the States continue to demonstrate higher reading achievement than ELLs (NCES, 2018, May). Texas reading scores on NAEP for 2017 are also much higher for Non-ELLs. Based on NAEP's reading results for Texas, 12% of ELLs in fourth grade and 5% of ELLs in eighth grade scored at or above "Proficient"; on the other hand, 34% of

Non-ELLs in grade 4 and 31% of Non-ELLs in grade 8 obtained a score at or above “Proficient” (NCES, 2017).

Similar trends are observed in the Texas state mandated assessments; minority students, particularly ELLs, are not reaching the expectations set by the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in reading, as per data published by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The 2015-2016 Texas Performance Reporting System (TPRS) indicates 52% of the ELLs who were assessed with STAAR Reading (all grades) scored at or above the “Satisfactory Standard” while 77% of Non-ELLs scored at or above the “Satisfactory Standard” level. Of those students who passed, 19% of Non-ELLs demonstrated mastery at the “Advanced Standard” as opposed to only 8% of ELLs (TEA, Division of Performance Reporting, 2016).

As can be seen, data demonstrate that the reading achievement gap between ELLs and Non-ELLs continues to be evident not only at the national level, but also at the state level. However, it is of utmost importance to point out that states’ assessment programs and reporting methods emit significantly different results from data collected and reported by NAEP (achieve.org, 2015). The scale score or “cut off” to be considered at a proficient level is much lower for STAAR than it is for NAEP. For instance, in fourth grade reading, Texas shows a disparity of 46 percentage points between the number of students identified as proficient by NAEP and the number identified as proficient through STAAR (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, June); such disproportion indicates the expectations for passing NAEP are higher than the expectations for STAAR. NAEP results are generally not reported to individual students or parents, and therefore, Texas parents must rely on STAAR results to know how their children are performing (achieve.org, 2015). Unfortunately, STAAR identifies students as

“Proficient” giving parents the impression that their children are being successful at grade level when they are actually performing at “Basic” level under NAEP’s standards.

There is no doubt that there is indeed a reading achievement gap between ELLs and Non-ELLs, and in order to close such gap, it is critical that educators pay attention to their own teaching practices and to their classroom environments. Effective teaching practices and positive learning environments are fundamental for the reading achievement of ELLs. The extant literature has repeatedly recognized the influence that quality of instruction and learning environments has on students’ academic achievement and on students’ affective and social needs (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Davis, H. A., 2003; Davis, L., 2010; Gallagher, 2013; Navarez, 2011; Sha, 2009); moreover, there has been a growing acknowledgment that quality of instruction is at least as significant as language of instruction in the academic achievement of ELLs (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Christian & Genesee, 2001; Devlin et al., 2012). Quality of instruction is the result of a variety of factors, such as the quality of teachers, class size, and instructional materials as well as the quality of the learning environment among others. A factor that is critical for the academic success of any child is an affective classroom setting where students can feel at-ease and concentrate on learning (Bulach, Brown, & Potter, 1998; Krashen, 1982, 1987, 1988; Miller, 2008; Pompa, Higareda, Trevino, & Guerra, 2011).

School can be tough for anyone, but as a former ELL and teacher of ELLs, I know how challenging learning to learn in a foreign language can be. Personal experience has taught me that when a child does not understand the academic language being used by the teacher and peers, feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, self-doubt, and a sense of being an outsider may prevent the child from learning. Linguist Stephen Krashen (1987) introduced the Affective Filter Hypothesis in the 1980s; this hypothesis embraces the view that negative emotional responses to

the learning environment may interfere with the process of learning (Krashen, 1987, 2013). Affective factors, although not causal, play a facilitative role in academics. Krashen asserted students who are highly motivated, have self-confidence, have a positive self-image, and have a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in learning because there is no “block” inhibiting comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982, 1987, 1988, 2013). The ethic of care in education upholds the implementation of instructional procedures that create risk-free environments where students’ affective filters are low; classrooms in which students can feel at ease, cared for, and confident enough to be motivated to take risks in challenging instructional tasks (Alder, 2002; Burleson & Thoron, 2014; Davis, H. A., 2003; Davis, L., 2010; Deiro, 2003; Gallagher, 2013; Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008; Miller, 2008; Noddings, 1988, 1995, 2005a, 2005b, 2012; Pompa et. al, 2011; Rimm-Kauffman & Sandillos (n.d.); Sha, 2009). It is important to explore the quality of instructional environments provided by caring teachers and the magnitude of the influence these environments have in the reading achievement of one of the most disadvantaged student groups, ELLs.

Teachers and school administrators seem preoccupied with meeting federal and state accountability mandates and act as if the main priority were to prepare students for state assessments, and in many instances, they tend to overlook the quality of the classroom setting (King & Chan, 2011; Valli & Buese, 2007). The fact is government demands quality education for all students and recognizes that classroom environment and positive teacher-student relationships are critical for the academic success of all students (teachfortexas.org, 2016, Nov.; U. S. Department of Education, 2016, Oct.). Currently, Texas evaluates teachers through the new Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). The T-TESS is structured in a way teaching practices are evaluated holistically; its design is centered on the constant teacher-student

interactions and gauges the effectiveness of teachers based on how students respond to the teachers' didactic practices. This new evaluation system is divided into four domains: (1) Planning, (2) Instruction, (3) Learning Environment, and (4) Professional Practices and Responsibilities. It also consists of 16 dimensions categorized among the four domains. Domain 1, "Planning," includes the dimension of "Knowledge of Students" which states, "Through knowledge of students and proven practices, the teacher ensures high levels of learning, social-emotional development and achievement for all students" (teachfortexas.org, 2016, Nov. p. 3). "Achieving Expectations," under Domain 2, states, "The teacher supports all learners in their pursuit of high levels of academic and social-emotional success" (teachfortexas.org, 2016, Nov., p. 5). Domain 2 also serves as a means to evaluate teachers on meeting the needs of diverse students through the Dimensions of "Content Knowledge and Expertise" and "Differentiation." Under the "Content Knowledge and Expertise" Dimension, a "distinguished" educator knows the students so well that he or she consistently anticipates possible challenges students might encounter during a lesson and proactively plans for teaching techniques that will ease comprehension; moreover, distinguished teachers plan lessons in a manner that provide students to use different types of thinking (e.g. analytical, practical, creative, etc.) and that facilitate students' understanding of how the lesson fits within the discipline and within real-world situations. The Dimension of "Differentiation" looks for evidence of how the educator adapts the instructional experience to the diverse needs of the students to ensure mastery of the content being covered. The Dimension "Classroom Environment, Routines and Procedures," under Domain 3, evaluates classroom setting; it looks for evidence that the teacher provides students with a "safe, accessible, and efficient classroom" (teachfortexas.org, 2016, Nov., p. 12). Lastly, Domain 3 focuses on teacher-behaviors that demonstrate a classroom of actively engaged

students who collaborate in a respectful manner with other students and the teacher under the Dimension “Classroom Culture” (teachfortexas.org, 2016, Nov.).

Research focused on teacher-student relationships conducted during the last two decades has reported that when students perceive their teachers as genuinely caring about them, this positive perception motivates them and substantially impacts their attitude towards schoolwork, their desire to learn, and their behavior because they want to please those who care about them (Bae, 2011; Becker & Luthar, 2002; Bulach et al., 1998; Davis, H. A., 2003; Deiro, 1996, 2003; Gallagher, 2013; Garza, 2009; Goldstein, 1998, 1999, 2002; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Lewis, Ream, Bocian, Cardullo, Hammond, & Fast, 2012; Miller, 2008; Noddings, 2005a, 2012). By fostering positive bonds with their pupils, teachers create supportive classroom environments in which students learn and practice socially appropriate behaviors and learn about academic expectations and how to attain such expectations. Teachers who provide their students with opportunities to practice positive social interactions among their peers and other individuals in the classroom enable students to gain a sense of security, a sense of high self-esteem, and a positive self-concept; hence, reducing anxiety, developing students’ motivation to be in school, and enhancing their desire to learn (Gallagher, 2013; McCormick, O’Connor, Capella, & McClowry, 2013). Saunders (2015) affirmed it is important to entice students’ motivation to learn, and Shrum and Glisan (2010) asserted “motivation has been identified as the most influential factor in successful learning...” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, pp. 31-32). Investigations have demonstrated a connection between motivation and reading. Motivation to read is predictive of performance in standardized assessments (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008); it is correlated with longer time spent in reading and in reading a vast range of topics (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Additionally, motivation to read results in greater frequency of reading (Baker &

Wigfield, 1999) and in improved reading comprehension (Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, Humenick, & Littles, 2007; Guthrie, Wigfield, Humenick, Perencevich, Taboada, & Barbosa, 2006; Mancini-Marshall, 2014).

Motivation has been recognized as a predictor of reading performance. When students are highly motivated to read, the likelihood of reading comprehension increases (Guthrie et al., 2007; Guthrie et al., 2006; Retelsdorf, Köller, & Möller, 2010). Intrinsic motivation, and not extrinsic motivation, was determined to be positively correlated with text comprehension by Wang and Guthrie (2004). When motivation to read is intrinsic, students read for the pure enjoyment of reading as a pleasurable task, or because of a keen interest in the topic being read; consequently, students involve themselves in reading activities more frequently, which means that reading skills are practiced more often which may facilitate a deeper level of learning (Hodges, 2012) and improved reading achievement (Topping, Samuels, & Paul, 2007). The adage asserts, “practice makes perfect”; well, time spent in reading engagement strongly relates to children’s text comprehension and achievement. Topping, et al. (2007) examined the quantity read, the appropriateness of the reading selection as compared to the students’ current reading level, and classroom placement; their study concluded that regardless of the students’ beginning level of reading achievement, the amount of time spent in reading activities had a positive relationship to reading achievement.

It has been established that when students’ intrinsic motivation to learn is activated, they find a purpose for learning, develop a more positive attitude towards school (Mancini-Marshall, 2014; Saunders, 2015), and become self-determined at seeking learning opportunities, thus allowing higher quality of learning to flourish. “They will be more open to the input, and it will strike ‘deeper’” (Krashen, 1982, p. 31). Nevertheless, in addition to students’ own interest in

reading, one must also consider the idea that what motivates students to read intrinsically may well be influenced by the relationships with their teachers. Whether conscientiously or inadvertently, teachers model behaviors and self-expectations for students, and students often shape their behaviors after their teachers' values (Gallagher, 2013).

Out of an established positive rapport with the teachers, students are better motivated to take an active role in the learning process; therefore, building nurturing teacher-student relationships is critical in building ELL students' motivation to read. This research project benefited ELLs, researchers, educators, and policymakers by enriching the extant data on caring learning environments and the effect that caring teachers possibly have on the reading achievement of ELLs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Effective instructional practices embody the quality of relations between educators and pupils. A worthy measure of relationship quality is caring, which is the ability to listen to, relate to, and be moved by the troubles or feelings of the other individual (Noddings, 1984, 1996; Ryan, 2011; Tarlow, 1996; Thompson, 2010). The manifestation of caring in the classroom has been reported to facilitate a secure classroom environment that is associated with learning (Lewis et al., 2012; Rogers, & Webb, 1991; Schaps, Schaeffer, & McDonell, 2001). Bulach, Malone, and Castleman (1995) identified significant positive correlation ( $k = +.52$ ) between classroom climate and academic achievement in their work with 611 teachers and 27 schools in Kentucky. The purpose of this correlational study was to investigate the possible influence that teacher-caring behaviors had in their students' reading achievement, in particular, the reading achievement of ELLs. As part of this study, I examined whether a statistically significant relationship existed between upper elementary reading teachers' caring behaviors, as perceived



by their students, and these students' reading achievement at three campuses located along the Texas-Mexico border. In addition, the study analyzed if there was a statistically significant difference between ELLs' and Non-ELLs' perceptions of their teachers' caring behaviors. The study also attempted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the reading achievement of ELLs and Non-ELLs. Lastly, the study examined if there was a statistically significant difference in the teachers' perceptions of their own teacher-caring behaviors and their students' perceptions of the teachers' caring behaviors.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of teachers' caring behaviors were examined through the administration of the teacher's and the student's versions of the instrument *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998). The survey consisted of four demographical questions and a total of 26 items that were categorized into five factors: (a) ability to reduce anxiety, (b) willingness to listen, (c) rewarding positive behavior, (d) being a good friend, and (e) appropriate use of criticism. Through the survey, each teacher obtained an overall score that represented the degree to which the teacher was perceived to display caring behaviors (Bulach et al., 1998).

Students' reading achievement was measured by determining the students' growth in scores obtained on the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmarks. The selected school district administered released STAAR assessments as benchmarks. Students in third and fourth grade were tested on December 12, 2017 for the pre-test and on February 21, 2017 for the post-test. Students in fifth grade were administered the pre-test on December 6, 2017 and the post-test on January 31, 2017. The school district opted to utilize released STAAR assessments as benchmarks to ensure students were tested on the same set of knowledge and skills that they would be tested on during the state assessment at the end of the school year; additionally, the

field was leveled for all students by allowing them to have the same designated supports or accommodations they would get on the actual STAAR test. Although benchmarks were primarily used to predict students' performance on the state exam, teachers and campus administrators were expected to use the data derived from these benchmark tests to guide and adjust instruction.

Furthermore, the school district selected for this study, implemented a reading scope and sequence developed by a group of selected teachers and instructional coordinators from within the district. This common curriculum was implemented at every school in the district. The scope and sequence vertically and horizontally aligned not only the content taught, but also the instructional materials to be used for each lesson. As a result, all students in a given grade level were taught and assessed with the same instruments and with the same rubrics.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the caring behaviors of third, fourth, and fifth grade reading teachers, as determined by their students' responses to the instrument *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher*, and these students' reading achievement, as measured by their growth on the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmark assessments?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in the degree to which third, fourth, and fifth grade ELLs and Non-ELLs perceive teacher-caring as determined by their rating of their reading teachers on the instrument entitled *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher*?

3. Is there a statistically significant difference between the reading achievement of third, fourth, and fifth grade ELLs and Non-ELLs as measured by their growth on the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmarks?
4. Is there a statistically significant difference between the way third, fourth, and fifth grade reading teachers perceive their own caring behaviors and the way their students perceive their teachers' caring behaviors, as determined by the teachers' self-reported and student-reported responses on *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher*?

### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

Characteristics of the study that limit and define the boundaries of the investigation, but that the researcher may control, such as the population selected, are known as delimitations (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). This study focused only on the students enrolled in grades 3, 4, and 5 at three elementary schools, and data resulting from the investigation might not necessarily generalize to all ELLs and Non-ELLs. Moreover, the study took place in a town bordering Mexico where most students, both ELLs and Non-ELLs, are from Mexican descent, and the results might not be applicable to students of more diverse backgrounds.

External factors may also limit the study; limitations are aspects of the investigation that present potential weaknesses of the study, but that are out of the researchers' control (Gay et al., 2006). Possible limitations of this study may be that students' may have had different reading teachers in prior school years and experienced differences in previous reading instruction, as well as differences in prior overall learning experiences. In an effort to control for these limitations, teacher attrition was considered when selecting the sites for the study. Moreover, students may not be truthful when responding to the questions posed on the survey for various reasons such as a desire to help their teachers look good on the survey, have a negative attitude toward the

teacher, or feel threatened thinking their teacher might find out how they answered the questionnaire and retaliate against the students. These conditions may have resulted in teachers receiving false scores on the teacher caring behaviors instrument. To help reduce the chances of this happening, students completed the survey in the schools' computer labs, away from their classroom teachers. In addition, students were reassured that only I, as the researcher, would have access to their responses, and their teachers would not read or see the completed surveys. Additionally, teachers might also not have been truthful when answering the survey regarding their own caring behaviors, thus resulting in the collection of false data.

### **Definition of Terms Relevant to the Study**

**Caring.** An ongoing process associated with protecting others; it involves the ability to listen to, empathize with, and be moved by the troubles or feelings of others (Noddings, 1984, 1996; Tarlow, 1996).

**Behaviors.** Actions or reactions of an individual in response to the surrounding environment (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, n.d.); behaviors display personal values, beliefs, and experiences that can be conveyed both verbally or non-verbally.

**Caring Teacher.** Caring teachers take time to establish a trusting and caring connection with their students, who in turn, become more receptive to the content being taught. Research has identified caring teachers as individuals who are committed, engrossed, and motivated to lead all students to success in all aspects of their lives (Dempsey, 1994; Noddings, 1984, 1996, 2002, 2005a, 2005b; Owens, 2000).

**Teachers' Caring Behaviors.** Purposeful actions exhibited when teachers are passionate enough about the well-being of their students to invest ample time and effort to ensure their academic success. Bulach et al. (1998) classified teachers' caring behaviors into five factors: (a)

ability to reduce anxiety, (b) willingness to listen, (c) rewarding good behavior, (d) being a friend, and (e) appropriate use of criticism.

**Benchmark Assessments.** Tests administered periodically throughout the school year to measure students' progress on knowledge and skills assessed on state exams. Data derived from these benchmarks is critical in guiding and adjusting instruction. For the purpose of this investigation, the students' reading achievement was measured by determining the students' growth between the pre- and post-reading State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) benchmarks.

**English Language Learners (ELLs).** An ELL is a student who is in the process of acquiring the English language, might be unable to communicate and/or learn effectively in English, whose native language is other than English, and requires specialized instruction in academic courses and in English language skills (TAC §89.1203(1)). It must be noted that the terms ELLs, Limited English Proficient (LEP) student, and English Learner (EL) are used interchangeably in the literature.

**Non-English Language Learners (Non-ELLs).** For the purpose of this study, the term Non-ELLs refers to a group of students comprised, not only by native English speakers, but also students who were identified as English Language Learners (ELLs) at some point in their schooling, and who have met criteria to be reclassified as English proficient. In the state of Texas, a student may be classified as an English proficient student at the end of the school year upon meeting "state performance standards in English on the criterion-referenced assessment instrument required in the TEC §39.023 for the grade level..." in addition to obtaining "passing grades in all subjects and courses taken." (TAC §89.1225(j)(1)(2)). As per TAC §89.1225(i), the earliest that a student may be reclassified as no longer an ELL is at the end of first grade.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Generally, English Language Learners (ELLs), with scarce essential reading skills, struggle academically and eventually drop out of school at higher rates than Non-ELLs. Strickland and Alvermann (2004) affirmed English Language Learners (ELLs) have historically fallen behind their Non-English Language Learner (Non-ELL) counterparts. As discussed in the previous chapter, ELLs continue to disproportionately lag despite Federal and State mandates requiring equitable education and closing the gaps. Studies continue to indicate fewer ELLs than Non-ELLs reach state-established scores for foundational levels of reading comprehension. (Kindler, 2002; Lonigan & Shanahan, 2010). Furthermore, Hispanic ELLs are reported to drop out of high school at alarming rates, and early literacy problems have been determined to be predictive of drop outs. Students, in general, who were identified as unsuccessful readers at the primary grades, continued to struggle in subsequent grade levels and sooner or later dropped out (Valenzuela, Fuller, & Vasquez, 2006; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). In Texas, students participating in a second language acquisition program in grades 7 through 12 comprised 45.9% of the annual dropout rate for the 2012-2013 school year, and ELLs enrolled in grades 9 through 12 made up 4.9% of the dropout rate for that same school year (TEA, Division of Research and Analysis, 2014, Aug.).

During the last decade, numerous studies have examined the power that a positive learning environment has in enhancing students' academic achievement. As part of this topic, researchers have explored how positive teacher-student relationships, established and maintained by teachers, augment an optimistic classroom culture and provide essential supports for learning.

Lahman (2001) focused on teacher-student caring relationships and chronicled the interactions among a pre-school teacher and her students to depict how the concept of caring is manifested in the classroom. Evidence collected demonstrated the objectives behind the teacher's actions and decisions made in creating a caring learning environment. It was observed that the foundation of this caring classroom was cherishing teacher-to-student relationships, student-to-student relationships, and teacher-to-parent relationships, as well as teacher-to-teacher relationships. It was concluded that caring for the students' social-emotional needs enables the child to further benefit from school experiences.

Campus climate and culture have also been explored in relation to caring learning environments. Johnston (2002) used a narrative research approach to analyze campus leadership practices that demonstrate an ethic of care and the impact that such practices have on the campus culture and climate, programs, organizational policies, and established procedures. In narrative research methodology, the researcher attempts to capture the voice of human experience through stories or life experiences collected from one or more individuals, observations conducted by the researcher, field notes, and the collection of sample artifacts, such as photographs and documents that relate to the study (Creswell, 2007). In this particular study, Johnston gathered stories of care from the school principal and five teachers at an academically successful public elementary school that has received several academic awards and has been rated "Exemplary" and "Recognized" by the state of Texas. The stories of care were collected through one-to-one interviews with the selected elementary school principal and five regular education teachers representing grades first, third, fourth, and fifth as well as physical education. Criteria for selection of the site was that it must have been rated as "Exemplary" or "Recognized" by TEA within the previous two years, service a minority student population of at least 35%, and service

an economically disadvantaged student population of at least 50%. Furthermore, the school principal must have been in the position at the campus for a minimum of five years. The only criterion for teacher selection was to have been in the school at least three of the past five school years. Data gathered in this study demonstrated teachers' "intimate knowledge" of the school's daily life as is typical of caring educational leaders (Noddings, 2005b). Teachers interviewed knew their students well, the students' personal family life, other members of the staff, and the community as a whole. Continuity of people in place (Noddings, 2005b) was also noted at this campus with at least three generations of family life and teachers' tenure. The personal relationships that have been built among the staff and community served have nurtured a bond of trust and confidence, a distinctive characteristic of caring environments (Bulach, et al., 1998). Moreover, the physical education teacher's involvement in providing students with physical activities that foster their development of life-long skills such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle, socialization, and safety revealed ways in which teachers at this campus cared for their students, and how the students cared for themselves and other members of their community. The gym teacher's engrossment in the growth and education of the students also demonstrated that not only classroom teachers take responsibility of the well-being and development of the students at the selected campus. At this school, a sense of community was established by having all stakeholders contribute to the growth of all students. Other practices that relate to caring learning environments observed at this campus included print rich classrooms where students' writing and products were highlighted, implementation of cooperative learning, an overall at-ease learning environment where students felt comfortable and were encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities, and camaraderie and collegiality as a way of school life (Bulach et al., 1998).



In *An ethic of care in practice*, Rabin (2003) analyzed how seven teachers at a private elementary school developed and maintained positive teacher-student relationships based on the teachers' narratives of their practices with their students. The teachers' narrated experiences were examined through the lens of Nel Noddings' ethic of care. Although the teachers' perceptions of care in the classroom did not fully parallel Noddings' theory of moral education, several commonalities were distinguished. Noddings' notion of moral education and care centers on practice, modeling, dialogue, and confirmation (Noddings, 2002). The teachers expressed they perceived themselves as role models for their students and recognized their influence on their students' behaviors in developing and nourishing effective relationships. Teachers described respectful dialogue as a means to better understand others and to establish effective relationships. Throughout the study, the teachers spoke about the importance of encouraging students to learn to relate to others effectively, and they intentionally provided opportunities for their students to practice these behaviors throughout the school day. Confirmation was another commonality noted; teachers considered that looking for positives in their students and acknowledging them affirmed a sense of a better self and consequently fostered an environment that enabled effective relationships.

The influence of teachers' caring behaviors in high school students' performance grades and behavior was studied by Miller (2008). This study focused on 131 students in six classrooms. The Likert-type instrument *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998) was implemented to collect data regarding teachers' caring behaviors as perceived by their students. The survey consisted of four demographic items and 26 caring behaviors classified into five factors of behaviors that, according to Bulach et al. (1998), can be used by teachers to create a caring learning environment; these five factors are: (a) reduce

anxiety; (b) demonstrate willingness to listen; (c) reward students for their appropriate behaviors; (d) be a friend; (e) recognize students' behaviors or appropriate use of criticism.

The survey was selected based on its reliability and validity as demonstrated in the investigation conducted by Bulach et al. (1998). The reliability estimate of the total survey, using Cronbach's alpha, was around .77; to establish the validity of the instrument, Bulach et al. (1998) collected the opinions of 116 practicing educators (teachers and administrators) to determine if the instrument had construct validity. Data gathered from the survey was analyzed to determine the level of teachers' caring behaviors, the resulting teachers' caring behaviors scores, and the significance of the five factors of teachers' caring behaviors. Miller's (2008) study demonstrated that the teachers' behaviors that reduce anxiety (i.e., calling students by their names, fair and just enforcement of classroom rules, providing a positive, safe and orderly classroom, maintaining eye contact with students) had the strongest relationship with students' academic and behavior grades.

The effect that caring teachers have on at-risk students has also been explored. In Texas, at-risk students are students who are experiencing or have experienced low academic achievement, and who have the potential to become drop outs. In general, these students are in need of provisional, or ongoing intervention to succeed academically. The Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) of Texas looks at 13 criteria to determine if a student who is under 21 years of age is at-risk of dropping out of school and, therefore, should be identified as "at-risk". Some of these indicators include not performing satisfactorily on a readiness test for the PK through third grade levels, not maintaining a minimum average of 70 on a scale of 100 for grades 7 through 12, being retained for one or more school years, being placed in an alternative education program, and being a student of limited English Proficiency among

others (PEIMS, 2013-2014). Thompson's (2010) multiple case study analyzed the social and affective teacher-student interactions of four middle and high school caring teachers and students identified as "at-risk". The analysis of the data derived from this research identified six common themes across the four caring classrooms: (a) the teacher's perspectives of at-risk students, (b) the importance of acknowledging the need to be flexible based on the needs of the students, (c) the importance of the role that relationships play, (d) the creation of opportunities for students to develop a positive sense of self, (e) the value of positive classroom experiences, and (f) the negotiation of power (Thompson, 2010).

Bae (2011) looked at the role of caring in physical education at three middle schools through the responses of sixth grade students. Bae interviewed the selected teachers and students and focused on the interpersonal interactions among the teachers and students and the affect those interactions had on students. Bae observed that students seemed to be sensitive to the learning environment intentionally created by the teachers and adjusted their behavior to the classroom atmosphere. Moreover, the ambience of the classroom influenced the teacher-student relationships, and the interpersonal interactions among the teachers and students influenced the students' perceptions of the quality of their educational experiences.

Teacher-student relationships are important in the development of children's cognitive, social and emotional maturity. Ryan (2011) investigated how Head Start Teacher's beliefs and practices connected to positive teacher-student relationships. The study focused on eight teachers at eight Head Start classrooms located in seven communities in the Midwest. The communities ranged from small rural communities to a mid-size city. Data were collected through the observation instrument *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS). This observation tool is used to describe aspects of classroom quality in early childhood classrooms. To establish

reliability, Ryan attended a two-day CLASS reliability training which included observing and coding classroom segments for inter-rater reliability of 87%. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were also conducted to gather data; the same general questions were asked to all eight participants, but follow-up questions depended on each teacher's responses to the guiding questions. Ryan (2011) posited that a warm, supportive environment can heighten the growth and development of young children. It was also noted that some of the teacher behaviors observed during the study, such as validating children's experiences and feelings, involvement in learning with the child, consistency, encouragement, and high expectations among other behaviors, have been associated with positive teacher-student relationships. Data gathered through the CLASS observations and individual interviews revealed Head Start teachers facilitate positive teacher-child relationships by incorporating a self-centered pedagogy in which students are actively engaged in hands-on activities reflective of their interests. Analysis of the data indicated Head Start teachers also view knowing their individual students and their families well as a critical component in building relationships with their pupils. The importance of creating an atmosphere of trust by building a safe and inviting classroom, by providing consistent behavior management, and by enforcing structures and routines consistently were also brought up by the teachers throughout the study.

Kissinger (2011) analyzed a core of seven middle school teachers considered by their colleagues as consistently demonstrating caring behaviors toward their pupils. Through individual interviews and classroom observations, the selected teachers' "most common and prominent" (p. 53) characteristics that enabled a caring teacher-student connection were identified. Six major themes emerged from the data collected: (a) love for teaching and career satisfaction; (b) patience and flexibility; (c) respect for students; (d) personal responsibility for

student outcomes; (e) high expectations for all students; and (f) building student's self-confidence. Kissinger (2011) posited that these caring teachers seemed to enjoy engaging with their students and interacting with them. It was also pointed out that these caring teachers obtained a sense of fulfillment, enriching both their personal and professional lives, through current and past students' feedback. The qualities of being patient and flexible came as a recurring idea, often based on respecting and understanding the challenges and struggles that are common among adolescents, as well as valuing the students' opinions and personal interests. A prominent quality detected among the seven teachers was the belief that what teachers want and do for their students, in and out of the schoolroom, play a crucial role in the students' academic achievement. Another idea mentioned by all seven teachers was that to be successful with their students, they needed to extend their teacher-student relationships beyond the parameters of what is expected from a teacher, "doing more for them than what they are expected to do, professionally" (p. 71). Having high expectations for all students regardless of their status or classification (i.e., Gifted and Talented, Economically Disadvantaged, At-Risk, English Language Learner) in terms of academics and social behaviors was also brought up by these teachers in addition to frequent encouragement and constant expressions of belief in students' abilities.

Nurturing teacher-caring relationships also have a positive impact in other content areas such as mathematics. Lewis et al. (2012) studied teacher caring in relation to math self-efficacy and math achievement among ELLs. This study examined Hispanic elementary school students' perception of teacher caring and how it relates to their math self-efficacy and math test performance. The investigation consisted of a correlational/comparative analysis of longitudinal data for 1,456 Hispanic students in 84 fifth and sixth grade classrooms. To conduct comparative

analysis, students were classified as fluent English speakers (EF) and Spanish-dominant English learners (EL) as indicated by the students' demographical data provided by the school district. The students' math achievement was obtained from the California Standards Test for Mathematics (CST-M) scores. The CST-M is a multiple-choice assessment instrument based on California's content standards that students should acquire by the end of each grade level. The assessment includes items covering algebra and functions, measurement and geometry, number sense, and statistics, data analysis, and probability. Teacher-caring and math self-efficacy were measured through the *Student Motivation Questionnaire* (SMQ), which measures student perceptions of teacher caring. The SMQ was created by researchers in the Math and Science Foundation as part of a project focused on facilitating math-science partnerships with reliable and valid self-report tools for assessing a variety of student motivation and classroom environment variables (Lewis et al., 2012). The results of the investigation demonstrated that caring teachers intensify can-do attitudes in math in all their students, consequently, positively impacting their students' math scores on the CST-M. Moreover, the data depicted a stronger effect of teacher caring among EL. Additionally, data demonstrated teacher caring on math scores was completely mediated by math self-efficacy in EF whereas, it was partially mediated by math self-efficacy for EL.

As can be seen, many studies have focused on the importance of teacher-student relationships, and how these relationships affect early academic and social outcomes as well as future academic outcomes (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Cataldi, Laird, & Kewalramani, 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2001); however, few studies have looked specifically at the effects that teacher-student relationships may have on the reading achievement of ELLs.

Society views school as the path for opportunities to better one's life; Weinstein (2002), stated, "Schools function as door openers as well as gatekeepers for access to knowledge, and for meaningful participation in work and in the broader society" (p. 23). If schools are to open doors for ELLs to become productive members of society, then it is vital for public schools to center their attention on the needs of ELLs; it is imperative that, as educators search for instructional strategies that support ELLs, they understand that ELLs are a heterogeneous and complex group of students. The instructional strategies implemented to support ELLs must consider students who come from diverse upbringings, who speak different languages, and who come to school with different experiences.

To address how an ethic of care can facilitate ELLs' reading achievement, this chapter is divided into five main sections. The first section offers a definition of care. The second part examines three theoretical frameworks that have provided critical information on caring relationships and education. The theoretical perspectives examined in this chapter include the Sociological Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Noddings' Ethic of Care. In the third portion of the chapter, I present a review of the role of caring relationships in the education of ELLs. The fourth section explores the characteristics of caring teachers, common practices in caring classrooms, and the influence that caring teachers have on academic achievement. The final segment discusses the remaining gaps that have been identified in the literature and the rationale for centering this investigation on teacher caring behaviors.

### **Definition of Care**

There are different descriptions and interpretations of caring in education; nonetheless, all definitions concur in that care is a basic need of all humans, that it is an ongoing process, and that it is associated with protecting others. Caring can be considered an ongoing process that is

based on mutual unconditional acceptance of one another and associated with a need to help each other (Noddings, 1984; Tarlow, 1996). Noddings (1996) views caring as “not a psychological state or innate attribute, but as a set of relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realization, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture, and possibility” (p. 13). Noddings (1984) posited that the concept of care applies to the notion of developing caring abilities. When a person cares, she or he truly hears, feels, and sees what the other individual wants, needs, and expects. As with any key concept, the conceptualization of the term “care” depends on situating the concept within a specific context. The approach to understanding “care” within the confines of this study has been to examine the literature that contextualizes “care” in the school setting.

### **Theoretical Concepts**

When considering the influence of teachers’ caring behaviors on educational settings, on student academic achievement, and on student emotional growth, there is a wide array of theoretical perspectives that could provide useful and rich information. For the purpose of this study, three theoretical frameworks were explored: (a) The Sociocultural Theory, (b) Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, and (c) Noddings’ Ethic of Care. The three theories were chosen to be included in this study because, as a researcher and educator, I have found each of them to have significant value for the topic being explored. The three perspectives have influenced and contributed to my understanding of why teacher-student caring relationships play such a powerful role when educating ELLs.

#### **The Sociocultural Theory**

An important theory related to the ethic of care in educational settings is Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, which looks at human behavior from both social and cultural perspectives.



In Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, learning is situated within interrelated cultural and communicative processes (Aimin, 2013; Lim & Renshaw, 2001). Vygotsky takes the perspective that children's thoughts and behaviors are guided by their social interactions; thus, development is not only cognitive and physical, but social as well. Vygotsky's theory states that the social context is of crucial importance if teachers are to be successful with their students. In the Sociocultural Theory, learning is influenced by social interactions that are heavily scaffolded, and by social contexts that enable students to adapt prior knowledge and transform their schemata with important academic knowledge and skills (Aimin, 2013; Morrow, Rueda, & Lapp, 2009).

A positive relationship between the teacher and the students is a vital component that leads students to reach academic achievement. An optimal teacher-student relationship under the Sociocultural Theory is one that is less authoritarian and more egalitarian; it is a relationship in which the teacher must balance curriculum demands with the personal interests and needs of the students (Aimin, 2013; Jaramillo, 1996). A positive teacher-student relationship is most favorable to the learning process, as it is the guidance of the teacher that works to facilitate learning (Jeon, 2000). As learning is facilitated through a positive teacher-student relationship, students can go beyond their level of actual performance and reach their academic potential; when this happens, students can reach what Vygotsky considered the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky, as cited by Goldstein (1999), defines the ZPD as the distance between the students' actual developmental level and the level of potential development. Goldstein (1999) posited "the affective qualities of the relationship between teacher and student...are what allow the zone of proximal development to take shape in any given situation" (p. 654). Hence, as a teacher closely works with a student in a collaborative way, guiding the

student through learning activities, there is an element of caring for the student, causing mutual pleasure in the child's growing cognitive competence. Effective teachers must be constantly attentive of the social developmental needs of their pupils to facilitate the progress of learning so that the ZPD can be reached; successful teachers see the social cues and know when to set limits and when to allow students to express themselves.

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Abraham Maslow was one of the pioneering leaders in the field of humanistic psychology (O'Connor & Yballe, 2007). Maslow's Theory of a Hierarchy of Needs, represented by a pyramid in which physiological needs are at the base, has historically been widely accepted in the world of social science (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Norwood, 2016, Jan.). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs places physiological needs, safety, and love and belonging at the lower levels of the pyramid and are considered deficiency needs which, when attained, the motivation for fulfilling them is diminished, and the individual can strive to reach the two higher levels, which are esteem and self-actualization. At the center of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, one will find the needs of love and belonging; these two needs are continuously sought by all humans. Commonly, parents are the most often implicit sources considered for meeting a child's needs for love and belonging; however, when children transition into an academic setting, children experience a whole new unknown world, hence going through an entirely new process of needing to feel loved, accepted, valued, and cared for (Kaiser & Raminsky, 2007; Maslow, 1987). With regards to academic achievement and development, Dodd (2000) and Perks (1999) pointed out that for children whose primary caretakers have not adequately satisfied the lower level needs, little progress can be made at the school. The assumption is that it is much more difficult for children to trust others and feel secure as they get older when their primary caretakers have not

satisfactorily met their lower level needs. A sense of security enables students to develop a positive self-concept and academic self-efficacy, which have a significant impact on students' motivation to learn and succeed academically (Gallagher, 2013).

Norwood (2016) presented the following behaviors as Maslow's recommendations for teaching children:

- Being authentic.
- Transcending culture to become citizens of the world.
- Valuing life as precious.
- Finding joy in all kinds of situations and being virtuous.
- Learning from their own character and qualities.
- Ensuring basic needs are met.
- Appreciate beauty and good things life offers.
- Controlled parameters are good, and total lack of restraint is bad.
- Transcending insignificant conflicts.
- Cope with injustice, pain or suffering, and death.
- Learn to make and make good choices including in religious beliefs.

Maslow's theory emphasizes motivation, an attribute frequently discussed in the field of education with regards to engaging students but posited that individuals must meet a series of needs so that they can reach their potential. Maslow's philosophy explains critical components of behavior, including school behavior. It is common for teachers to assume the students' basic needs are met at home; nonetheless, there are students who live in conditions that prevent them from experiencing safety in school and at home, resulting in students directing all their attention and energy on surviving and being distracted by feelings of anxiety (Burlison & Thoron, 2014);

feeling anxious and unsafe can lead students to academic failure. Although ensuring all students' needs are met may be out of the control of the teacher, there are still some things that can be taken care of in the classroom. For instance, Maslow lists "safety" and "belonging" as needs that must be met; teachers can satisfy these needs by creating learning environments in which students feel safe, at-ease of taking risks, and where they experience strong relationships with their peers and teachers (Burlison & Thoron, 2014). Teachers can create this type of environment by modeling and demanding respect, by not allowing derogatory name-calling, and by banning oppression, harassment, and other negative behaviors. Purposefully planning lessons that incorporate cooperative learning can transform the classroom into one of support and belonging because of the friendship that evolves from working with each other, participating in the same clubs, or being part of a team.

Self-esteem is another need that must be fulfilled; it embraces confidence, achievement, respect of others, and individuality. Most people seek positive feelings of themselves, pride in themselves, as well as recognition from their peers (Burlison & Thoron, 2014). Teachers satisfy this need when they persistently acknowledge and celebrate the success of their students; when they focus on finding positives in their students on purpose and announce it to the learning community.

### **Nel Noddings' Ethic of Care**

The ethic of care encompasses the entire classroom milieu. Noddings (2005b) has described school relational experiences between teachers and students within what she has denominated an "Ethic of Care." According to Noddings, an ethic of care is a philosophy based on relationships; it is based on the recognition of needs, relation, and response (Noddings, 1984). Noddings suggested there are three requirements for caring; she affirmed the carer (*the one-*

*caring*) must exhibit engrossment and exhibit motivational displacement, while the person receiving (*cared-for*) must respond in some way to the caring being received (Noddings, 1984, 2005b). The term *engrossment* as defined by Noddings' philosophy entails, not a deep fixation on the cared-for, but refers to thinking about the cared-for and gaining a greater understanding of him or her as an individual; engrossment is said to be essential for caring because an individual's personal and physical state must be understood before the one-caring can determine the most appropriate action (Noddings, 1984). Noddings explains motivational displacement takes place when the behavior of the one-caring is primarily determined by the needs of the cared-for (Noddings, 1984, 2005b). Moreover, Noddings stated caring requires the cared-for to recognize that the one-caring is indeed caring, and that when such recognition takes place, caring is said to be "completed in the other" (Noddings, 1984, p. 4).

Caring for others can emerge naturally or from a sense of obligation towards others. Nel Noddings characterized caring as natural caring (*I want*) and ethical caring (*I must*), and explained natural caring occurs when a person cares about someone out of natural desire; that is, I care about you because I want to care. On the other hand, ethical caring occurs when someone behaves caringly due the belief that caring is the appropriate way to relate with a given individual (Noddings, 1984). In education, the ethic of care takes the form of an obligation to do what is right and the sense that one must do what is right for others (i.e. students) (Noddings, Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2003). Furthermore, caring in schools refers to the relationship formed between teacher and students where teachers respond to the needs of their pupils for example through the incorporation of differentiated instruction based on the students' needs and interests (Katz, Noddings, & Strike, 1999). Under Noddings notion of caring in education, caring teachers are those who actively seek to know their students as individuals (Noddings, 1995,

2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2012). As teachers get to know their students, they gain a better understanding of their students' needs, are encouraged to act in the students' best interest, and become more involved in their students' emotional well-being (Alder, 2002; Tarlow, 1996).

### **The Role of Caring Relationships in the Education of ELLs**

The extant literature identifies several elements that appear to foster the probability of success for academically disadvantaged students, such as ELLs. Two of these factors include caring relationships within the family context that support parental involvement in the educational setting and positive teacher-student relationships and positive learning environments (Gutman & Midgley, 2000).

### **ELLs and their Families as a Support System**

Children who have had positive developmental experiences before they begin formal schooling acquire beliefs, attitudes, values, and connections that help them succeed in school (Comer, 2001; Mabin, 2016). Family characteristics that enable academic attainment include adult supervision, high expectations for academic achievement, and an emphasis on the significance of formal education (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Moreover, families offer children support through conversations regarding the importance of obtaining a formal education, by being actively involved in school functions, and by actively monitoring children's engagement in school (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). The parental support that families provide to successful students is essential for understanding what help ELLs might be missing. The relationship between the parents of academically disadvantaged students and schools can be complex. For instance, academically disadvantaged students such as ELLs often come from families where parents did not have positive relationships with school themselves (Gallagher, 2013; Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003). Because of such experiences,

these parents may not reach out to be involved in their children's academic activities, hence developing an inadequate relationship with their children's school (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). If parents are comfortable in their children's school and communicate and build a positive rapport with the teachers, their children are more likely to feel a positive connection to their learning environment and to their teachers. When parents perceive schools as caring for all children, positive school-family relationships emerge, thus leading to more optimistic outcomes for students (Woolley & Bowen, 2007).

### **Positive Teacher-Student Relationships and Positive Learning Environments**

Everyone has a basic need to relate or to connect to others (Goldstein, 2002, 1999, 1998; Noddings, 1984). All human relationships based on interpersonal connections present the most vital component in happiness (Noddings, 2002, 2005a). Goodenow (1993) stated that children seemed to feel this need even more strongly than adults. Children who are fortunate enough to feel secure and strongly attached to loving and caring adults that surround them are free to engage constructively in new interactions and learning activities (Goldstein, 2002). In the classrooms, a caring relationship is initiated and maintained by the teacher, while the student receives the caring (Noddings, 2005a, 2005b). However, teachers must attend to the affective needs of all their students in addition to maintaining documentation, to monitoring the academic progress of their students, and to planning appropriate interventions based on their students' needs. Such demands of the job make it difficult for teachers to attend to the affective needs of all students and consequently, academically disadvantaged students, such as ELLs, receive "less support and guidance from teachers..." (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p 561). Additionally, with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, and now as updated by the Every Student Succeeds (ESSA) Act mandating equitable education and closing achievement gaps

(Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015), teachers have placed a major emphasis on high-stakes policies, thus leaving less time to create and to maintain personal connections with their students; it seems as if the era of accountability has transformed schools and school districts into systematic organizations centered on scores and state rankings (King & Chan, 2011; Valli & Buese, 2007).

Supportive teachers with positive expectations for all students play a very important role in the academic success of ELLs. Caring relationships involving educators and their pupils are vital parts of classroom experiences and are especially significant to those children who depend on nurturing relationships to grow and sustain their well-being (Alder, 2002; Gallagher, 2013; Noddings, 1995). Caring relationships between teachers and students provide an emotionally safe learning environment that facilitates participation in learning activities because it allows the students to feel connected, respected, and valued by their teacher (Dempsey, 1994; Gallagher, 2013; McCormick, et al., 2013).

Students from minority background are often challenged on the course of their lives. One major challenge that many minority students encounter is teachers from cultural backgrounds that differ from theirs. Gutman and Midgley (2000) affirmed that when the culture of teachers differs from theirs, minority students are more prone to feel alienated and to sense rejection in an environment where values and beliefs mismatch their own; consequently, minority students do not perform well academically. Moreover, some minority students may experience poverty, racism, and violence which in turn, may affect their performance in school. Minority students who come from low socio-economic status may not have access to adequate resources, to books and to other instructional materials that can aid in meeting their cognitive needs (Devlin et al., 2012; McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson, & Robinson, 2008). Furthermore, minority



students may reside in unsafe neighborhoods where violence and threats of violence are recurrent and where encouraging career role models may be missing (Kenny, Blustein, Haase, Jackson, & Perry, 2006). Caring teacher-student relationships can positively impact school experiences of ELLs by bridging the incompatibility between the culture of students and that of the educators, as well as supporting the prevention of some of the damage caused by the stress from acculturation (Devlin et al., 2012).

A school climate in which teachers are enabled to develop a sense of self-efficacy with regards to their success in educating at-risk students generate positive learning environments where students feel at-ease to take risks; thus, resulting in a positive impact in academic performance. Students in at-risk situations often seek a social support network at school, but in learning communities where students experience less teacher support, and where meaningful teacher-student relationships are difficult to develop, the students' need for additional interpersonal connections is often unmet (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Bowen, Rose, & Ware, 2006; Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Rebus, 2005; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; McCormick et al., 2013). A depersonalized school environment may challenge the academic success of minority students who are more likely to feel unconnected in a school setting whose culture seems incompatible with their own (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Mabin, 2016).

The need for caring relationships with adults, specifically those who facilitate healthy decision making, is critical in children's development. Noddings (2012, 2005a, 2005b) stated caring is a fundamental human need, and as such, it is basic to education; the students' emotional needs cannot be separated from their academic needs. Children yearn to feel wanted, accepted, and valued. Children who experience positive adult-child interactions are best able to relate positively to other people in the school setting and bond with them. To better understand the role

of caring relationships in education, the following section of the chapter will examine the characteristics of caring learning environments, the characteristics of caring teachers, and the impact that caring teachers have on ELLs' academic achievement (Comer, 2001; Mabin, 2016).

### **Characteristics of Caring Learning Environments**

A school must have clear and common goals and expectations for all students; collaboration among all key stakeholders and a culture of trust and shared beliefs must be present in all learning settings. The culture of caring begins with the school and funnels into the classroom (Sautner, 2008). Studies conducted over the last twenty years determined that caring was the central factor enabling teachers to better know their students and their cognitive and affective needs; in addition, caring, in educational settings, served to create affective atmospheres that were conducive to learning (Dempsey, 1994; Noddings, 1996; Tarlow, 1996). Noddings (1984, 2005a, 2005b, 2012) affirmed that in caring environments caring relations are manifested through encounters between two human beings in which one is the "one-caring" and the other one is the "cared-for." In the classrooms, this relationship of care is initiated by the teacher, thus the teacher is the "one-caring," and the student is the recipient of care, the "cared-for." As the initiator of the caring encounters, the teacher must actively work at sustaining and nurturing the relationship, while as the recipient of care, the student responds to the efforts of the teacher and acknowledges the teacher's caring attention with appreciation, thus closing what is classified as the "circle of care" (Dempsey, 1994; Noddings, 1984). In caring learning environments, teachers demonstrate the care through attentiveness to individual students' needs, through positive interactions with their students, and by helping their students achieve (Alder, 2002; Noddings, 1984, 2005a, 2005b).

## **Caring Multicultural Classrooms**

In multicultural classrooms, caring teachers focus their attention on the student as a whole and pay close attention to the students' cognitive, affective, and cultural and social needs. Goldstein (2002) affirmed that the implementation of an ethic of care in the classroom enables teachers to accept and support the concept of caring in such a way that enhances and deepens their understanding of teaching; in other words, in an ethic of care, teachers embrace caring in a way that extends further than the gentle smiles and the warm hugs usually found in elementary schools (Goldstein, 2002, 1998). Pang, Rivera and Mora (1999) declared multicultural education evolved from an ethical purpose to care for and teach all children; therefore, caring multicultural classrooms are led by teachers who take on a moral obligation to care for their students within the framework of the students' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Everyone needs general knowledge that goes beyond the basics, but every individual child has different affective and cognitive needs. Teachers in caring multicultural classrooms listen to all students and assist them in attaining the knowledge and attitudes needed to achieve their personal goals, and not simply reaching the goals of the pre-established curriculum. The effective caring multicultural teachers fuse their students' cultural and linguistic characteristics into the pedagogy implemented in the classroom (Pang et al., 1999); hence, taking this into account, caring multicultural classrooms stress the creation of trusting relationships; trust, then, is the groundwork for building an effective academic and social climate for instruction (McCormick et al., 2013). Lim and Renshaw (2001) affirmed teachers in caring multicultural classrooms contribute to societal equity in their efforts to create an educational system that places the academic, emotional, and social needs of children at the center of their multicultural classroom; in creating a learning environment focused on the students' academic, emotional, and social needs, teachers in caring

multicultural classrooms display the following characteristics (Gallagher, 2013; Noddings, 1988, 2012; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandillos, n.d.):

- Teachers are the students' partner in fostering their academic growth.
- Teachers allocate instructional time for dialogue.
- Teachers use teaching moments effectively as opportunities to model caring.
- Teachers treat students with respect and consideration.
- Teachers encourage their students to treat each other with respect and consideration.
- Teachers implement activities which allow for active student interaction.
- Teachers encourage group work and cooperative learning.
- Teachers have high expectations of their students.

Modeling for students, especially at the elementary school level, is a very useful teaching tool. Modeling caring relationships and interactions are an effective tool for creating a caring culture by providing schemas of the concept of caring and love (Gallagher, 2013; Goldstein, 2002, 1998; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandillos, n.d.; Swick, 2007). Caring teachers realize that, throughout the school day, students learn from the explicit and implicit messages they give to their students. Students of different backgrounds learn appropriate social behavior from the social interactions they observe from their teachers and learn problem-solving strategies teachers implement throughout the school day as they mediate for students.

Teacher caring behaviors have a similar effect in students from different cultural backgrounds. Rogers and Freiberg (1994) recognized teacher empathy, a positive classroom environment, and trusting relationships as key elements for promoting effective educational settings where children develop positive attitudes and ownership of their education in a

supportive multicultural environment. The study conducted by Ruben Garza (2009) analyzed the differences between Caucasian and Latino perceptions of a caring teacher. In this investigation, five similar themes surfaced among the responses of the two different ethnic groups. First, the students recognized caring teachers as those who were readily available for the students. Secondly, teachers who provided scaffolding and relevancy during a lesson were also perceived as caring. Thirdly, students identified teachers who modeled kindness through their actions as caring individuals. Another caring characteristic in teachers was their authentic interest in students outside the classroom walls. Lastly, students characterized teachers who provided emotional encouragement in the classroom environment as caring. It may be argued that there are differences among distinct cultures, but as can be noted in Garza's (2009) study, caring teachers possess characteristics that transcend cultures. Educators, therefore, can be confident that caring is perceived, generally, the same in its importance across cultures.

### **Strategies that Enhance Caring in Educational Settings**

It is crucial to identify how teachers communicate to students that they honestly care for them and their needs. Deiro (2003, 1996) stipulated at least six strategies that enhance nurturing caring learning environments through teacher behavior. The strategies that aid in the development of caring relationships in educational settings are as follows:

- Create one-on-one time with their students and maximize individual and small group activities.
- Intersperse personal and academic talk and conduct personal conversations during non-class time.
- Write genuine comments on students' papers

- Use nonverbal communication, such as direct eye contact and touch (shoulder, arm, or other safe areas), to build trust and rapport with students.
- Disclose personal information about self that is relevant to students' needs.
- Establish and maintain high academic expectations for their students and communicate a belief in the students' capacity to meet such expectations.

These six teacher practices enable students to feel an emotional link to their teachers that builds a feeling of trust that the teachers are attentive and responsive to their needs. Success occurs when the teacher cares for the pupils and the students receive the teacher's caring. As previously mentioned, the notion of reciprocity must be present in a caring relationship. Noddings (1984, 2005a, 2005b) posited that if the student perceives the teacher's caring and responds to it, then the student is giving the teacher what the teacher needs most to continue to care. The student, then, rewards the teacher with positive responsiveness, questions, effort, comments, and cooperation.

### **Caring Teachers and How they Develop Caring Relationships**

There are at least three essential characteristics of caring teachers. Tarlow's study (1994) established that a caring individual is sensitive to the needs of others, acts in the best interest of those he or she cares for, is emotionally invested, and does things that are helpful for others. The most important characteristic in a caring learning environment is the presence of a caring teacher who is committed, engrossed, and motivated to lead all students towards excellence in all aspects of their lives. Research has identified teachers' engrossment, commitment, and motivational shift as essential characteristics of caring teachers (Dempsey, 1994; Gallagher, 2013; Mabin, 2016; Noddings, 1984, 2005a, 2005b, 2012; Owens, 2000). Noddings (1984, 2005a, 2005b) views engrossment as thinking about somebody and building a deep understanding of that individual.

Caring teachers display engrossment when considering the cognitive and affective needs of their students. “Caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s” (Noddings, 1984, p. 24), and in creating caring relationships, teachers center their attention on developing a deep understanding of the students’ learning needs (Goldstein, 1999, 2002). In an educational environment, engrossment can also occur when a teacher establishes a caring relationship in which students’ feelings are accepted and students’ experiences are viewed as valuable learning resources.

Commitment, the second characteristic of caring teachers, is perceived through the process of engrossment. Committed teachers value students’ ideas and try to understand and accept the students’ feelings (Noddings, 1984, 2002, 2012; Tarlow, 1996). Through acceptance and nurturance, teachers’ commitment transforms into an unconditional act in which students’ shared experiences are enhanced as students realize their teachers’ commitment to meet their needs and to understand and accept them as individuals (Dempsey, 1994; Mabin, 2016; Noddings, 2002). Nonetheless, commitment and engrossment are not sufficient in developing caring teacher-student relationships. While teachers engross and commit to meet the affective and learning needs of their students, teachers experience a change in their motivation to attend to their students, many times even before meeting their own needs. Caring teachers prioritize their students’ needs and interests and become focused on their well-being both at school and throughout their lives (Noddings, 2005a, 2005b, 2012; Tarlow, 1996). Caring teachers are more likely to devote attention to thinking about and carrying out actions in the best interest of their students (Noddings, 1995, 2005b, 2012).

Teachers develop caring relationships with their students by being authentic individuals who know what they stand for and speak the truth with care and thoughtfulness. Caring teachers

respond to their students with honesty creating a climate where students feel at-ease and safe to be authentic and risk takers. Teachers can also cultivate caring relationships by being open and accepting of students and by valuing their students' feelings and opinions without judgment (Larrivee, 2000).

### **The Influence of Caring Teachers**

Empirical research has analyzed and described how teachers define the concept of caring in classrooms (Alder, 2002; Dempsey, 1994; McCormick et al., 2013; Rudasill, Reio, Stipanovic, & Taylor, 2010; Tarlow, 1996). Mainly, such investigations have been completed in search of improving student learning within a classroom environment in which students feel cared for and valued by their educators. Dempsey (1994) completed an ethnographic study analyzing how 10 elementary school teachers defined the concept of caring in their classrooms, thus focusing on teachers' relationships with children and the contexts in which they teach. During interviews, teachers were asked to describe examples of good teaching and good lessons. It was reported that the teachers understood their relationships with their students in terms of caring, loving children, respecting children, being sympathetic, knowing their students, and understanding them. The results from the study showed that connections, relationships, and caring are very much a part of the knowledge base of teaching. Additionally, the study concluded that as students become excited and motivated to learn, teachers feel a sense of accomplishment and are motivated to continue implementing good teaching practices (Dempsey, 1994).

Caring teachers make it a point to know their students and the circumstances in which they live. Caring teachers often communicate with their students and acknowledge and value their cultural backgrounds and daily lives (Devlin et al., 2012; Tarlow, 1996). This communication enables teachers to better understand the affective and cognitive needs of their



students and to create better lesson plans that incorporate the students' daily living into their learning experiences. Noddings (2005b) affirmed that when teachers relate the students' daily lives to the subject matter, students become more interested in the world, and acquire skills in finding information. Murdock and Miller (2003) concluded that teacher caring includes interpersonal support and respect, as well as behaviors that exhibit a commitment to student learning, such as high expectations and appropriate class preparation. In addition, they denoted that teacher caring makes the largest unique contribution to intrinsic valuing of education.

Students learn how to socialize and relate with others in school. Theorist Neil Noddings (2005a, 2005b, 2012) proposed there is a need for pedagogy to build caring relationships between students and educators given the fact that schools provide a cultural framework that instructs students as to how they should live in the world. With a focus on respect, responsibility, and social skills, schools provide the rules with which all human behaviors are judged. An ethic of care entails a web of relationships at its core. The connections or relationships between teachers and students promote the sharing of norms and values of the society (Coleman, 1988); hence, the ethic of care in school settings entails the development of interdependent relationships rather than independence. The supportive relationship that is developed among teachers and students promote the sharing of norms and values, which allows for the attainment of goals that would otherwise not be reached individually. For example, academic achievement is not an individual effort, but rather a collective process between teachers and students. Within our educational system, one of the primary purposes of education is to prepare students to meet the demands of the community, to be an integral and productive part of the social group. For many children, schools provide the experience of membership in an enlarged common community.

Meier (2002) affirmed, that when children do not experience being part of a common community, it can be detrimental to their academic careers.

The quality of teacher-child relationships provides a protective factor and influences the social development of the students (Davis, H. A., 2003; Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, & Barbarin, 2008; Hughes et al., 2008). The longitudinal study conducted by Hughes et al. (2008) investigated the quality of teacher-child relationships and their effect on academic achievement. The results of this study showed there was clearly a relationship between a child's academic achievement and teacher-student relationships. Teacher-student relationships had a significant effect on student engagement, which in turn correlated with math and reading achievement.

### **The Influence of Caring Teachers in ELLs**

The philosophy of the ethic of care does not imply that the simple implementation of caring relationships equates to the academic achievement of ELLs; nonetheless, the establishment of caring relationships between educators and their students lays the foundation for successful pedagogical encounters to occur. As educators focus on their students' affective and cognitive needs, as well as on their cultural differences, they gain the students' trust, which in turn, leads students to openly accept what the teachers are trying to teach them (Gallagher, 2013). Noddings (1999) proposed that, as teachers engage in instructional dialogues and informal conversations with their students, they access critical information regarding the students' needs, talents, habits, and passions; such important information is vital when developing appropriate lessons for the ELLs' individual academic progress. To schema theorists, learning is a sophisticated process of conceptual mental structures representing the individual's perception of the world and builds upon their background knowledge. Noddings' (1999) proposal parallels

with notions found in schema theory and other constructivist reading theories. Students can acquire a better understanding of abstract concepts once a solid foundation of concrete, relevant concepts has been established by a caring teacher who utilizes the students' background as a teaching tool. As teachers attentively listen to their students, they become cognizant of their students' schemata and are then able to incorporate the students' background knowledge into their teaching by activating and constructing knowledge where needed, thus resulting in effective literacy lessons catered to the exclusive interests of the pupils (Weaver, 2009).

In addition to activating students' schemata, the caring-centered multicultural teacher may enhance ELLs' cognitive skills through features of effective instruction that elicit the students' creativity. For example, after reading a story, the teacher can implement activities such as response journals, dialogues, graphic organizers, reader's theatre, story boxes, story-telling, literature response groups, dioramas, problem-solving approaches, and hands-on strategies which make reading more concrete (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Because the caring multicultural teacher gets to know the student on a personal level, he or she can adequately generate differentiated instruction based on the students' needs.

The ethic of care in educational settings calls for constant assessment of students' needs, goals, and cultural backgrounds as well as the implementation of interventions based on such needs, interests, and schemata. Such concepts fully reflect what research in literacy development and second language acquisition has proven to be essential (Echevarria & Graves, 2007). Regarding activating background knowledge, Cary (2007) noted, "the outside story unfolds away from school and is built from a thousand and one experiences hooked to home, home country, and new country factors, including values, attitudes, worldview, family dynamics, communication style, language status, and political climate" (p.29). In addition to continuous

assessment of students' needs, evaluation of learning should be on-going, personalized, and involve the student in judging his own academic achievement. Teachers who successfully build caring relationships with their students confirm that personal knowledge of the student enables them to motivate the students and to engage them with relevant scaffolding opportunities (Grande, 2008). Caring requires certain practical skills and principles for building close and trusting relationships. Teachers require interpersonal skills, such as effective communication, empowering skills, conflict resolution, negotiating skills, accountability skills, candidness and a nonjudgmental attitude as well as respectfulness (Deiro, 1996).

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Several gaps remain in the current literature concerning what caring teachers do for ELLs. Researchers have examined at-risk students' perceptions of caring teachers in addition to the implications of such students' perceptions in the areas of math, physical education, and student behavior; however, minimal information exists on how teacher caring behaviors impact the reading achievement of ELLs. This absence of information on teachers' caring behaviors leads to the assumption that there is little understanding regarding this specific area. Because research has affirmed caring learning environments have significant impact on the academic achievement of students who are academically challenged, further attention should be paid to teacher-ELLs interactions; specifically, it is critical to center further study on the correlation that might exist between reading teachers' caring behaviors and ELLs' reading achievement.

### **Synthesis of the Research and Literature on Caring in Education**

The topic of caring is extremely broad and abstract, and it could be said that caring is simply a personality trait, a way of being and reacting in interpersonal relationships, and that there is no one recipe for producing a caring individual (Noddings, 1984, 1988, 2005a, 2005b,

2012); nevertheless, the extant literature identifies specific behaviors that typify caring teachers and that have a positive effect in students. Teachers who want to have a positive impact in their students' social and academic development can learn and apply such behaviors in their classrooms. Deiro (2003, 1996) indicated that caring could be determined by specific behaviors that teachers exhibit towards students, and that such behaviors, as well as their influence on student behavior and academic performance can be quantitatively measured. Knowing about specific caring teachers' behaviors that enhance ELLs' academic achievement may help strengthen teachers' relationships with their ELLs and positively influence student reading achievement.

Much of the research has focused on characteristics of caring teachers that impact students' attitude and behaviors from the perception of students (Deiro, 2003, 1996; Dempsey, 1994; Garza, 2009; King & Chan, 2011; Larrivee, 2000; Murdock & Miller, 2003; Owens, 2000; Tarlow, 1996). Dempsey (1994) focused on teaching relationships and the context in which educators teach, and Deiro (2003, 1996) identified strategies that enhance nurturing caring learning environments. Other studies regarding caring teachers have focused on the effect that teachers' caring behaviors have in specific content areas; the study conducted by Lewis et al. (2012) focused on teacher caring and math self-efficacy and math achievement. Bae's (2011) research was centered on the role of caring in physical education classrooms. Studies regarding caring in education have also concentrated on specific student population groups or grade levels; for instance, Ryan (2011) studied positive teacher-child relationships in head starts, Kissinger (2011) investigated caring teachers in middle schools, and Thompson (2010) researched caring teachers' impact on at-risk students. These studies mentioned have demonstrated that a caring learning environment significantly influences students' education, but there is still a need to

expand the body of knowledge concerning teacher caring behaviors and their potential impact on the reading achievement of ELLs.

The research and review of the literature presented in this chapter examined three theoretical frameworks that support the need for caring relationships in the learning environments. The research and literature review on caring suggested the noteworthy influence of caring on student academic achievement; effective teaching strategies are more impactful when applied in a positive, supportive environment where students feel valued and accepted. Currently, the latest reform to ESEA, known as ESSA, demands academic improvement and successful learning by all students; teachers of ELLs could use the knowledge gained in teachers caring behaviors to enhance their students' reading achievement and to make a significant contribution to the goals of ESSA. This study could point out the future direction of ELLs' education to achieve greater reading success.

Chapter III will describe the research design, research questions, subjects of the study, sample size, instrumentation, and the method of study as well as data analysis.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

As discussed in previous chapters, there is a robust body of empirical investigations that have studied the effect that caring learning environments and caring teachers have in the general student population. Research suggests that positive correlations exist between teacher-caring behaviors and the academic achievement in the general student population (Bae, 2011; Deiro, 2003; Gallagher, 2013; Kissinger, 2011; Noddings, 2012; Ryan, 2011; Thompson, 2010). Nonetheless, there is minimal information regarding a possible relationship between teacher caring behaviors and the reading achievement of third, fourth, and fifth grade ELLs. The primary purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the possible influence of teacher-caring behaviors on ELLs' reading achievement. As part of the investigation, I examined whether a statistically significant relationship existed between third, fourth, and fifth grade reading teachers' caring behaviors and the reading achievement of their students at three elementary campuses. Additionally, the study examined if there was a statistically significant difference in the degree to which ELLs and Non-ELLs perceived teacher-caring behaviors and whether there was a statistically significant difference in the reading achievement of ELLs and Non-ELLs. Furthermore, the study analyzed teacher-self reported data and student-reported data to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the way teachers perceived their own caring behaviors and the way their students perceived those same teachers' caring behaviors.

## Research Design

The research presented in this chapter was based on a correlational method to provide insight into the potential relationship between students' perceptions of their teachers' caring behavior and students' reading attainment. In general, a correlational study is a quantitative method of research in which two or more quantitative variables from the same group of subjects are analyzed to determine if, and to what extent, a relationship exists (Gay et al., 2006). For the purpose of this study, the variables to be examined were teacher-caring behavior, as perceived by the reading teachers themselves and by their students and as measured through the instrument *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998), and students' reading achievement as measured by their growth from a pre- to a post-reading STAAR benchmark test. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between teacher-caring behaviors and students' reading achievement, whether there was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of ELLs and Non-ELLs regarding their reading teachers' caring behaviors, whether there was a statistically significant difference between the reading achievement of ELLs and the reading achievement of Non-ELLs, and whether there was a statistically significant difference between the teachers' perceptions of their own caring behaviors and the students' perceptions of those same teachers' caring behaviors. Descriptive research involves "reporting the way things are" (Gay et al., 2006, p. 11); it comprises data collection using questionnaires, surveys, observations, or interviews and describing the data. (Gay et al., 2006). Inferential statistics involve analyzing data to generalize to a population based on information collected from a sample group. Gay et al. (2006) define inferential statistics as "...techniques for determining how likely it is that results



obtained from a sample or samples are the same results that would be obtained for the entire population” (p. 337).

### **Selection of Setting**

The investigation took place at a public-school district located in South Texas in a town bordering Mexico. Three elementary schools were selected based on their similarity in demographics and proximity to each other to ensure the student population groups surveyed were of similar socio-economic backgrounds. This was done to reduce the risk of students’ reading achievement being the result of additional educational resources at home (e.g. computer-based tutoring programs, private tutoring, instructional materials, etc.) and not their classroom experiences; a fourth campus of similar demographics was selected to pilot the selected survey instrument. Upon requesting approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university, the school district associate superintendent was contacted via e-mail to inquire about procedures to request permission to conduct the study at four elementary schools (three campuses for the actual study and one school to pilot the selected instrument). All documentation required by the school district was submitted for the associate superintendent’s approval. Once permission was granted, and the three elementary campuses had been selected, I proceeded to contact and schedule appointments with each individual school principal to obtain their approval to conduct the study at their campuses, to discuss the study and logistics (i.e. purpose, timeline, participants, instrument, collection of data) and to address any concerns the principals had with regards to the study.

### **Selection of Participants**

Because most of the caring in education literature and investigations found during this research project involved early childhood classrooms, middle school students, and high school

students, I decided to select students in third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms to contribute to the extant data by filling this gap in the literature. Participants for this study were selected through convenience sampling; in convenience sampling, participants are part of an existing group (Gay et al., 2006). The sampling frame for the study was all students enrolled in grades 3, 4, and 5 and all reading teachers in grades 3, 4, and 5 at the selected campuses. A meeting with each principal and their third, fourth, and fifth grade reading teachers was scheduled to discuss the objectives of the study, the timeline for the study, the survey to be completed by the reading teachers and students, procedures to collect students' scores on the pre- and on the post-reading STAAR benchmarks, as well as the content and procedures for distributing and collecting the Consent Forms and the Assent Forms from potential participants.

With the permission of the school principals, each reading teacher in grades 3, 4, and 5 at each campus were given a class set of a Consent Form stapled to an Assent Form and an Informational Parent Letter explaining the gist of the study to be distributed among their students and a Teacher Consent Form for himself/herself. Each third, fourth, and fifth grader received the Consent Form, Assent Form, and Parent Informational Letter. The Consent Forms and Assent Forms received by the students had to be signed by both, parent and child, so that the student could participate in the investigation. Reading teachers were provided with pens and pencils to reward those students who returned signed Consent Forms and Assent Forms; a pizza party was offered for the class with the most forms returned. Initially, a time period of one week (i.e. five school days) was established for returning the signed Consent Forms; however, the deadline was extended to one more week upon request by some of the teachers.

Before any research was conducted, all Consent Forms and Assent Forms collected from the students and reading teachers were picked up from the school principal designee at each site.

A list of participants was then created for each classroom using an identification number per individual reading teacher as the identifier for the class and students' five-digit school identification number for each child. Only those reading teachers who returned a Consent Form signed, and only those students who returned a Consent Form signed by at least one of their parents, and an Assent Form signed by the student within the deadline, participated in the study.

The Consent Forms, Assent Forms, and completed surveys as well as students' pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmark scores were filed by campus and by teacher and were treated as confidential documentation that was only available to the researcher. Responses to the survey and students' benchmark scores were collected electronically via Google Forms-linked to Excel in order to encrypt all data for confidentiality.

Upon completion of the investigation, a letter of appreciation was given to each participant; students were asked to take the letter home. Teachers, principals, and the associate superintendent also received a letter thanking them for their contributions and assistance with this research project.

### **Research Questions**

Data analysis was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the caring behaviors of third, fourth, and fifth grade reading teachers, as determined by their students' responses to the instrument *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher*, and these students' reading achievement, as measured by their growth on the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmark assessments?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in the degree to which third, fourth, and fifth grade ELLs and Non-ELLs perceive teacher-caring as determined by their rating of their

reading teachers on the instrument *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher*?

3. Is there a statistically significant difference between the reading achievement of third, fourth, and fifth grade ELLs and Non-ELLs as measured by their growth in the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmarks?
4. Is there a statistically significant difference between the way third, fourth, and fifth grade reading teachers perceive their own caring behaviors and the way their students perceive their teachers' caring behaviors, as determined by the teachers' self-reported and student-reported responses on *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher*?

### **Instrumentation**

*A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998), which has a teacher version and a student version, was the instrument selected for the purpose of this study. I searched for the instrument developer's, Dr. Clete Bulach, contact information on the internet. Upon finding his webpage and e-mail address, I proceeded to contact Dr. Bulach via e-mail introducing myself, explaining the intent of my study, and requesting his permission to use the survey for my research. After receiving no response from Dr. Bulach within a week, I attempted a second time. On this second attempt, Dr. Bulach responded to my e-mail within the same day. In exchange for allowing me to use the instrument, Dr. Bulach requested for me to send him my Curriculum Vitae. Once Dr. Bulach reviewed my information, he e-mailed me a copy of the survey and granted his permission for me to use the survey for this investigation; he also e-mailed me other references that could be useful for my study and directed me to other resources in his website. I contacted Dr. Bulach one more time and secured his permission to also use the teacher version of the survey.

The instrument has reliability estimates as demonstrated by a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of .77 ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ) in prior studies (Bulach et al., 1998; Miller, 2008). Gay et al. (2006) define reliability as the degree of "stability or consistency" with which the instrument measures a construct, in this case, teacher-caring. Because reliability "is dependent on the group being tested," (Gay et al., 2006), a pilot study using the instrument with third, fourth, and fifth grade students from a campus comparable to those who participated in the actual investigation was conducted. Feedback concerning the instrument was requested from the participants of this pilot study. During this pilot investigation, I focused on vocabulary used in the instrument that might hinder the students' comprehension of the items; close attention was also paid to those items that might present reading difficulties for struggling readers in third, fourth, and fifth grades. Upon administration of the instrument to the sample group, internal consistency (reliability) was estimated using Cronbach's Alpha.

The validity of an instrument refers to the accuracy of the instrument or the degree to which the instrument "measures what it is supposed to measure" (Gay et al., 2006, p. 134). Gay et al. (2006) define construct validity as "the degree to which a test measures...an unobservable trait, that explains behavior" (p. 596). As mentioned previously, in establishing the construct validity of the selected instrument, Bulach et al. (1998) collected the opinions of 116 practicing teachers and administrators enrolled in the education administration preparation program at the State University of West Georgia. The participants were divided into three groups, with the first group comprised of 166 students who were requested to describe the behaviors they themselves used to demonstrate to their students that they cared about them. A list of behaviors was generated from the descriptors submitted by the 116 students. Utilizing a Nominal Group Technique, the list was reduced to 30 behaviors. A Nominal Group Technique refers to a

structured method for group brainstorming that encourages contributions from everyone to gain consensus (Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006). A Likert-type scale survey was created with the 30 descriptors and administered to a second group consisting of 70 students in the education administration preparation program. A factor analysis was completed for the data collected through the survey and based on the results, the survey was reduced to 26 items. Through the opinions of the 116 educators who participated, it was concluded that the instrument does differentiate between those teachers who use the 26 caring behaviors frequently with students and those who use them less often; that is, the survey has construct validity.

The final version of the survey was administered to a third group of 99 graduate students to determine the number of factors measured by the caring behaviors identified and the frequency of behavior usage as teachers interact with students. Based on the data collected from this third group of students, the 26 statements that measure teachers' caring behaviors were classified into five factors; Table 2 shows this classification. The five factors are: (a) the ability to reduce anxiety, (b) willingness to listen, (c) rewarding appropriate behavior, (d) being a friend, and (e) the appropriate use of positive and negative criticism. Bulach et al. (1998) stated that if these five categories of behaviors are practiced by teachers and campus administrators, then a "caring learning community" should be present.

Table 2

*Factors of Teachers' Caring Behaviors*

Classification of Teachers' Caring Behaviors	
<u>Factors</u>	<u>Caring Behaviors</u>
Reduce Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain eye contact with students when I talk with them</li> <li>• Teach students at their ability level</li> <li>• Reinforce students for good behavior</li> <li>• Create an environment where students feel safe</li> <li>• Am positive with students</li> <li>• Enforce the same rules for all students</li> <li>• Cue students when they don't understand or respond</li> <li>• Call students by their name</li> <li>• Provide an orderly classroom</li> <li>• Greet students when they enter my classroom</li> </ul>
Demonstrate Willingness to Listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get students to make decisions that affect them</li> <li>• Take a personal interest in students outside the classroom</li> <li>• Ask students for their opinions</li> <li>• Make time for students before and after school</li> </ul>
Reward Students for their Appropriate Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display students' work</li> <li>• Provide treats and goodies on special occasions</li> <li>• Ask students to help with classroom tasks</li> <li>• Inform parents about student progress</li> </ul>
Be a Friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat lunch with students</li> <li>• Return work promptly with comments</li> <li>• Let students have fun at the teacher's expense</li> <li>• Intervene when students are being picked on</li> </ul>
Recognize Students' Behaviors or Appropriate Use of Criticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use sarcasm with students (reverse scored)</li> <li>• Use negative criticism with students (reverse scored)</li> <li>• Recognize students for extra-curricular achievement</li> <li>• Recognize students for academic achievement</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from Bulach et al. (1998).

As mentioned previously, the instrument is designed as a Likert-type scale. In a Likert-type survey, the participants indicate the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the statements presented by selecting one of four or five options which typically include, “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), “undecided” (U), “disagree” (D), or “strongly disagree” (SD). Each response is assigned a value, and an individual’s score is obtained by finding the sum of the point values of all the statements (Gay et al., 2006; Huck, 2008). The survey included four items that collected demographical data and 26 items presented to the students in the form of statements describing how frequently the students’ reading teacher used each behavior. In the teacher version, the items were presented in the form of statements describing how frequently the teacher performed the given behavior. For scoring purposes, a score of “1” was assigned to a response of “Never” and a score of “5” was assigned to “Always”. Scores “2”, “3”, and “4” were assigned to the rest of the responses on the scale; items 24 and 29 were negative behaviors and, therefore, were reverse scored. In analyzing the data, it must be recognized that a negative response was scored as a “1” and a positive response was scored as a “5”. For the two negative behaviors (statements 24 and 29) the scores were the opposite way; for instance, if participants responded to item 29 (“My teacher uses sarcasm.”) with “always”, then a score of “5” became a “1”. Scores approaching a “2” were interpreted as the weakest areas; scores above “3” and close to a “4” were considered as the strongest areas. Scores approaching a “5” were definitely considered as strengths.

As it has already been stated, when the five factors of behaviors analyzed by the survey are present in a classroom, the result should be a caring learning setting (Bulach et al, 1998). Participating students completed the survey to determine if their teachers provided a caring learning environment, as perceived by their students. Teacher self-reported data on the survey



was also collected to measure the teachers' perceptions of their own teacher-caring behaviors. Data collected from both, reading teachers and students, through the survey was then analyzed to answer the four research questions presented in this chapter.

To examine whether a statistically significant relationship existed between students' perceptions of their reading teachers' caring behaviors and these students' reading achievement, it was necessary to identify the reading growth demonstrated by the students throughout the school year. For the purpose of this investigation, the students' reading achievement was measured by determining the students' growth between the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmarks. The students' scores on the pre- and post-reading benchmarks were collected from a campus or district administrator through Excel reports generated from the district's local assessment database. As explained previously, the district selected for this study utilizes released STAAR tests as benchmarks to measure the students' growth and to predict students' performance on the state assessments administered at the end of the school year.

The use of the actual STAAR test administered by the state at the end of the school year instead of the students' growth demonstrated between the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmark tests was considered as the measurement for students' reading achievement; nonetheless, I rejected such idea on the basis that the state assessment represents a single form of assessment that measures the students' ability to read and comprehend text on a given day. Based on personal experience, many factors could affect the students' performance on such given day (e.g. student may be sick the day of the test or other situation may inhibit the student from performing to his or her full capacity while taking the test). On the other hand, the growth demonstrated on two similar tests administered in a more relaxed setting, such as locally administered benchmarks, could offer a much better picture of the students' reading

achievement. While considering what instrument or data to use to measure the students' reading achievement for this project, I also considered using the students' mean reading grades. This idea was also rejected due to the fact that daily grades and/or grades on weekly tests and quizzes issued by teachers could be subjective and thus might not necessarily represent the same from teacher to teacher; for example, teachers giving extra points on certain assignments, teachers interpreting scoring rubrics in a different manner, differences in instructional materials, differences in curriculum such as the pace and fidelity with which the district's adopted scope and sequence was being followed, etcetera. The selected district implements a locally developed scope and sequence with materials and rubrics vertically and horizontally aligned. The expectation is that all teachers at a given grade level cover the same lessons, with the same instructional materials, and measure learning with the same instruments and rubrics; nonetheless, there exists the possibility of teachers deviating from the scope and sequence. Alternatively, the instruments used as pre- and post-reading benchmarks were the same for every campus in the district, were scored by a scanner machine, and were administered on the same dates. Moreover, all students received any designated support or testing accommodations they routinely used as per their individualized educational plans; this leveled the field and provided a much better picture of the students' reading abilities. All of this gave me confidence that the reading scores obtained from the benchmarks for the participating students represented mastery of the same reading skills. Reports with the students' scores on the two assessments were generated from the district's local assessment database and were obtained from a campus or district administrator on Excel spreadsheets that were encrypted for confidentiality purposes.

## **Data Collection**

All students and reading teachers in grades 3, 4, and 5 at the three selected campuses were asked to participate, but they were required to document their willingness to participate through Consent and Assent Forms. Before administering the survey to any of the students, I made sure they had submitted a Consent Form that was signed by at least one of their parents or guardians and an Assent Form signed by themselves. The reading teachers were also required to turn in a signed Consent Form prior to completing the survey.

I prepared a Google Form to collect data from the survey. That is, the students and reading teachers completed the survey electronically through the Google Form that I shared with them through a hyperlink. At this particular school district, students are administered various types of assessments (e.g. benchmarks and Concept Based Assessments) and reading assignments online on a regular basis; therefore, completing the instrument electronically did not present a challenge for the students. Completion of the survey took place at each school's computer lab, and I personally monitored the students while completing the survey to avoid students feeling pressured or influenced by their classroom setting or teachers. A hard copy of the instrument was provided as an accommodation for those students who had different abilities and were not able to access it electronically, as well as for those campuses where computer usage was not feasible. I collected the paper-pencil surveys upon completion and personally inputted those students' responses on the Google Form. The paper-pencil surveys were kept in a sealed envelope to maintain the students' confidentiality until they had been inputted in electronic format. Once the responses had been inputted, the hard copies were shredded. Because some of the students struggled with reading or comprehending the items, the survey was answered incorporating a whole group guided practice, with me reading the items and translating them into

Spanish as needed. I furthered elaborated or explained the survey items at student request. These practices eased student comprehension of all items in the survey. Students marked their individual responses as they were ready.

I prepared and read a script to students regarding the survey instrument, the reason for the survey, and the procedures for completing the survey instrument so that all students at the three selected campuses were given the same instructions. As mentioned previously, the survey was read to and/or translated into Spanish to students, as needed, to ensure comprehension of survey items. The survey took the students approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete all questions. By completing the survey through the Google Forms, the students' responses were collected onto an Excel spreadsheet automatically. The spreadsheet was encrypted for confidentiality, and only I had access to the password that unlocked the file.

Reading teachers were asked to complete the survey electronically, at their convenience. The reading teachers were given the script with the instructions for completion of the survey, to read on their own, prior to beginning the survey. As with the students, their responses to the survey were automatically recorded onto an Excel spreadsheet which was also encrypted for confidentiality.

Students' scores on the pre- and post-reading benchmarks were obtained from the district's local assessments database. A campus or district administrator was asked to generate the two reports and to save them on Excel to be encrypted for confidentiality purposes. The students' reading growth was calculated by finding the difference between their scores on the pre- and post-tests. This information was also saved on the encrypted Excel Workbook. As with the survey, only I had access to the password to unlock the file. The students' benchmark scores and scores resulting from the survey were matched up for the analysis of the data.

## **Data Analysis**

After all surveys had been scored and students' pre- and post-benchmark scores had been collected, data charts and tables were created for ease of analysis of the data. The students' raw scores from the survey and their reading growth was recorded according to the five-digit identification number assigned. The identification number created for the class was used as the teacher's identifier; therefore, their raw scores on the surveys were recoded according to those numbers assigned. For the purpose of this study, computations and statistical analyses were completed using Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis and interpretation of the data at hand. Descriptive and inferential statistics are used to give different insights into the nature of the data being gathered and are used in conjunction for a much better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Descriptive statistics describe the data (Howell, 2011) in a concise and meaningful way with numerical indices (Gay et al., 2006). In this study, data were described by reporting measures of central tendency (i.e. mean and median). Measures of variability (i.e. variance and standard deviation) were used to have a better understanding of the dispersion of the data, and histograms were used to represent and to describe the shape of the data (i.e. kurtosis and skewness).

Inferential statistics, as the term implies, are data analysis techniques used to draw conclusions (Howell, 2011) or make inferences (Gay et al., 2006) about the entire population based on data or observations collected from a sample population. Gay et al. (2006) defined inferential statistics as "...techniques for determining how likely it is that results obtained from a sample or samples are the same results that would be obtained for the entire population" (p. 337).

The subsequent paragraphs will explain the inferential techniques that were used to answer each of the four research questions.

Research question 1 aimed to determine whether a statistically significant relationship existed between the caring behaviors of upper elementary reading teachers and the reading achievement of their students; to answer this question, measures of relationship were used. First, data were plotted into a scatterplot to examine the relationship between the predictor variable, teacher-caring, and the criterion variable, students' reading achievement. In a scatterplot, every subject in the study is represented by a point on a vertical and horizontal axis (Howell, 2011). The scatterplot was useful in showing the extent of the correlation, if any, of the variables teacher-caring and students' reading achievement. If the points appeared randomly scattered on the coordinate plane, then it could be said that no correlation existed between teacher-caring and students' reading achievement; on the other hand, if the points tended to concentrate near a straight line (the regression line), then it would be safe to state that there was a strong correlation between teacher-caring and students' reading achievement. The regression line, or line of "best fit", was used to determine trends and predictability (Howell, 2011); in simpler words, it facilitated a better understanding of the possibility of students' reading achievement changing as teacher-caring changed. The scatterplot and the regression line also gave insight into the sense of the correlation; in other words, it was easier to visualize if the correlation was negative, positive, or if there was absolutely no correlation. Data were furthered analyzed by computing the Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficient to determine the degree to which teaching-caring was related to students' reading achievement. Pearson  $r$  is one of many types of coefficients used in the field of statistics, and it is used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables (Gay et al., 2006; Howell, 2011). The coefficient value can range between -1.00 and

+1.00; if the coefficient value is in the negative range, then the relationship is said to be negatively correlated; in other words, if one value decreases, the other increases and vice-versa. The correlation is said to be positively correlated when the coefficient value lands on the positive range; this means that both values decrease or increase together (i.e. if one value goes up the other value also goes up; if one value goes down, then the other value also goes down) (Gay et al., 2006; Howell, 2011).

The purpose of research questions 2, 3 and 4 was to examine whether a statistically significant difference existed among two groups. To answer questions 2 and 4, a test of significance was applied for each of them. A two-tailed *t*-test was selected as the test of significance for this study. A *t*-test is commonly used to test differences and to corroborate if the means of two groups are statistically different from each other. The larger the *t*-value, the larger the difference between the two sample groups (Gay, et al., 2006; Howell, 2011). Moreover, this inferential statistic resolves if the observed difference is sufficiently larger than a difference that would be expected to occur by mere chance. A two-tailed test of significance was computed to answer each of these two questions because I wanted to examine the possibility of the difference going in both directions; that is, if either group's mean could be higher than the other. A significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  was set as the threshold to determine significance. After computing the test of significance, the resulting *t* value was found on the appropriate *t* table value to determine the significance of my results. Additionally, an effect size was calculated to measure the magnitude of each of the two differences. According to Howell (2011), simply finding a significant difference is not enough; it is a lot more adequate to also report whether such difference is meaningful. Cohen's *d* was the statistic selected to measure the effect size for each of the two differences being studied because it indicates the standardized difference in means of

two independent groups. It is calculated by subtracting the means of the two groups, and then dividing the difference by the standard deviation of either group. Question 3 was answered by computing a two-tailed  $t$  test for the pre-reading benchmark and a two-tailed  $t$  test for the post-reading benchmark as well; a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  was also used as the threshold for these two  $t$  tests. Cohen's  $d$  coefficient was also computed to measure the magnitude of these differences as well. This question was further analyzed by performing a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the mean differences in the reading achievement of ELLs and Non-ELLs in grades 3, 4, and 5 for each of the benchmark tests.

### **Summary**

The quantitative study presented in this chapter used a correlational method to gain insight into the relationship between teacher-caring behavior and students' reading achievement. The research questions guiding this study, the selection of participants and methods implemented for data gathering as well as data analysis were also presented. The subsequent chapter will include a detailed analysis of data collected and the results of the investigation.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

Chapter IV provides a summary of the results of the present study. The focus of this correlational study was to investigate the possibility that teacher-caring behaviors influence students' reading achievement, in particular, the reading achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs). As part of the study, I analyzed whether a statistically significant relationship existed between upper elementary reading teachers' caring behaviors and their students' reading achievement. I also explored whether there was a statistically significant difference between ELLs' and Non-ELLs' perceptions of their reading teachers' caring behaviors, and whether there was a statistically significant difference in the reading achievement of those ELLs and those Non-ELLs. Lastly, I examined whether there was a statistically significant difference in the reading teachers' perceptions of their own teacher-caring behaviors and the perceptions of their students. To contextualize the results of these four inquiries, I reported demographic information regarding the setting as well as the participants of the study followed by an overview of the analysis of the data collected and the statistical results relative to the research questions.

#### **Descriptive Statistics of the Setting**

The school district selected for this study was located in a Southwest Texas city bordering Mexico. The school district manages 27 elementary schools, nine middle schools, and four high schools plus five alternative discipline and residential facilities for a total of 45 campuses. The district serviced approximately 42,986 students of which 42,503 were of Hispanic or Latino descent, and roughly 16,344 were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Of those LEP students, 18,082 received specialized English language instruction through a bilingual

education or English as a Second Language (ESL) program. The following three tables present an overview of the selected school district's demographics. Table 3 depicts the population by school level, Table 4 describes the population by ethnicity, and Table 5 shows the number of students serviced by the different programs available.

Table 3

*Campuses and Enrollment for 2017-'18*

Academic Level	# of Campuses	# of Students Enrolled
ELEMENTARY	27	20,246
MIDDLE SCHOOL	9	9,766
HIGH SCHOOL	4	12,771
STEP/JJAEP/RESIDENTIAL	5	203
TOTAL	45	42,986

*Note.* Information obtained from the participating school district's 2017-2018 District Improvement Plan (DIP).

Table 4

*2017-'18 Students by Ethnicity*

Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latino	Not Hispanic/Latino
	42,503	483
American Indian/Alaskan Native	614	10
Asian	60	142
African-American	89	58
Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	12	15
White	41,829	282
Two or more races	98	21

*Note.* Information obtained from the participating school district's 2017-2018 District Improvement Plan (DIP).

Table 5

*2017-'18 Students by Program*

Program	# of Students Serviced
Economically Disadvantaged	32,392
Title I	42,986
Migrant	125
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	16,333
M1-First Year LEP Exits	2,202
M2-Second Year LEP Exits	1,965
Bilingual	13,180
English as a Second Language (ESL)	4,902
Special Education	3,728
Section 504/Dyslexia	1,689
Gifted and Talented (GT)	5,505
Advanced Placement	3,421

*Note.* Information obtained from the participating school district's 2017-2018 District Improvement Plan (DIP).

Four elementary schools were selected based on their proximity and similarity in demographics. One of the selected campuses was designated for the pilot study to test the reliability of the instrument to be implemented, and the other three schools were chosen to participate in the actual investigation. Table 6 displays the demographics of the four selected campuses. As can be seen from Table 6, about 80% of the students serviced at each of these four campuses is identified as economically disadvantaged; this means the majority of the population serviced at these campuses is of a low socio-economic background. Additionally, about 50% of the population at each campus is limited English language proficient (LEP), and 10% or less of the students serviced at each campus needs services from a special education program.

Table 6

*Participating Campuses Demographics*

Site	Total Students Served	% Limited English Proficient (LEP)	% Economically Disadvantaged	% Special Education	% Special Ed. and LEP
Campus 1 (PILOT)	746	69	84	8	5
Campus 2	551	49	81	9	4
Campus 3	822	50	83	7	4
Campus 4	865	53	84	10	6
District	43,274	36	75	9	4

*Note.* Information obtained from the selected school district's database-as of April 9, 2018.

### Descriptive Statistics of the Participants

Descriptive statistics for demographic data of the participants were presented in Tables 7 and 8. The total number of students who participated in the pilot study was  $n = 38$ , with 50% ( $n = 19$ ) identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) or English Language Learners (ELLs), and 61% ( $n = 23$ ) as female students. There was a total of  $n = 148$  participants in the actual study; this included 138 students enrolled in grades 3, 4, and 5 ( $n = 138$ ) and these students' reading teachers ( $n = 10$ ). Of the participating students, 50% ( $n = 69$ ) were female, and 43% ( $n = 59$ ) were identified as ELLs. Students ranged in age from 8 to 12 years with a mean age of 10 years old. There were  $n = 10$  participating reading teachers of whom eight were female. Only one of the participating teachers held a master's degree in education with the rest holding a bachelor's degree in education. Only three of the teachers reported the number of years of teaching experience, which ranged from 5 to 22 years.

Table 7

*Participating Students' Demographics*

Site	# of Participating Students	Male	Female	ELL	Non-ELL
Campus 1 (PILOT)	38	15	23	19	19
Campus 2	23	15	8	8	15
Campus 3	22	10	12	3	19
Campus 4	93	44	49	48	45
Totals	176	84	92	78	98

Table 8

*Participating Teachers' Demographics*

Site	# of Participating Teachers	Male	Female	Bachelors' Degree	Master's Degree
Campus 2	4	2	2	4	0
Campus 3	2	0	2	2	0
Campus 4	4	0	4	3	1
Totals	10	2	8	9	1

**Descriptive and Inferential Analyses of the Data**

Prior to conducting the analyses on this investigation's research questions, it was necessary to conduct a pilot study to test the reliability of the selected instrument even though it had an established reliability estimate of  $\alpha = .77$  in prior studies (Bulach et al., 1998). The main reason for this decision was the fact that the survey selected had not been previously used with students of a background similar to that of the participants of this study. As mentioned previously, there were 38 elementary school students who participated in the pilot study. Based

on the responses of these 38 students, the survey proved to have a reliability of  $\alpha = .91$  which indicates a relatively high internal consistency. Once the instrument's reliability with this type of population was established, I proceeded to gather and analyze the data.

For the purpose of this study, I used SPSS (Version 23) and Excel to analyze the data and answer each research question. Figure 1 and Table 9 depict the distribution and descriptive statistics of the data gathered from the students with regards to their reading teachers' caring behaviors.

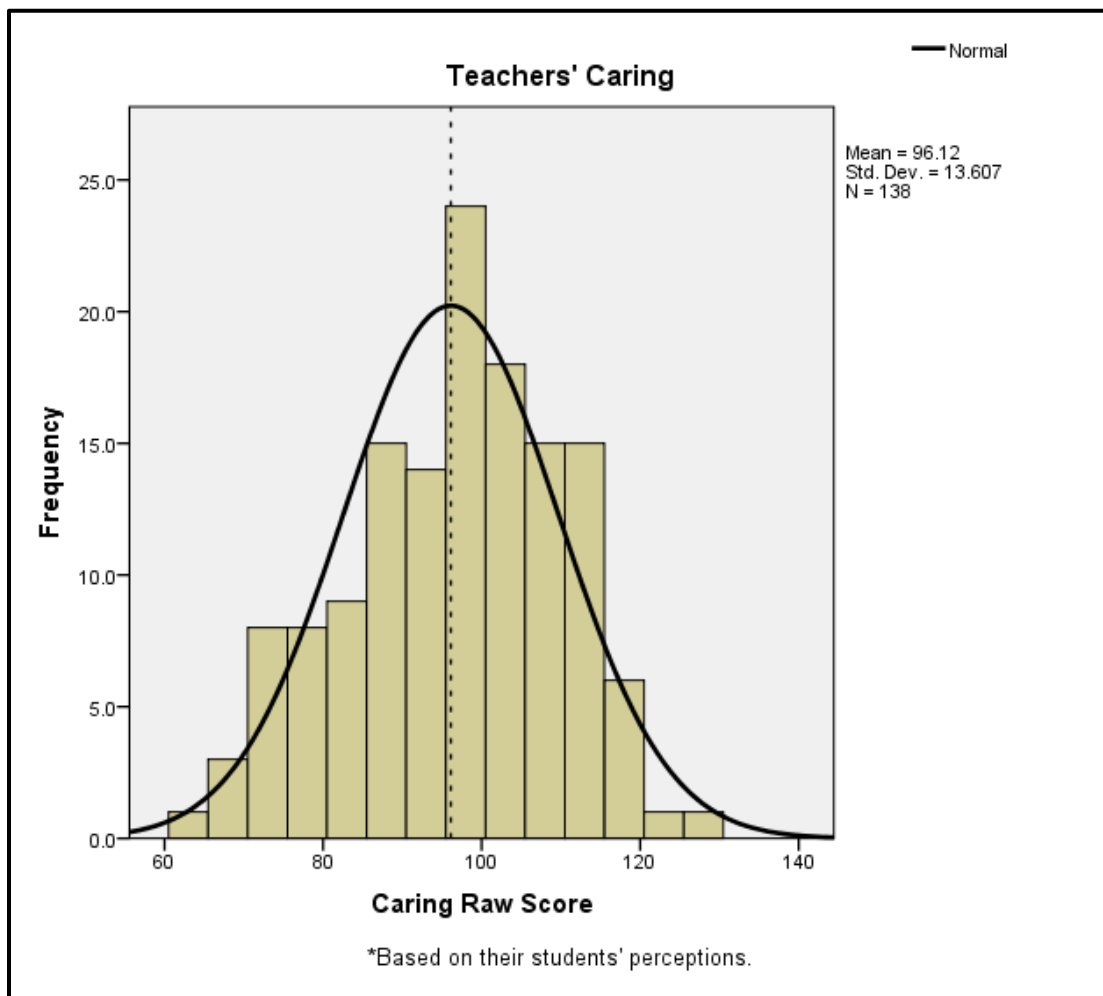


Figure 1. Students' perceptions of their reading teachers' caring behaviors.

Table 9

*Descriptive Statistics of Data Collected*

Variable	N	Mean	SD	VAR	Skewness	STD Error	Kurtosis	STD Error
Teacher Caring (Student-Reported)	138	96.12	13.607	185.140	-.307	.206	-.529	.410
Teacher Caring (Self-Reported)	10	108.90	4.533	20.544	-.142	.687	-.366	1.334
Teacher Caring (ELL)	59	96.36	15.570	242.440	-.376	.311	-.732	.613
Teacher Caring (Non-ELL)	79	95.94	12.035	144.829	-.217	.271	-.486	.535
Reading Achievement (All)	138	2.80	15.304	234.217	.790	.206	3.607	.410
Reading Achievement (ELL)	59	.08	16.340	267.010	-.179	.311	-.147	.613
Reading Achievement (Non-ELL)	79	4.84	14.250	203.062	2.075	.271	7.458	.535
Reading Pre-Test (All)	134	59.91	16.552	273.962	-.071	.209	-.536	.416
Reading Post-Test (All)	137	61.42	18.41	338.922	-.387	.207	-.773	.411
Reading Pre-Test (ELL)	57	49.63	13.466	181.344	.531	.316	.395	.623
Reading Post-Test (ELL)	58	48.86	17.196	295.7	.269	.314	-.847	.618
Reading Pre-Test (Non-ELL)	77	67.52	14.419	207.911	-.594	.274	.945	.541
Reading Post-Test (Non-ELL)	79	70.65	13.091	171.386	-.472	.271	-.356	.535

A total of  $n = 138$  students in grades 3, 4, and 5 were surveyed concerning the caring behaviors displayed by their reading teachers. Based on the students' responses, the reading teachers received a score representing the extent of caring they displayed towards their students. As can be noted on Figure 1 and on Table 9, based on the students' responses, the teachers received a caring mean score of 96.12 with a standard deviation of 13.61 and a variance of 185.14. The distribution of the data was negatively skewed, meaning that it was nonsymmetrical; it was slightly heavier on the left side, as can be seen on the histogram. The distribution also had a negative kurtosis with a coefficient of  $-.53$ ; that is, the distribution was somewhat flat, with several modes clustering around the mean. However, the curve was approximately normal and allowed for using parametric data analysis.

To answer the research questions, data were also gathered from the participating students' reading teachers. A total of  $n = 10$  reading teachers completed the survey regarding the frequency with which they displayed certain caring behaviors towards their students. Figure 2 and Table 9 displayed the distribution and descriptive statistics of the teachers' self-reported data. The distribution of the reading teachers' self-reported data indicated a mean of 108.9 with a standard deviation of 4.53 and a variance of 20.54. The distribution had a negative coefficient for skewness of  $-.142$ , and it also had a negative coefficient for kurtosis of  $-.366$ . As can be easily seen on the histogram, there are some outliers on the left side of the distribution, and it has several modes making it relatively flat; hence, the negative coefficients for skewness and kurtosis. While the distribution was not clearly normal, the coefficients indicated that the data were sufficiently normal to allow for parametric analysis.



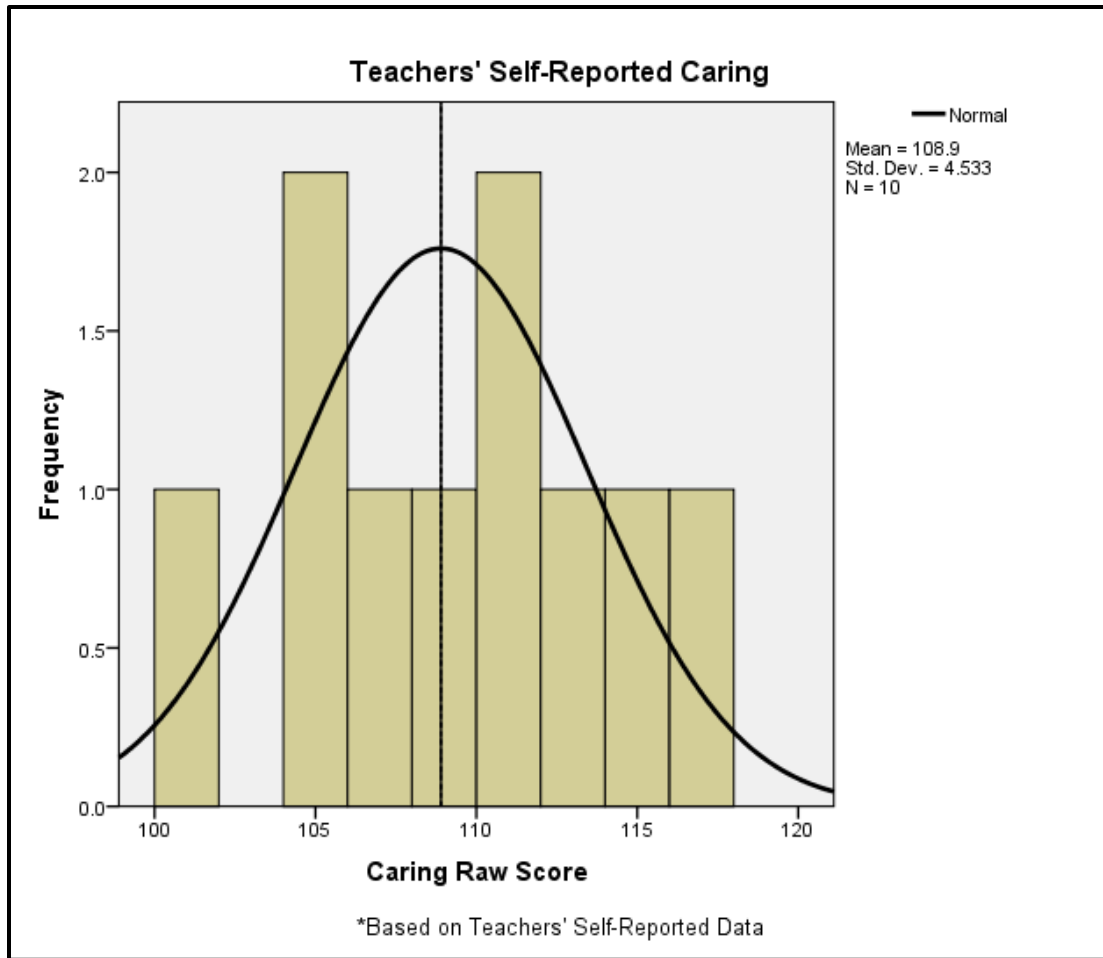


Figure 2. Reading teachers' perceptions of their own caring behaviors.

Through research question 1, I determined if there was a statistically significant relationship between the caring behaviors of third, fourth, and fifth grade reading teachers, as determined by their students' responses to the instrument *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998), and these students' reading achievement, as measured by their growth on the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmark assessments. To address this research question, a scatter plot and linear regression were used to examine the trend of the data, and Pearson *r* correlation was calculated to determine the direction and strength of the relationship, if any. In Figures 3, 4, and 5, scatter plots were displayed illustrating the trend

of the data; Tables 10 and 11 depict the coefficients from the correlation and the linear regression analyses. There was a positive correlation between teacher-caring ( $\bar{X} = 96.12$ ,  $SD = 13.61$ ) and students' reading achievement ( $\bar{X} = 2.8$ ,  $SD = 15.304$ ),  $r = .171$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $n = 138$ . This positive correlation was statistically significant with a  $r = .045$  with a  $p < .05$  level (2-tailed). Based on these coefficients, it could be said that teacher-caring was a good predictor of students' reading achievement; for example, as the value of teacher-caring increases, one could expect the value of students' reading achievement to also increase. The simple linear regression calculated to predict students' reading achievement based on teachers' caring behaviors resulted in  $b = .17$ ,  $t(136) = -1.70$ ,  $p = .091$ . A statistically significant regression equation was found,  $F(1,136) = 4.108$ ,  $p = .045$ ,  $r^2 = .029$ . Although there was a positive statistically significant relationship, its strength was very low; the coefficient of determination,  $r^2 = .029$  indicated that for this population, roughly 3% of the variance of the students' reading achievement was explained by the teachers' caring behaviors.

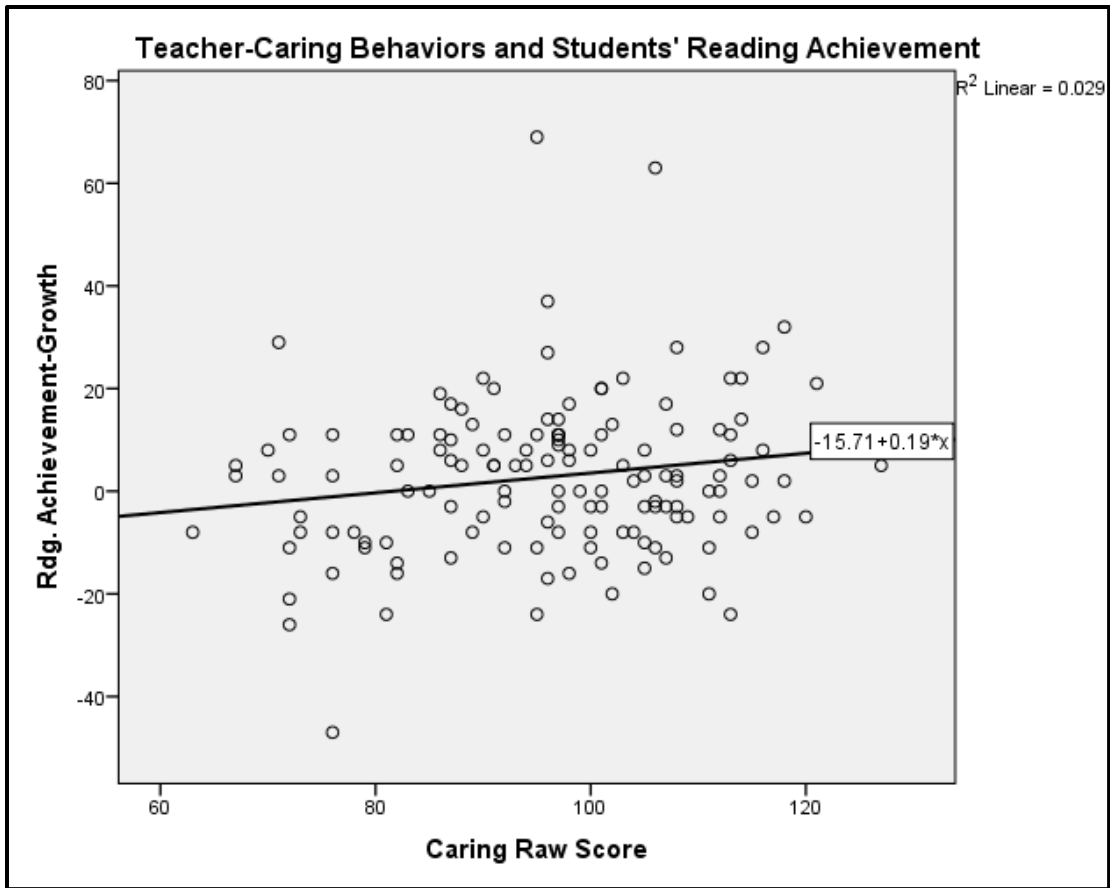


Figure 3. Relationship between teacher-caring behaviors and students' reading achievement.

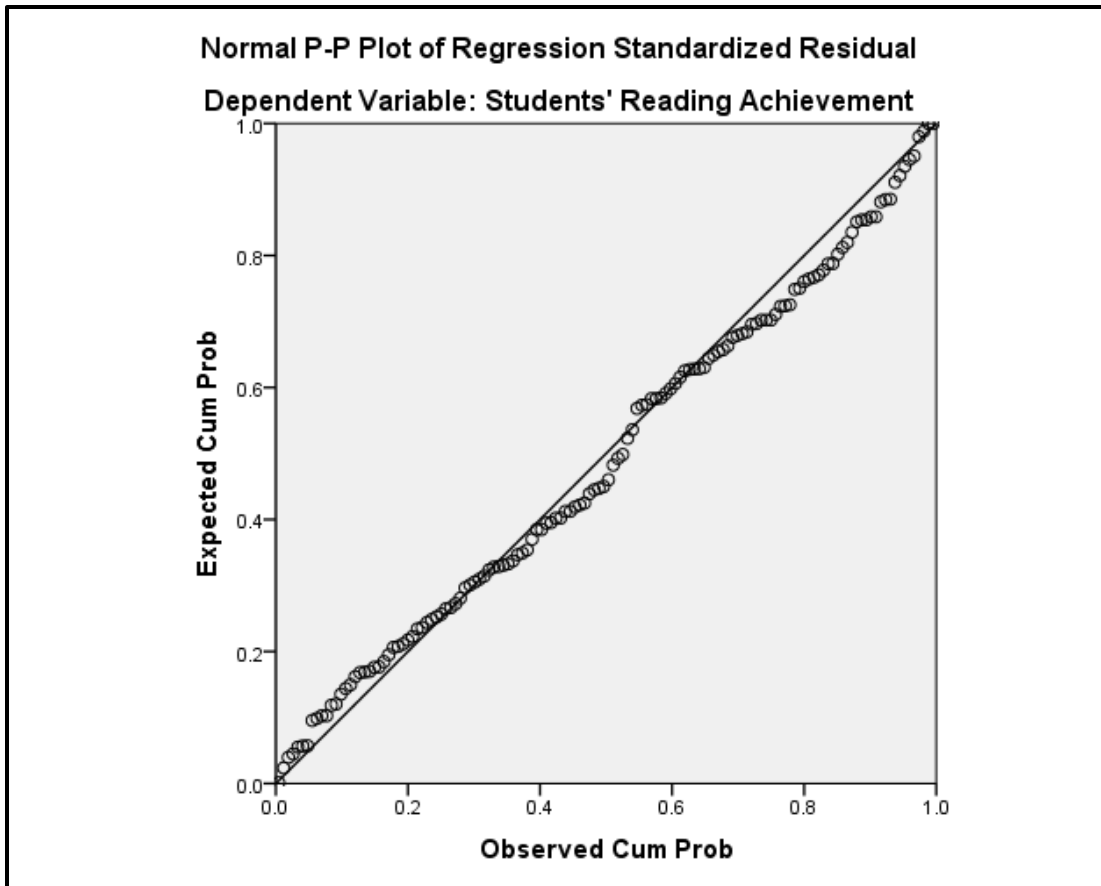


Figure 4. Normal probability plot for teacher-caring behaviors and students' reading achievement.

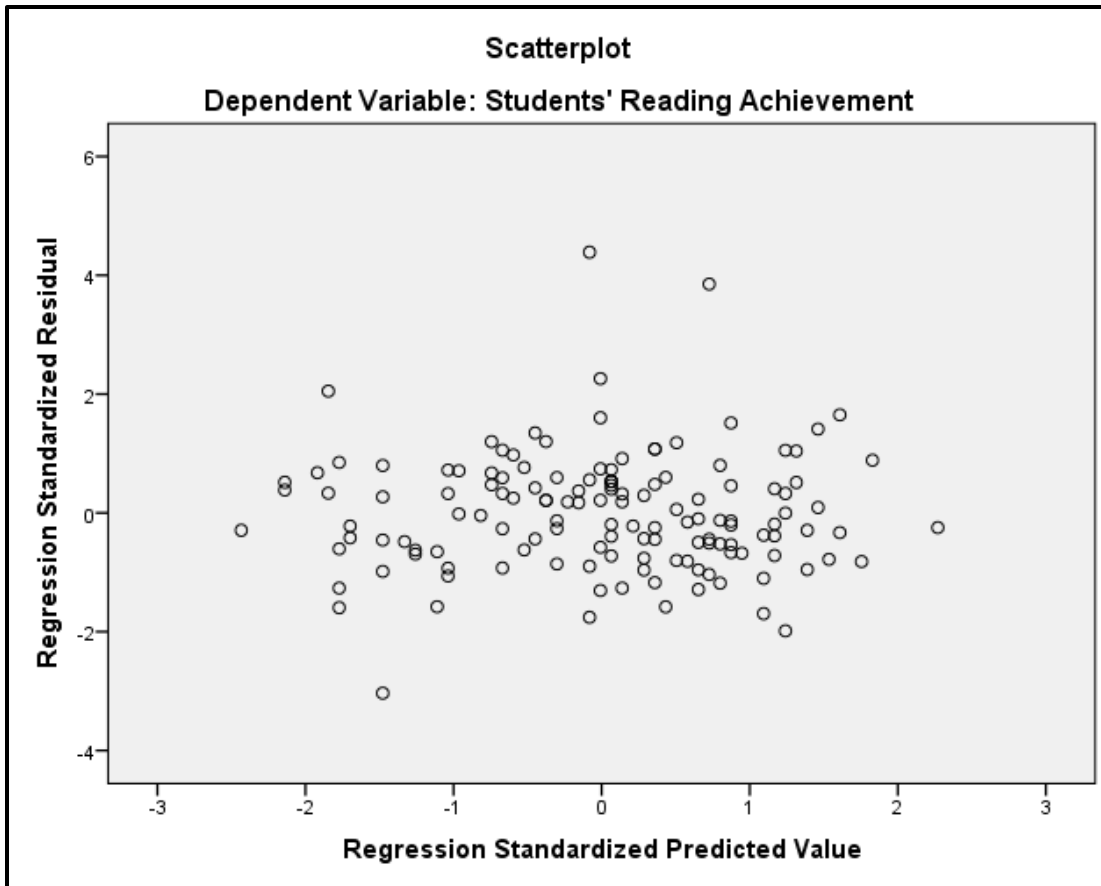


Figure 5. Standardized residuals for teacher-caring behaviors and students' reading achievement.

Table 10

*Correlation Matrix for Teacher-Caring and Students' Reading Achievement*

		Students' Reading	
		Achievement	Teacher-Caring
Students' Reading Achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	.171*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.045
	N	138	138
Teacher-Caring	Pearson Correlation	.171*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.045	
	N	138	138

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 11

*Coefficients Variables Resulting from Simple Regression Analysis*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	-15.708	9.224		-1.703	.091
Teacher-Caring	.193	.095	.171	2.027	.045

*Note.* Dependent Variable: Students' reading achievement

Through research question 2, I investigated whether there was a statistically significant difference in the degree to which third, fourth, and fifth grade ELLs and Non-ELLs perceived teacher-caring as determined by their rating of their reading teachers on the instrument *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998). This question was addressed by calculating a two-tailed independent samples *t* test comparing the mean scores of the ELLs' and Non-ELLs' perceptions of their reading teachers' caring behaviors. The mean for the ELLs' perception of their reading teachers' behaviors was numerically higher ( $\bar{X} = 96.36$ ,  $SD = 15.57$ ,  $n = 59$ ) than the mean of the Non-ELLs ( $\bar{X} = 95.94$ ,  $SD = 12.04$ ,  $n = 79$ ). As can be

seen on Table 12, the independent samples *t* test indicated there was no statistically significant difference in the degree to which ELLs and Non-ELLs perceived their reading teachers' caring behaviors;  $t(106) = -.172, p > .05$ . Cohen's *d* was calculated ( $d = .031$ ), thus indicating a difference of relatively small magnitude.

Table 12

*Results of t-Test for Students' Perceptions of their Reading Teachers' Caring Behaviors*

	ELL Status						95% CI for Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	ELL			Non-ELL					
	M	SD	<i>n</i>	M	SD	<i>n</i>			
Teacher-Caring	96.36	15.57	59	95.94	12.04	79	-5.25, 4.41	-.172*	105.66

\*  $p > .05$

Research question 3 was whether there was a statistically significant difference between the reading achievement of third, fourth, and fifth grade ELLs and Non-ELLs as measured by their growth on the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmark assessments. Concerning the students' reading achievement, the ELL group was associated with a numerically smaller mean ( $\bar{X} = 49.63, SD = 13.47, n = 57$ ) than Non-ELLs ( $\bar{X} = 67.52, SD = 14.42, n = 77$ ) on the pre-test, and they were also associated with a numerically smaller mean on the post-test ( $\bar{X} = 48.86, SD = 17.20, n = 58$ ) than Non-ELLs ( $\bar{X} = 70.65, SD = 13.09, n = 79$ ). As noted on Table 13, data indicated a statistically significant difference for both assessments; pre-test  $t(125) = -7.38, p < .001$  and post-test  $t(135) = -8.42, p < .001$ ; hence, ELLs were associated with a statistically significant smaller mean in their reading achievement in comparison to that of Non-ELLs as per

their scores on both benchmark assessments. The Cohen’s *d* estimates (pre-test  $d = 1.08$  and post-test  $d = 1.18$ ) revealed a difference of a large magnitude. Moreover, it was noted that ELLs’ scores regressed from the pre- to the post-test while Non-ELLs made some gains (see Table 13).

Table 13

*Results of t-Test for Pre- and Post-Reading Benchmarks*

	ELL Status						95% CI for Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	ELL			Non-ELL					
	M	SD	<i>n</i>	M	SD	<i>n</i>			
Pre-Test	49.63	13.47	57	67.52	14.42	77	-13.09, -22.69	-7.34*	125.03
Post-Test	48.86	17.2	58	70.65	13.09	79	-16.67, -26.9	-8.42*	135

\*  $p < .05$

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of ELL status and grade level on the students’ reading achievement based on their scores to the pre-test. As can be noticed on Table 14, there was no statistically significant interaction between the effects of ELL status and grade level on the students’ pre-test scores,  $F(2, 128) = 1.507, p > .05, \eta^2 = .023$ ; however, there was a statistically significant main effect for ELL status,  $F(1, 128) = 36.008, p < .001, \eta^2 = .220$  on the students’ reading scores on the pre-test (see Table 14). Because the results from this analysis showed ELL status might contribute to students’ reading achievement, data from the pre-test were further analyzed to determine which group differences were statistically significant. Based on the data at hand, the Non-ELL grade 3 and Non-ELL grade 5 groups were associated with a statistically significant difference,  $t(128) = 11.312 / 5.513 = 2.05, p < .05$ . As can be clearly observed on Figure 6, based on the students’ pre-test scores, the widest gap in reading achievement for ELLs and Non-ELLs was found in grade 3.



Table 14

*Results from ANOVA for Pre-Reading Benchmark Assessment*

Variable	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
ELL Status	7004.022	1	7004.022	36.008	.000	.220
Grade Level	240.831	2	120.415	.619	.540	.010
ELL Status*Grade Level	586.098	2	293.049	1.507	.226	.023
Error	24897.664	128	194.513			
Total	517398	134				

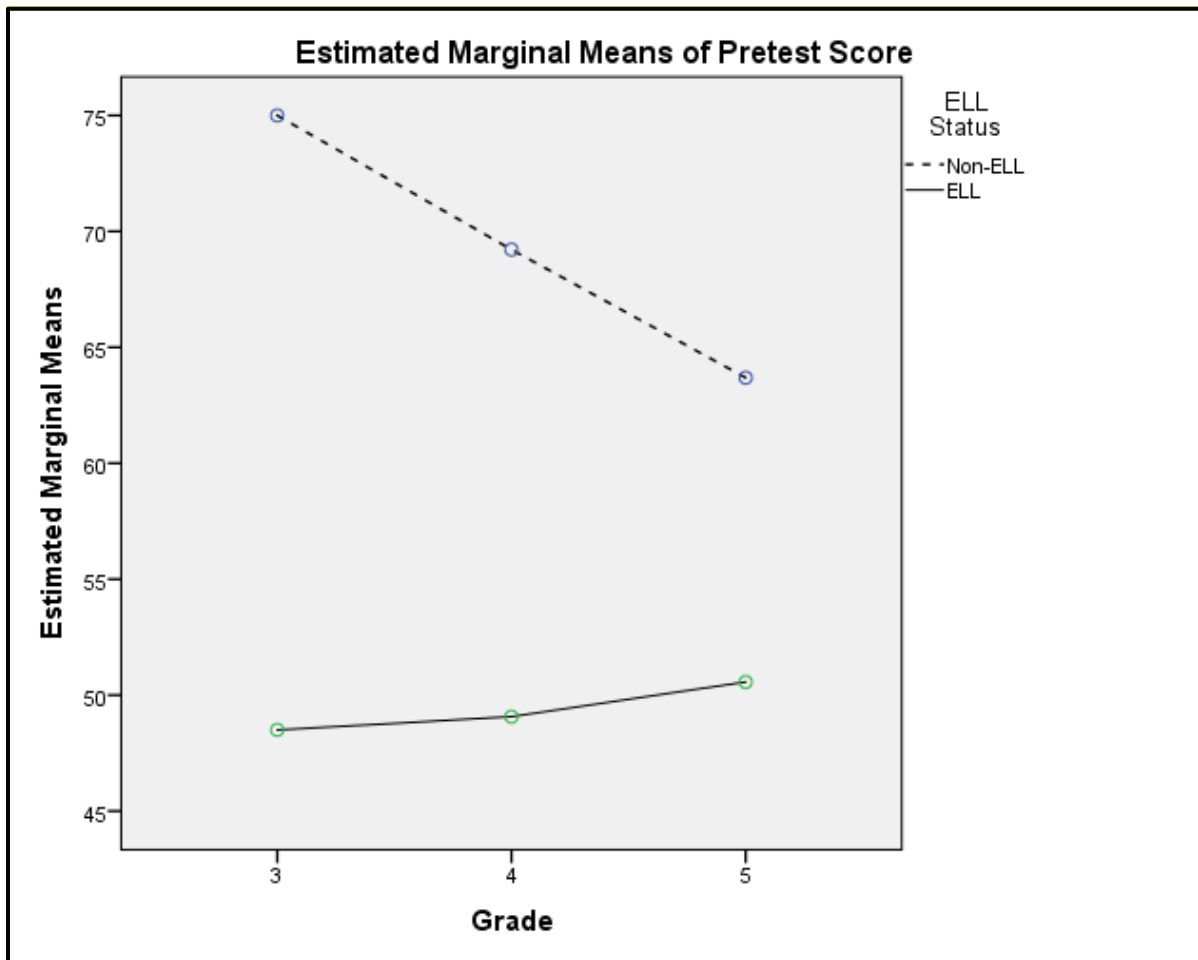


Figure 6. Plot of the mean “pre-test score” for each combination group of ELL status and grade level.

Data from the post-test were also analyzed through a two-way ANOVA; the results from this test showed insufficient evidence to affirm there was a statistically significant interaction between the effects of ELL status and grade level on the students' post-test scores,  $F(2, 131) = .607, p > .05, \eta^2 = .009$ . Nevertheless, both effects were statistically significant (see Table 15). The main effect of ELL status yielded an  $F$  ratio of  $F(1, 131) = 45.205, p < .001, \eta^2 = .257$ , and the main effect of grade level resulted in an  $F$  ratio of  $F(2, 131) = 10.311, p < .001, \eta^2 = .136$ . The data at hand were further analyzed to determine which groups in specific had a statistically significant difference. Data showed the Non-ELL grade 3, and Non-ELL grade 5 groups were associated with a statistically significant difference,  $t(131) = 15.08 / 5.54 = 2.72, p < .05$ . The mean difference of the Non-ELL grade 4 and Non-ELL grade 5 groups was also statistically significant,  $t(131) = 7.43 / 3.35 = 2.22, p < .05$ . Moreover, the difference among the ELL grade 3 and ELL grade 5 groups was statistically significant too,  $t(131) = 15.63 / 7.6 = 2.06, p < .05$ . Lastly, the results from the data also indicated a statistically significant difference among the ELL grade 4 and ELL grade 5 groups,  $t(131) = 12.88 / 3.85 = 3.35, p = .001$ . As shown on Figure 7, data revealed ELLs in grade 5 obtained the lowest scores on the post-test.

Table 15

*Results from ANOVA for Post-Reading Benchmark Assessment*

Variable	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
ELL Status	8932.035	1	8932.035	45.205	.000	.257
Grade Level	4074.642	2	2037.321	10.311	.000	.136
ELL Status*Grade Level	239.924	2	119.962	.607	.546	.009
Error	25884.406	131	197.591			
Total	46093.445	136				

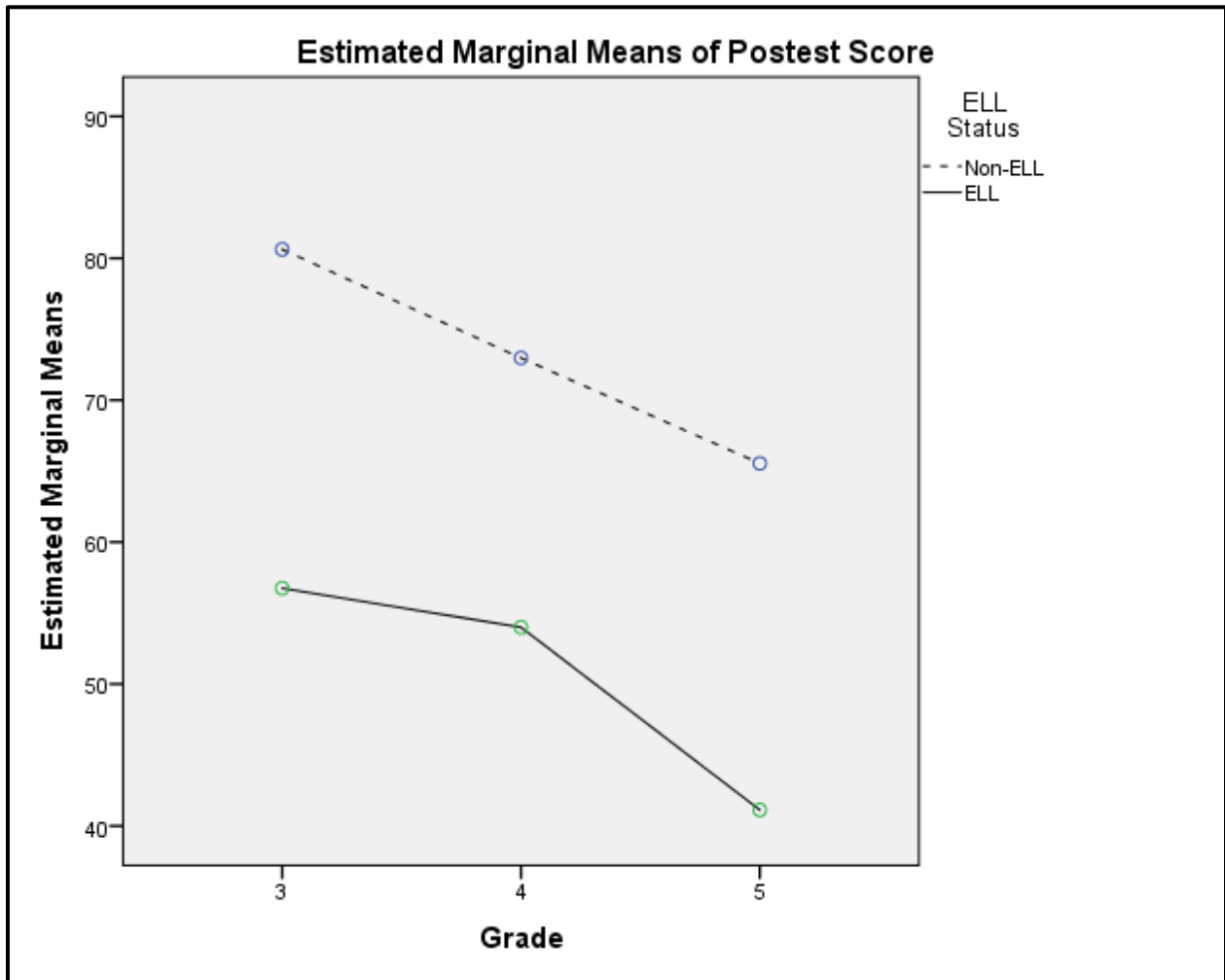


Figure 7. Plot of the mean "post-test score" for each combination group of ELL status and grade level.

The last question was about whether there was a statistically significant difference between the way third, fourth, and fifth grade reading teachers perceived their own caring behaviors and the way their students perceived these same teachers' caring behaviors, as determined by the teachers' self-reported and student-reported responses on *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998). As can be seen on Table 16, teachers had a numerically higher mean ( $\bar{X} = 104.4$ ,  $SD = 4.274$ ,  $n = 10$ ) than students

( $\bar{X} = 96.12$ ,  $SD = 13.607$ ,  $n = 138$ ) with regards to their perceptions of the teachers' caring behaviors. An independent sample  $t$  test analysis was calculated to answer this question. The results of the independent samples  $t$  test indicated there was a statistically significant difference;  $t(26.15) = -4.65$ ,  $p < .001$ . Teachers were associated with a statistically significantly higher mean than their students. Nonetheless, the magnitude of this difference was of medium size ( $d = -.62$ ).

Table 16

*Results of t-test for Teacher Caring*

	Group						95% CI for Mean Difference		$t$	$df$
	Student			Teacher						
	M	SD	$n$	M	SD	$n$				
Teacher-Caring	96.12	13.607	138	104.40	4.274	10	-11.94, -4.626	-4.654*	26.148	

\*  $p < .001$

### Summary

This chapter presented the actual findings from the analyses. Correlational methodology was implemented along with linear regression to gain insight into the relationship between teacher-caring behaviors and students' reading achievement. Independent samples  $t$  tests and Cohen's  $d$  coefficients were calculated to determine differences, if any, and the magnitude of such differences among the populations under study. Additionally, two-way ANOVA tests were computed to compare the mean differences between ELL status and grade level for each of the two reading benchmark tests. In the following chapter, I discuss the conclusions inferred from

the results of the data analyses, implications for stakeholders at different levels, and implications for future research as well as concluding thoughts.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter contains conclusions developed through the analyses of all data gathered. The chapter includes a brief synopsis of the investigation and provides discussion and interpretation of the results for this study. Research questions and major findings are summarized and discussed along with their relationship to existing literature. Moreover, implications for stakeholders at different levels are considered. Lastly, recommendations for future research as well as concluding thoughts are covered.

#### **Synopsis of the Study**

The purpose for conducting this study was to examine the behaviors of caring teachers and the possibility of certain teacher-caring behaviors being positively associated with third, fourth, and fifth grade students' reading achievement. Demographic information was gathered using district extant data. Student reading performance was gathered using extant school STAAR reading benchmark data collected during the month of December for the pre-test, for all three grade levels, and from the post-test, administered on January for third and fourth grades and on February for students in grade 5. Teacher-caring data were obtained through the instrument *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998) which was administered to participating third, fourth, and fifth grade students and those same students' reading teachers at three selected campuses during the latter part of March and early April. The study included 138 students and those same students' reading teachers for a total of 10 teachers. Because the selected instrument had not been previously utilized with elementary school students from Southwest Texas, it was necessary to conduct a pilot study to test the reliability of the

survey prior to carrying out the actual investigation. The pilot study took place mid-March, at an elementary school located near the selected campuses and with similar socio-economic demographics. A total of 38 third, fourth, and fifth grade students ( $n = 38$ ) participated in the pilot study, of which 50% of them were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) or what is now known as English Language Learners (ELLs).

### **Discussion of Major Findings**

Through research question 1, I examined whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the caring behaviors of third, fourth, and fifth grade reading teachers, as determined by their students' responses to the instrument *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998), and these students' reading achievement, as measured by their growth on the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmark assessments. The findings from this research question revealed a positive statistically significant correlation between teacher-caring behaviors and student reading achievement ( $r = .171, p = < .05$ ). That is, although one cannot say that the more a teacher cares about his or her students, the more those same students will achieve in the area of reading, it can be said that teacher-caring is a good predictor of students' reading achievement. In other words, one can expect that the more a student perceives the teacher as caring about him or her, the higher his or her reading achievement will be; for the same token, it can also be expected that as teacher-caring decreases, student reading achievement would also decrease. This finding was consistent with research conducted by Miller (2008), who studied the influence of teachers' caring behaviors in high school students' performance grades and behavior. Miller's results showed the influence of teacher caring on students' academic grades and behavior; in specific, it was demonstrated that

teachers' behaviors associated with reducing anxiety levels had the strongest relationship with students' academic and behavior grades (Miller, 2008).

Using research question 2, I analyzed whether there was a statistically significant difference in the degree to which third, fourth, and fifth grade ELLs and Non-ELLs perceived teacher-caring as determined by their rating of their reading teachers on the instrument entitled *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998). Data showed ELL students perceived teacher-caring at a higher degree when compared to Non-ELL students; however, such difference was not statistically significant as per the data analysis,  $t(106) = -.172$ ,  $p > .05$ . The results from this research question contribute to the extant data by shedding light into the possibility of ELL students being more sensitive to their teachers' behaviors and to the possibility of such behaviors having a higher degree of influence in the reading achievement of ELLs than it has in Non-ELL students. While reviewing the extant literature, I did not find any study that was specifically investigating the influence that caring teachers could have in ELLs. However, Bae (2011) observed students seemed to be sensitive to the learning environment intentionally created by the teachers and adjusted their behavior according to the atmosphere of the classroom. Studies on teacher-student relationships, such as the one conducted by Thompson (2010) and the one conducted by Bae (2011), have demonstrated the importance of creating learning environments that enable students to develop the perception that their teachers genuinely care about them as individuals. It is theorized that students with this positive perception of their teachers caring about them tend to develop a more positive attitude towards school, and that students, in order to reciprocate to their teachers, try their best in school in an effort to please those who care about them. In this kind of classroom environment, students in general, gain a sense of security and feel motivated to be in school (Gallagher, 2013). Davis



(2010) also acknowledged children's classroom experiences influence their motivation to learn and their motivation to read, thus consequently positively impacting their academic success.

Based on the results from question 2, it could also be inferred that the reading teachers of the participating students could be intentionally demonstrating caring behaviors towards their ELLs in specific. This implication concurs with Rabin (2003) who posited teachers perceive themselves as role models for their students and recognize their influence on students' behaviors. Teachers, therefore, intentionally provide opportunities for their students and purposefully look for positives in them and acknowledge them as a way of fostering an environment that enables effective relationships in the classroom, thus keeping students motivated to learn (Saunders, 2015).

With research question number 3, I studied whether there was a statistically significant difference between the reading achievement of third, fourth, and fifth grade ELLs and Non-ELLs as measured by their scores on the pre- and post-reading STAAR benchmarks. The analysis of the data at hand exposed that ELLs were associated with a statistically significantly lower mean in their reading achievement when compared to that of Non-ELLs on the reading pre-test ( $t(125) = -7.38, p < .001$ ) as well as on the reading post-test ( $t(135) = -8.42, p < .001$ ). Data also revealed ELLs regressed from the pre- to the post-reading test, while Non-ELLs made some gains. Additionally, data from the pre-test and from the post-test demonstrated ELL status might possibly contribute to students' reading achievement (pre-test  $F(1, 128) = 36.008, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$ ; post-test ( $F(1, 131) = 45.205, p < .001, \eta^2 = .257$ ) but such effect might differ across grade levels. The two-way ANOVA for the pre-test showed that Non-ELLs in grade 3 demonstrated a higher reading achievement than Non-ELLs in grade 4 and in grade 5. On the

other hand, ELLs in third grade demonstrated a lower reading achievement than ELLs in fourth and in fifth grades, and a much lower reading achievement than Non-ELLs in general.

These results are consistent with the trend of data collected through the administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for the Nation's Report Card demonstrating the reading scores for ELLs, in grades 4 and 8, are much lower than the scores for Non-ELLs in those same grade levels (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, May). The results from this research question are also consistent with data gathered in the state of Texas from the STAAR reading assessments. STAAR reading scores for ELLs are also much lower than the scores for Non-ELL students (TEA, Division of Performance Reporting, 2016). Moreover, these results corroborate Haycock's (2001) affirmation that public schools are not being successful at facilitating the literacy achievement for ELLs and consequently placing them at an academic disadvantage.

While examining research question 4, I investigated whether there was a statistically significant difference between the way third, fourth, and fifth grade reading teachers perceived their own caring behaviors and the way their students perceived their teachers' caring behaviors, as determined by the teachers' self-reported and student-reported responses on *A Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of a Teacher* (Bulach et al., 1998). The results of the independent samples *t* test calculated for this research question showed a statistically significant difference between the teachers' perceptions of their own caring behaviors and their students' perceptions ( $t(26.15) = -4.65, p < .001$ ). Based on the outcomes of the data analysis for this research question, it could be inferred that teachers are cognizant of how the behaviors they display in the classroom could possibly influence their students' academic experiences. If so, then one could say that teachers intentionally behave in a particular way to model appropriate behaviors for their

students and to create learning environments where the students feel at-ease, take risks, and are motivated to learn and to improve their reading skills. If such conclusion is accurate, then these results concur with previous research investigations showing that teachers intentionally plan the way they behave in the classroom (Rabin, 2003). The results from this question coincide with Bae's (2011) investigation which focused on the interpersonal interactions among the teachers and students and the affect that such interactions had on students. It was observed that the ambience of the classroom influenced the teacher-student relationships, and the interpersonal interactions among the teachers and students influenced the students' perceptions of the quality of their educational experiences thus resulting in academic success.

Based on the fact that the teachers were associated with a statistically significantly higher teacher-caring mean than the students, it could also be concluded that teachers differentiate their instruction and intentionally behave in certain ways with some students and not with others in order to meet the students' individual needs. This assertion coincides with Thompson's (2010) observations of teachers in caring classrooms. According to Thompson (2010), teachers shape their behaviors based on their perceptions of their at-risk students. Caring teachers recognize the importance of being patient and flexible based on respecting and understanding the needs of the students (Kissinger, 2011). Moreover, teachers recognize their students' individual needs such as that of developing a positive self-esteem and deliberately satisfy such need by focusing on finding positives in their students and purposefully making the learning community aware of such positives (Burlison & Thoron, 2014). In caring multicultural classrooms, teachers responsively assist all students in attaining their personal goals in addition to meeting the goals of the required curriculum (Pang et al., 1999, McCormick et al., 2013).

## **Implications for Stakeholders**

Results of this research along with existing literature indicate that when students perceive their teachers care for them, the students' reading achievement levels are improved as a result of being motivated to please the teacher who cares for them (Noddings, 2002, 2005a, 2012).

Teachers at all levels must keep in mind that their students' learning experiences are not only influenced by the lessons they teach based on the lesson plans they prepare for the week; they also teach a hidden curriculum through their actions and effect their students' attitude and behaviors towards school and learning. It is crucial that teachers intentionally behave in a manner that promotes positive social interactions in the classroom, that enable students to gain a sense of security and of high self-esteem, that reduce students' anxiety, and that enhance the students' desire to learn (Gallagher, 2013; McCormick, et al., 2013) so that their reading achievement level can increase.

This study and historical data from NAEP and STAAR assessments have established that ELLs are staying behind Non-ELLs in reading. This should not be completely attributed to the teachers and what they do in the classroom, for school and district administrators also have the responsibility to ensure that all students are provided with caring learning environments. The campus administrator should, always, be cognizant of the type of pedagogy practiced by their classroom teachers. As the instructional leader of the school, the campus administrator must be capable of identifying those teachers who are not successfully reaching all their students, to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers, and to capitalize on the teachers' strengths so they can build upon their weaknesses. District administrators have the responsibility of supervising all campuses to ensure all students are being successful regardless of their background or linguistic needs. It is of utmost importance that district administrators

disaggregate and analyze campus data as part of on-going needs assessment to provide timely and efficient interventions such as professional development needed as a district in general, for a specific campus, or for a particular teacher or group of teachers. School board members are charged with setting the vision and goals for the district. They are also responsible of adopting policies that provide the district with direction to achieve its goals. It is imperative that school board members are made aware of the relationship between teachers' caring behaviors and student reading achievement so that they can make better informed decisions and actively promote the development and maintenance of school policies and practices that endorse caring classrooms.

Based on the review of the literature, there are also implications for the students' parents, families, and the community in general. A caring relationship within the family context that supports parental involvement in the academic setting fosters the probability of success for academically disadvantaged students, such as ELLs (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Families that provide positive developmental experiences enable children to acquire beliefs and attitudes that help them be successful in school (Comer, 2001; Mabin, 2016). It is essential that parents provide their children with adult supervision at all times, that breed a culture of high expectations for academic achievement, and that constantly emphasize the significance of formal education (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Families also contribute to the students' academic success by actively participating in school functions and by actively monitoring their children's engagement in school (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). When parents are comfortable in their children's school and can freely communicate and build a positive rapport with the teachers, their children are more likely to perceive a positive connection to their learning environment and to their teachers;

positive school-family relationships emerge and lead to more successful outcomes for the children (Woolley & Bowen, 2007).

As it was mentioned in Chapter II, students learn how to socialize and relate with others in school. Noddings (2005a, 2005b, 2012) posited there is a need for pedagogy to build caring relationships between students and educators because schools provide the cultural framework that prepares students to live in the real world. One of the primary purposes of our educational system is to prepare students to meet the demands of the community so that students can be an integral and productive part of the social group. It is essential that the community receives the students and provides an environment in which they are given ample opportunities to practice what is learned at school including both, academic and social skills because the experience of not being part of a common community can be detrimental to their academic careers (Meier, 2002). Universities, as part of the community, should make additional efforts to embed an ethic of care in education in all future teacher preparation programs. It is obvious that it might be impossible to transform all future teachers into caring individuals, but professors can certainly teach the notions of intentionally providing caring learning environments and the effects that such experiences have in the students' academic success.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study suggests, and concurs with former research investigations, that teacher-caring behaviors are positively related to students' achievement (Bae, 2011; Lahman, 2001; Miller, 2008; Noddings, 2002; Ryan, 2011; Thompson, 2010). Nonetheless, it must be noted that all the participating students and teachers are Hispanic, and that most are of Mexican descent. It should also be noted that given the geographical location of the selected school district, many of the participating Non-ELL students were identified as ELLs at the beginning of their academic lives.

Given these facts, the results of the data at hand cannot, and should not, be generalized beyond this population. It would be appropriate to conduct this study on a much larger scale with participants of different backgrounds in order to make generalizations regarding the influence that teacher-caring behaviors have on students' reading achievement. One must not forget that although the selected school district provides the same professional development sessions to all its teachers, and even though all teachers are required to follow the district-developed scope and sequence for reading and required to implement the same instructional materials, students in different classrooms, taught by different teachers will have different learning experiences. Because of this, a longitudinal study at a campus where looping, or the practice where the same teacher remains with the same group of students for more than one school year, is integrated as a regular procedure, would be beneficial to more accurately measure the effect that teachers' behaviors have on students' reading achievement. Additional research integrating mixed methodologies triangulating classroom observations, classroom artifacts, and interviews, in addition to data gathered from a survey instrument could provide a much better understanding of the relationship between teacher-caring and student reading achievement. This type of study could also provide deeper understanding of the impact that caring learning environments have in the reading achievement of ELLs as compared to native English speakers.

### **Conclusions**

The results of the data analyses demonstrated that, although not causal, the way teachers behave and how they demonstrate they care about their pupils does make an impact in the students' reading achievement. Although it is important to plan data-driven lessons that address the academic needs of all students, it is just as critical to intentionally plan how to address their affective needs. Perhaps it might not be possible to make caring teachers out of any given

individual; nonetheless, teacher-preparation programs at the university level and professional development sessions offered by the school districts could embed the notion of educators becoming a lot more cognizant of their own behaviors, and the impact their behaviors could have on their students' learning experiences. The extant data have repeatedly stated ELLs are staying behind Non-ELLs when it comes to reading achievement at the national level and at the state level in Texas. Data derived from this study demonstrated very similar results at the local level. It is of utmost importance for campus administrators and classroom teachers to analyze their behaviors towards this population subgroup. Let us not forget that in addition to learning reading skills, this subgroup is also learning a new language, and therefore specialized instruction is needed. Being a caring teacher of ELLs does not imply to lower the standards or the demands of the curriculum, it is about becoming cognizant of the students cognitive, affective, and linguistic needs and deliberately planning activities to meet such needs.



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