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Exploring Dialectic Tensions in Teachers' Relationships in School Settings

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EXPLORING DIALECTIC TENSIONS IN TEACHERS' RELATIONSHIPS IN SCHOOL
SETTINGS

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to all the teachers who dare to change the world one student at a time.

EXPLORING DIALECTIC TENSIONS IN TEACHERS' RELATIONSHIPS IN SCHOOL
SETTINGS

by

GRISELDA FLORES RODRÍGUEZ, Bachelor of Arts

THESIS

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Abstract

This study explored the feasibility of using dialectic theory to study of dialectic oppositions in teachers' school-based relationships. Employing relational dialectics as a theoretical framework, this study exposed several sets of dialectical forces emerging in teachers' relationships. 23 high school teachers were interviewed utilizing a semi-structured questionnaire; interviews were transcribed and coded for analysis. The analysis revealed that the dialectic tensions of *control vs. emancipation*, *empowerment vs. oppression* are prevalent in teachers' relationships with administrators; the dialectic tensions of *solidarity vs. autonomy* and *fragmentation vs. unity* are common in the relationships of teachers with administrators and colleagues as well; while the dialectic tensions of *nurture vs. discipline*, *respect vs. suspect*, *consistency vs. flexibility*, and *connection vs. disconnection* are prominent in teachers' relationships with their students.

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Chapter 1: **Introduction**

Relationships are organized around the dynamic interplay of opposing tendencies, that is, they are characterized by dialectical tensions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For instance, in relationships there is a desire to be close to another person while also wanting to retain autonomy. There may also be tension between wanting to self-disclose to a partner while also wanting privacy. And so on. These opposing features are inherent in the very fabric of relating, and are what enables a relationship to exist as a dynamic social entity (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). This dialectical interplay can work backstage beyond partners' mindful awareness, nonetheless, contributing to relational alteration (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The dynamic interplay of dialectical contradictions in human relationships, as friendship (Rawlins, 1983), romantic (Goldsmith, 1990), and marital relationships (Baxter, 1990; Baxter, 1994; Baxter & West, 2003; Erbert, 2000) has been the focus of several empirical investigations. Nonetheless, contradictions can also be found between the interests within other collectives that might include professionals in the area of education (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Researchers in education have been focusing their attention on different variables as work status, gender, work experience, and leadership style among other variables (Bogler, 2001; Kelley & Finnigan, 2003; Kokkinos, 2006; Lewis, 1999; McCaughtry, 2004; Sari, 2004). However, there is little research committed to the understanding of teachers' relationships in school grounds. Baxter (1990) argues that the perceived presence of contradictions in any relationship might be a source of frustration, tension, or of feelings of satisfaction, depending on how parties cope with those oppositions. Surprisingly, there is a lack of research dedicated to the understanding of dialectic contradictions in teachers' experiences in school settings where teachers' daily interactions with different parties can be abundant sources of relational frictions. More importantly, understanding teachers' relationships in school settings is vital since it is associated with teachers' satisfaction with their profession, and in turn with teacher's

effectiveness in a classroom, which ultimately affects students' achievement (Houtte, 2006; Meyer & Turner, 2002; Sari, 2004; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

A study reported by the National Center for Education Statistics in July 1997 was dedicated to determining the level of teachers' satisfaction. The NCES study was focused on the satisfaction of teachers with different background characteristics, teaching in different schools, with different perceptions of workplace conditions, and receiving different levels of compensation (1997). The study reported differences in satisfaction between elementary and secondary teachers, and public school and private school teachers. However, most schools, classrooms, and teacher background variables were weakly associated with satisfaction with teaching as a profession. Instead, workplace conditions, and specially a positive relationship with administration, students, and parents, were reported as being major sources of teachers' satisfaction (NCES, 1997). Hence, understanding teachers' school-based relationships is critical. Therefore, this study explores the feasibility of using dialectic theory as a descriptive explanatory theory for understanding teachers' relationships in school settings.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to expand the understanding of teachers' experiences by exploring the dialectic tensions that surface in the process of teachers' relating with others in school settings. For that reason, the theoretical framework utilized in this study is dialectics. While there are many approaches to dialectics, this study centers on the notion that social processes are characterized by tensions and contradictions --a ceaseless interplay between contrary opposing tendencies that occur when members of a personal relationship deal with others (Baxter, 1996).

Studies in the education field elucidate that teachers' relationships in school settings are full of contradictions and tensions (Frank, 1998; Lewis, 1999; Meyer & Turner, 2002; Rapp, 2002). Schools are organizations deliberately intended to function in the context of the broader society. Beyond being the primary source for children to learn the content and methods taught in academics and art curricula,

the school is still expected to socialize desire and control behavior. While teaching language, mathematical and critical thinking skills, teachers are still held responsible for quieting chaos and cultivating the value system of a civilization (Frank, 1998). Frank argues that the multiple realities of school life intertwine with the schools' efforts to create a value system that can allow to shape, govern, and guide growth, behavior and learning (1998). As a consequence, teachers, as the primary channels of those efforts, find themselves affected by the contradictory forces that arise in the processes that school life entails.

Frank (1998) argues that the presence of contradictions and conflicts is real and an expected part of the culture in general, and of school life, in particular. Hence, understanding the dialectic tensions that may arise in the process of teachers' relationships is critical. Thus, this study approaches those issues using an appropriate dialectical framing to examine dialectic oppositions in relationships. Even though it is important to understand teachers' relationships at the different grade levels; this study is limited to the examination of contradictions emerging in the teachers' relationships within school grounds in a high school setting.

1.2 Plan for the Present Thesis

In the present Chapter 1, I provided an introduction to the present study, presenting a statement of the problem and its justification. Chapter 2 establishes the dialectical framework of this study; presents a view of the history and development of dialectic theory; provides an explanation of relational dialectics, the dialectic framing considered in this study; and, introduces the research question that guides the present research. Chapter 3 describes the methods and data-collection procedures utilized in this study. Chapter 4 reports the results of this project describing the different sets of dialectic tensions found in the process of teachers' relationships in school settings. Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions, provides suggestions for future research, and outlines the limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: **The Dialectical Framework**

Dialectical theory is a theoretical perspective that explains the contradictory processes in social interactions. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), dialectical theory is an approach to the investigation of human symbolic processes that examines the multiple contradictions, complexities, and changes that may characterize human relationships. Dialectics is often characterized as a metatheoretical orientation whose history is long and whose genealogy contains many specific dialectical theories, all of which share a family resemblance in their basic world view, but which may vary in their theoretical particulars (Baxter & Montgomery). Specifically, the dialectic orientation of this study is a dialogical perspective developed by Baxter & Montgomery (1996) called “relational dialectics.” Relational dialectics emerged from the perspectives of many other dialectical theorist whose voices merit consideration. This chapter expounds the concept of dialectics from a historical and philosophical perspective, laying out the dialectic framework that this study will apply to the understanding of teachers’ relationships in schools settings.

2.1 **History and Development of Dialectic Theory**

Most people attribute the origin of dialectic to the philosophy of Plato. According to Williams (1989), Plato, in his dialogues brought to the attention of the world, what he took as negative and unsatisfactory dialectic of the sophists and the positive dialectic of his teacher Socrates. Socrates looked at dialectics as the process of giving birth to new knowledge through analyzing and criticizing the thoughts of others. Plato, on the other hand, practiced this art in his dialogues and more successfully producing powerful and well-founded conclusions from engaging and sometimes entertaining dialogues (Williams, 1989). However, Williams claims that Plato was not the most radical dialectician of ancient times. According to Williams, the philosopher who employed dialectic in the most far reaching way and provided the inspiration for Plato’s own dialectic was Heraclitus (1989).

Williams (1989) argues that Heraclitus was the first philosopher who introduced the dialectic view of the universe which plays such a prominent role for dialecticians. Williams argues that it was Heraclitus who brought to light the method of argument which stresses the unity of opposites. In Heraclitus world view, in life everything is both, in a state of coming to be or ceasing to be; everything is and is not at the same time (Williams, 1989). Williams declares that in Heraclitus' world view, reality may be reduced to only one principle; the principle of movement or change, the same principle that was the basic ground for the intellectual labor of many thinkers, and particularly for Hegel (1989).

Gadamer Hans-Georg (1976) argues that Hegel inherited what was a common intellectual occupation in ancient times, dialectics, and brought it to the modern world on his own terms enriching and expanding this world view. Gadamer asserts that Hegel expanded in different ways the ancient knowledge that held that the working out of dialectal contradictions was only a study which prepared one for actual knowing (1976). In Hegel's view everything is inherently contradictory be that an argument or a process or thought, or even reality. Gadamer (1976) affirms that "For Hegel anything that lives is subject to contradiction" (p.105).

In his studies on Hegel, Kainz (1988) argues that while expanding the knowledge of dialectics, it was necessary for Hegel to maintain that contradiction is not a final category, and that transcendence of the contradiction is legitimate and necessary. Kainz notes that for Hegel the point of dialectics is that precisely by pushing an opposition to the point of self-contradiction is what makes possible the transition to a higher truth that unites the sides of the contradiction (1988). Moreover, Hegel sustains that contradictions or paradoxes can be resolved only through reason. Hegel attributes to understanding the power to bring out the contradictory nature of our experiences while assigning reason the task to resolve those contradictions (Gadamer, 1976; Williams, 1989).

In Hegel's view, conflict should not be thought of as an aberrant feature of society, but be viewed as a normal and fundamental aspect of human life, vital to the persistence and health of a

society. In Hegel's words (1977), "Because we suffer we acknowledge we have err" (p. 28). Hegel posited that once contradictions and paradoxes have been properly comprehended, they are already on their way to being resolved. Williams argues that for Hegel in the apparent contradictions, conflicts and paradoxes belie an imminent and underlying order (Williams, 1989). But, Hegel was not the only thinker that devoted his intellectual work to the inquiry of dialectics. Marx and Engels also devoted much of their intellectual work to the understanding of contradictions.

Like Hegel, Marx and Engels concluded that conflict is an essential and desirable condition of culture and society (1968). Williams (1989) argues that Marx's main purpose in writing *Capital* is to demonstrate that the essence of human society is dialectical. According to Williams, Marx did not see reality as dialectic, but rather takes the view that reality can only be *understood* dialectically (1989). Marx and Engels (1968) explain:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journey man, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes (p. 35-36).

Williams affirms that Marx and Engels do not take a wholly negative attitude towards occurrence of conflict in society. Like Hegel, Marx and Engels look at the positive side to see what might emerge from conflict (Williams, 1989). Williams argues that Marx and Engels support the idea that knowing what is right and what is wrong presuppose each other, and since right and wrong are opposites, they bear an essential and reciprocal relation to each other (1989).

As for philosophers of ancient times, and more recently for Hegel, Marx, and Engels, dialectics was for Mao Tse Tung, the founder of Communist China, subject of thoughtful study. Nonetheless, Mao uses a different scope in his inquiry of contradiction. Soo (1981) argues that Mao does not provide a

systematic treatment of ‘contradiction’ as a term; nor does he ever define it in philosophical terms, he simply uses the term extensively and frequently and above all in many different contexts (p.47). Soo affirms that each objectively existing thing is for Mao a contradiction, because for Mao, it is the contradiction within the particular thing that determines its essence or nature, and distinguishes it from others (1981). For Mao, studying the law of contradictions means touching a wide variety of problems in philosophy including; the universality of contradictions; the particularity of contradictions; the principal aspect of a contradiction, and the role of antagonism in contradiction (Soo, 1981).

Mao believed that there is nothing that does not contain contradiction: “Without contradiction there would be no world” (Mao, 1954, p. 22). He argued that any form of motion contains within itself its own particular contradiction, and in order to understand and resolve that contradiction, we must reveal the particularity of each aspect of the contradiction, otherwise, it is impossible to reveal the quality of the process (p. 22-25). Mao believed that there are contradictory aspects in every process that exclude each other, struggle with each other, and are opposed to each other (1954). He noted that such contradictory aspects are contained without exception in the process of all things in the world and in human thought. Mao (1954) explained the underlying principle under his supposition as follows:

The reason is that contradictory aspects cannot exist in isolation. Without the other aspect which is opposed to it, each aspect loses the condition of its existence. Just imagine, can any of the aspects of contradictory things or of contradictory concepts in the human mind exist independently?

Without life, there would be no death; without death, there would be no life (p. 43).

Soo (1981) states that although Mao used contradiction in different contexts and his primary concern was to discover contradictions in society and to resolve them. Mao viewed any social phenomenon or event essentially as a relationship or a process of relationships, and as such, also as a contradiction (Soo, 1981). Mao used contradiction to refer to a dynamic relationship between different groups or classes that are opposed to, or antagonistic to one another. Mao (1954) asserted:

In human history, antagonism between classes exists as a particular manifestation of the struggle within a contradiction. The contradiction between the exploiting class and the exploited class: the two contradictory classes coexist for a long time in one society, be it slave society, or a feudal or a capitalist society, and struggle with each other; but it is not until the contradiction between the two classes has develop to a certain stage that the two sides adopt the for open antagonism.. (p. 49-50).

Mao (1960) considered that contradictions between ourselves and our enemies are antagonistic ones (p. 9). On the other hand, Mao (1960) also used the term 'contradiction' to refer to a dynamic relationship between different groups or classes that are not opposed to one another, or are "non-antagonistic", such as contradiction among working people (p. 9). Nonetheless, Mao thinks that disturbances between contrary forces as antagonistic and non-antagonistic forces have a dual character, since when they occur they force us to learn lessons from them (1960). Thus, Mao (1960) argues, "in this sense bad things can be turned into good things...All kind of disturbances can be looked at it this way" (p. 62).

Dialectical theory has a long history in human thought, and versions of dialectics are as many and as varied as the thinkers that dedicated their lives to the understanding of this concept (Altman, 1993). Human thought is permeated with a style of thinking based on dichotomies and binary oppositions like right or wrong, rational or emotional, nature or nurture, public or private, self or other, and internal or external. The study of dialectical contradictions is expanding and it has been growing during the last few decades. Researchers are exploring dialectical contradictions on human interpersonal relationships focusing in contradictions in different areas like in organizations (Altman, Vinsel & Brown, 1981; Erbert, Mearns & Dena, 2005; Ford, D. J. & Backoff, W. R., 1988; Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2000; Stohl & Cheney, 2000; Tracy, 2004; Trethewey, A. 1999), in close personal relationships like marriage (Baxter, 1990, 1994, 2004; Baxter & West, 2003; Erbert and Duck, 1999; Goldsmith, D.,1990; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998; Rawlins, W. K., 1983), in group-government relations (Evans,

2001), in immigrants' experiences (Erbert, Perez & Gareis, 2003) and in close relationships as in grandparent relationships with their grandchildren (Erbert & Aleman, 2006), as well as in the understanding of social change (Papa, Singhal & Papa, 2006).

Although dialectical ideas appear in a variety of political philosophies, the term dialectic has been employed in very different ways over the course of history. Therefore, the concept of dialectics must be employed with caution and with as much specificity as possible. Hence, this study attempts to understand the contradictions that emerge in teacher's relationships in school settings, utilizing "relational dialectics". Relational dialectics is a version of dialectics developed by Montgomery & Baxter (1996). The following section is dedicated to the explanation of this theoretical view.

2.2 **Relational Dialectics**

From Baxter and Montgomery's point of view, relational dialectics is a pattern of thinking about human relationships that is deeply influenced by the dialogic thinking propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin, the Russian intellectual responsible for dialogism, wrote the volume of his work in the Soviet Union in the 1920's and 1930's, but for political reasons his work was slow to be published, and slower to be translated (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). Nevertheless, since its rediscovery in the 1970's and 1980's, Bakhtin has emerged as one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century due to his highly distinct concept of language, a concept that has as its core a sense of opposition and struggle at the heart of existence; a ceaseless battle between centrifugal and centripetal forces (Holquist, 1981). Holquist (1981) asserts that for Bakhtin these two forces are always in "*praesentia*" and that they determine the way we actually experience language as we use it, and are used by it in the particularity of our everyday lives (p.270). The essence of Bakhtin's dialogic view holds that dialogue, both as an actual, real-time, interpersonal process, and as a conceptual metaphor for understanding more abstract cultural, historical, and relational phenomena, is the glue that holds social existence together (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998).

Bakhtin's dialogic view strongly influenced Montgomery and Baxter's conception of relational dialectics. From the perspective of relational dialectics, social life exists in and through people's communicative practices, by which people give voice to multiple (perhaps even infinite) opposing tendencies (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Montgomery and Baxter (1996) argue that social life is an unfinished, ongoing dialogue in which polyphony of dialectical voices struggle against one another to be heard, and in that struggle, they set the stage for future contradictions. Even though dialectics has many perspectives, all of them are united in the commitment to the foundational concepts of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality, but separated in the unique emphases that characterize each perspective (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter 1998). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) describe relational dialectic as a perspective that is "...uniquely patterned and richly colored by the dialogic complexities of communicating in personal relationships, with the common dialectical threads of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality" (p. 7-8).

Taking a relational dialectic perspective, Montgomery and Baxter (1998) affirm that contradictions are complex, overlapping domains of *centripetal* or dominant forces juxtaposed with *centrifugal* or countervailing forces. Thus, they conclude, "the *centripetal* relational feature of certainty is countered by several *centrifugal* oppositions that co-exist as certainty-predictability, certainty-novelty, certainty-mystery, certainty-excitement, and so on" (p. 157). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) argue that even though the term "contradiction" in common language connotes something negative, an incongruity or inconsistency in a person's reasoning or action, from a relational view, contradictions are inherent in social life and not evidence of failure or inadequacy in a person or social system. In fact, the authors sustain that contradictions are basic "drivers" for change (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998).

The concept of change is also a core assumption common to dialectical theorist. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) argue that to claim that change is inherent in social systems is, at the same time, to

recognize stability. The authors assert that dialectical change is simply the interplay of stability and instability (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). From a relational perspective, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) sustain argue that change is not directed toward some necessary or ideal end state; rather, change involves ongoing quantitative and qualitative shifts that simply move a system to a different place. Although all dialectical approaches presume that the change process is an inherent feature of dialectical interplay, differences of emphasis can be identified in each of them. However, from a relational dialectic view change is labeled as spiraling change for its highly abstract level of interplay of oppositions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Moreover, from a relational view, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) assert that the concept of spiral change involves recurrence, but recognizes that phenomena never repeat in identical form.

The third tenet of dialectics is that people are at once actors and objects of their own actions; a feature that dialectical theorists have termed “praxis” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). From a relational view, people function as proactive actors who make communicative choices in how to function in their social world. People are actors in giving communicative life to the contradictions that organize their social life, but these contradictions in turn affect their subsequent communicative actions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) support the view that the interplay of opposing tendencies is situated in the symbolic, not material practices of relationship parties. Also, the authors assert that communication processes are symbolic resources through which meanings are produced and reproduced (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Moreover, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) sustain that relationship parties respond to dialectical exigencies that have been produced from their past interactional history together through their jointly enacted communicative choices. At the same time, the communication choices of the moment alter the dialectical circumstances that the pair will face in future interaction together (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

The fourth and final core concept of dialects is “totality”. Baxter & Montgomery (1996) define totality as the assumption that phenomena can be understood only in relation to other phenomena. However, the authors explain that the notion of totality in a dialectical view does not mean “completeness” in the sense of producing a total complete portrait of a phenomenon. Instead, it can be seen as a way to think about the world as a process of relations or interdependencies (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) affirm that an important implication of the dialectical emphasis on the whole is that the tension of opposing dialectical forces is conceptually located at the level of the interpersonal relationship. From this point of view, dialectical attention is directed away from the individual as the unit of analysis and toward the dilemmas and tensions that are inherent in relating (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). When people come together in any social union, they create a host of dialectical forces. The authors posit that although partners may be aware of and may describe many of the dialectical dilemmas they face, a dialectical tension does not necessarily be consciously felt or described. Baxter & Montgomery add that the dialectical interplay may work beyond partners’ awareness nonetheless contributing to relational change (1996).

Montgomery & Baxter (1998) affirm that Bakhtin also enriched the notion of dialectic praxis which posits that relationship parties react to dialectical exigencies creating new dialogic realities in their praxical communicative choices of the moment. These praxical improvisations are both creative and reflective of established patterns that Montgomery & Baxter have described in previous work (see Baxter, 1990 and Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For instance, for Montgomery and Baxter (1998), the patterns of *denial* represent an effort to subvert, obscure or deny the presence of contradictions by legitimating only one dialectical force to the exclusion of countervailing ones. Also, the authors describe *disorientation* as a pattern which involves a fatalistic attitude in which contradictions are regarded as inevitable, negative, and unresponsive to praxical change. According to Montgomery & Baxter (1998), the pattern of *balance* is typified by a compromise in which the parties dilute oppositions by fulfilling

them only in part; as when a couple tries to maintain a middle point between openness and closeness, a style of communication that is not wholly one or the other, but somewhere in between. *Recalibration* is identified by Montgomery and Baxter (1998) as a pattern in which relationship parties reframe a contradiction in such a way that polarities are encompassed in one another, thereby transcending the form of an opposition without resolving it. Montgomery and Baxter identify *reaffirmation* as a process that involves the acceptance of the inevitability of contradiction, but in contrast to disorientation patterns that lament this fact, *reaffirmation* celebrates contradiction as the essence of social existence. Nonetheless, the authors recognized that the descriptions of these recurring patterns are insufficient for understanding praxis without also attending to the creativity of the interactive moment (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). Baxter and Montgomery affirm that satisfaction and dissatisfaction in relationships may be associated with how contradictions are managed moment to moment more than with how the relationship parties experience contradictions (1996). Hence, consideration of the unintended consequences, emergent possibilities and trial-and-error nature of social interactions merited scholarly attention (Baxter, 1990; Erbert et. al., 2003; Erbert. et. al., 2005; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998; Papa, Singhal & Papa, 2006). This study attempts to enhance the knowledge of dialectics in relationships in school sites using relational dialectics.

2.3 **Research Question**

Teachers have to deal with a knot of relationships that pull alongside contradictions (Frank, 1998; Lewis, 1999; Meyer & Turner, 2002; Rapp, 2002). Thus, the primary target of this study is to enlarge the understanding of teachers' relationships in school settings. Baxter (1996) argues that the existence of a relationship implies some forms of dialectic contradictions. Therefore, a number of dialectic contradictions are expected to be perceived in teachers' interactions in school grounds. Though a number of factors faced by teachers in their daily interactions have been the focus of widespread study (Houtte, 2006; Miner & Dachler, 1973; Kokkinos, 2006; Pugliesi, 1999; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), the

dialectic tensions that may permeate teachers' relationships in schools suffer a lack of attention. Therefore, the guiding research question in this study is exploratory and open-ended:

Research Question 1: What dialectical tensions are present in teachers' relationships in school settings? How do they manifest themselves? How do they influence their interactions inside and outside of the classroom?

The answer to this question potentially adds to the knowledge of dialectics emerging in teachers' school-based relationships. At the same time, this exploration helps to determine the feasibility of using Relational Dialectics to understand teachers' relationships in school sites.

2.4 **Summary**

The present chapter justified the utilization of relational dialectics as a framework for this study. It provided a historical backdrop on dialectic theory, focusing on the many elements and attributes of relational dialectics. A guiding research question was also proposed. The next chapter describes the methods and procedures employed to answer the research question that guides this study.

Chapter 3: **Methods and Procedures**

This study primarily utilized qualitative methods and also some very basic quantitative compilations. The data gathered in this study helped us in the exploration of the feasibility of utilizing dialectic theory as a theoretical framework to investigate teachers' experiences in schools settings. Also, the information gathered in this study facilitated the examination of the contradictions that surface in teachers' relationships in schools settings. Quantitative methods were utilized to gather biographical information of the participants involved in this study.

3.1 *Participants*

As a first step, an application to investigate teachers' relationships in school settings was submitted to the IRB of The University of Texas at El Paso and to a School District located at El Paso, Texas. After approval of both institutions, the participants were recruited at a High School with authorization from the School Principal. Letters containing a form that requested the voluntary participation of the teachers were submitted to the school. Those forms were given to the school Department Heads, and they in turn, submitted the forms to the teachers of their departments. The teachers that were willing to participate in this study were asked to meet individually with the principal investigator to complete the different instruments. At teachers request, interviews took place at the High School where this study was located, or at a location that met the requirements of safety, confidentiality, and ethics. The participants did not have to follow any specific criteria except that of being an active teacher. Twenty seven participants were interviewed individually, but only data collected from 23 participants was kept for analysis. All interviews were recorded with previous consent of the participants. Twenty-three interviews were transcribed and the data obtained was kept for analysis. Four interview recordings were not transcribed due to poor recording quality, and written data collected from the participants was destroyed. The transcriptions produced about 200 pages of double-spaced text. Interviews from 11 males and 12 female participants of different ages and teaching experience were

included in this study (See Table 3.1). Interviews took place from April 16 to May 22, 2008. Interviews took from 20 to 50 minutes to complete.

3.2 *Instruments*

To conduct the interview, the interviewer used a general *script* (provided in Appendix A). During the process of the interview, the participants were asked to fill out different forms starting with an *Information Consent* (Appendix B) form, the *Structured Written Interview* (Appendix C). To obtain information of teachers' experiences in oral form, the interview concluded with an oral interview using a *Semi structured Interview Protocol* (Appendix D).

The purpose of the *Informed Consent* (Appendix B) was to inform the participants about the purpose of this research, as well as about the risks and rights involved in the participation on this study. Additionally, the *Informed Consent* was utilized to obtain informed signatures of agreement from participants.

The respondents were asked to fill up a survey questionnaire, the *Structured Written Interview* (Appendix C). The purpose of the survey was to gather basic demographic information about the respondents; their age, gender, race, years of formal education, their teaching experiences as well as grade levels taught (See Tables 3.1 to 3.6). This research used a structured written interview (Appendix C) similar to the one used by Joseph M. Garmon (2004) with small modifications to fit the requirements of the present study. The *Structured Written Interview* questionnaire was analyzed using the statistics program *SPSS 15.0*. To be able to analyze the data obtained during the interviews, the questions were treated as variables, and were given a computable name. The possible answers were also treated as variables, and were given a numerical value from 1 to 5 and labeled accordingly. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data (See Tables from 3.1 to 3.6 for Biographical information).

On information about gender, from 23 participants, 11 participants identified themselves as male and 12 as female (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	11	47.8	47.8	47.8
	female	12	52.2	52.2	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

On information about race or ethnicity, from a total of 23 participants, 10 participants identified themselves as Caucasian, 11 as Hispanic, and 2 as belonging to other races (See Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Race/ Ethnicity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Caucasian	10	43.5	43.5	43.5
	Hispanic	11	47.8	47.8	91.3
	Other	2	8.7	8.7	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

On information obtained about marital status, from a total of 23 participants, 12 participants identified themselves as married, 6 as single, and 5 as divorced (See Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Marital Status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Married	12	52.2	52.2	52.2
	Single	6	26.1	26.1	78.3
	Divorced	5	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

From 23 participants, 18 participants declared to have a BA/BS Degree, and 5 a MA/MS Degree (See Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Years of Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BA/BS Degree	18	78.3	78.3	78.3
	MA/MS Degree	5	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

In the *Structured Written Interview*, from a total of 24 participants, 12 participants declared to have less than 5 years of experience; 2 less than 10 years of experience; 4 less than 15 years of experience; 4 less than 20 years of experience; and 3 participants declared more than 25 years of experience (See Table 3.5).

Table 3.5 Years of Experience

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid -5	12	52.2	52.2	52.2
-10	2	8.7	8.7	60.9
-15	2	8.7	8.7	69.6
-25	4	17.4	17.4	87.0
25+	3	13.0	13.0	100.0
Total	23	100.0	100.0	

All of the 23 participants declared to have taught at the High School level, but two of them also have experience working at the middle school and elementary level which was not an option on the *Structured Written Interview* (See Table 3.6 and Appendix C for more information).

Table 3.6 Grade Level Taught

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid High School	23	100.0	100.0	100.0

In order to obtain information on teachers' experiences in their relationships in school settings, participants were asked to answer a *Semi Structured Interview Protocol* (Appendix D) orally. The interview protocol consisted of 13 questions that were constructed specifically to obtain information about teachers' relationships in school settings as well as to gather other general information on teachers' experiences. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions of the interviews were coded and analyzed in order to find allusions of dialectic tensions in the participants' articulations. The transcriptions were coded and the dialectic tensions were identified using a coding form constructed for this study. Hard data with the written allusions of the dialectic tensions was placed

in individual envelopes and labeled accordingly. The coded data was reviewed several times looking for consistencies, patterns, and discrepancies in the sets of the dialectic tensions identified. Special attention was given to the dialectic tensions that emerged more frequently in the participant accounts.

The information obtained in this study revealed the presence of dialectic tensions in teachers' relationships with administrators, with other teachers, with students, and with other people (which includes staff and parents). However, for the purpose of this study, we took into consideration only the dialectic tensions found in teachers' relationships with administrators, other teachers, and students. Also, the participants' narratives exhibit countless allusions to different sets of dialectic tensions that intersect as teachers relate with different parties in their workplaces. Though, this study took into account only the sets of dialectic tensions that emerged more frequently in the participants' articulations (See Table 3.7).

Table 3.7

Dialectic Tensions in Teachers' Relationships				
Teacher's relationships with	Administrators	Other teachers	Students	others
<i>1.Control/emancipation</i>	35		6	12
<i>2.Oppression/empowerment</i>	29	3	7	5
<i>3. Solidarity/autonomy</i>	13	13		
<i>4.fragmentation/ unity</i>	18	11		
<i>5.Nurture/discipline</i>			22	
<i>6.Respect/suspect</i>	3	4	9	
<i>7.Consistency/flexibility</i>	15		16	
<i>8.Connection/disconnection</i>			59	
<i>9.Other dialectic contradictions</i>	10	8	37	5
Total number of allusions	123	39	156	22

Note. The total number of allusions of each dialectic pair is not based in the total number of participants, but in the total number of allusions of the dialectic tensions sets per participant.

3.3 Summary

The present chapter described the methods and procedures that were utilized to explore the dialectic tensions in teachers' relationships. A description was provided of the instruments employed to gather the data. General biographical information about the participants involved in this project was presented, and coding procedures for the qualitative data were outlined. The following chapter will report in more detail the findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter reports the findings of the present research and has two main parts. The initial part offers a detailed description of the dialectic tensions that emerged in teachers' relationships with administrators and colleagues. The second part elaborates on the dialectic tensions found in teachers' relationships with their students.

4.1 Dialectic Tensions in Teachers' Relationships

The results of this research suggest that a knot of dialectic contradictions surfaces as teachers interact with (1) administrators, (2) other teachers, and (3) students.

This study revealed that the dialectic tensions of *control vs. emancipation* and *empowerment vs. oppression* are prominent in teachers' relationships with administrators.

This study also revealed that the dialectic tensions of *solidarity vs. autonomy* and *fragmentation vs. unity* are present in the relationships of teachers with administrators, as well as in teachers' relationships with other teachers. This suggests that in the dynamic interplay of opposing tendencies in teachers' relationships, some of the dialectic tensions intersect as teachers interact with administrators and peers.

The findings of this study reveal the dialectic tension of *nurture vs. discipline*, *respect vs. suspect*, *consistency vs. flexibility*, and *connection vs. disconnection* are prominent in teachers' relationships with their students. The dynamics of these dialectic tendencies are explained next.

4.2 Teacher-Administrator Dialectic of *Control vs. Emancipation*

Teacher's relationships in school grounds nestle the dialectic tension between *control vs. emancipation*. The educational system is controlled by regulations and policies that are followed and reinforced by all its members. The activities that teachers perform in their workplaces are guided by State mandated norms and reinforced by individual organizational structures at school level. Although, the educational system's rules and regulations control the freedom of all of its members, those same

rules and regulations allow the existence of the dialectic opposition forces of *control* vs. *emancipation*. This study found that while teachers recognize the need of some form of control in their organization, their actions show traces of emancipation enactments when excessive control reinforced by school administration is directed to their individual performance. The dialectic tension of *control* vs. *emancipation* in teachers' relationships in school grounds is not easy to explain. To understand this dialectic interplay, consider the cases of some of the participants in this study. One of the participants expressed:

The administrators whom I worked with within these three years were very strict and monitored everything. Like when you turn in your grades, they pronounced that you had to do it a certain day. You had to wait in line because you had to check up and go back and do everything right. At the time, I thought that the administrators were making us do silly things. But sometimes, at least, if an administrator is directing you, you are used to seeing them in your room from time to time. I think that that keeps people more in line. There're pros and cons to all. I mean, it is less stressful to have a less strict administrator (Interview April 22, 2008).

Our data reveal that even though teachers justify systems of control in the form of demands coming from different education levels, the legitimacy of those demands may appear doubtful for some of them. A participant illustrated his awareness in the following way:

I don't think it is Administration; it goes as far as to the Federal Government. It's just the TAKS demands (*Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills*); the TAKS demands and the tension it creates to the students. In other words, let's just say this week for example; they can be doing some other thing, but we are like TAKS, TAKS and direct instruction on the TAKS. And I do that mostly because I want success, but I am kind of going somewhere else. I am thinking about, "The big man is up there, and the demands here are up to us" And then, it has that accountability issue. We should be accountable, but there should be a fine line between accountability and how we run

a classroom. I understand where those demands come from. I understand where the vicious demands come from, and the stage, and they go all the way, like I said, to the Federal Government. So, it's kind of a trickle-down effect. How can we meet both demands, the Federal Government and Administration's demands, and at the same time, my demands? (Interview April 30, 2008). (Italics added)

Findings in study suggest that the dialectic tension of *control vs. emancipation* arises in teachers' relationships with their administrators when teachers feel that their duty as educators is being severely disrupted by excessive controlling demands at school level. A participant gave his opinion on this matter:

You should have the freedom to teach. As long as we are following our curriculum, as long as we are getting across the concepts and ideas, we should still have that freedom to teach. But, it is like more and more, there's less freedom. It's almost becoming robotic and mechanized. The administrators are very happy when you have the TASK scores and you are making the school look good, of course, because you are helping them meet the AYP, and so on. But at the same time, I know a lot of us, the teachers, don't feel good about it because we know we are just doing a lot of drill learning and practice test. So, we are just teaching to the test. That really limits our ability to be dynamic, and to be innovative as teachers; and to really just kind of have to teach the moments because we are always on a schedule. We got to cover this, we got to cover that, we got to do all these practice TASK. We are taking more and more time away from actual teaching so that we can have the time to administer the TASK test, to have bench marks tests, to have other kinds of exams. So, it is all these things that it seems that all it is, is just cutting to our time that we can use to do real teaching (April 24, 2008).

Our data shows that teachers are trapped between their desire to teach in their own terms, and the controlling education guidelines that they have to follow. However, that entrapment is what produces

teachers' emancipation deeds when the teachers' personal sense of mission is stronger than following the educational system guidelines that they consider doubtful.

The educational system empowers teachers in ways that incorporate them in what is traditionally, a democratic system. However, it can also limit the options open to the teachers in schools through the use of norms that can be controlling, or dubious to the teacher's judgment. Our study shows that teachers empower themselves by formulating their own decisions, and determining their own courses of action directed to reach individual and collective goals. Thus, *emancipation* develops when the courses of actions the teachers choose are opposite to the educational system or the school system directives. Consider the case of one of the participants. Agreeing with the position that other participants in this study embrace, this teacher declared that there are certain rules and regulations in his workplace that he chooses not to follow; even though the consequences for his noncompliance of school policies may have adverse results for himself. This participant declared:

I come to the conclusion that what I did was right, and I accept whatever accountability that comes with it. I take after a fellow with the name of Henry David Thoreau. He was a person who wrote Civil Disobedience. And, basically, he says that if you don't want to be with the law, you can be disobedient of it, but you have to accept the consequences of your actions. You don't fight, you don't complain, you don't scream, you just accept it, and that is how I see it. I do what is right in my eyes and in the eyes of God; and I let the ships fall over me; and just accept whatever comes down the road (April 25, 2008).

This participant, as other participants in this study, admitted that for him, it is more important to follow his own judgments when teaching his students, than school norms or state norms that he considers of doubtful educational value. He also declared that he is willing to accept whatever result comes out of his actions, rather than following rules and regulations that he questions.

This study demonstrates that the dialectics tension of *control vs. emancipation* emerges in teachers' relationships when they question the educational value of excessive demands mandated by the educational system and enforced by school administration. However, this set of contradictions is not a solitary set of opposite forces taking place in the process of teachers' relating. We found other central sets of tensions emerging in teachers' relationships with their administrators illustrated in teachers' uttering during the interviews of this study. We found that teachers' relationships embody also the dialectic tension of *oppression vs. empowerment*. The dynamics of these opposite forces are explained in the following section.

4.3 **Teacher-Administrator Dialectic of *Oppression vs. Empowerment***

Our investigation demonstrates that in the dynamic interplay of opposing forces that emerge in teachers' relationships in their workplaces, the dialectic tension of *oppression vs. empowerment* is also present. Findings in our study illustrate that the educational system empowers teachers to play an important role in helping their students to improve critical skills. However, the amount of work required to reach the teachers' mission and the educational system's goals is, in some cases, extreme. Our study reveals that to benefit themselves and their students, teachers must submit to the policies and procedures mandated by the educational system and to the structures of control of their individual campuses. However, in some cases, those school demands can be oppressive to the teachers.

The dialectic tension of *empowerment vs. oppression* appears in teachers' relationships in schools settings when teachers are empowered to change students' lives through following mandated procedures, while those procedures by themselves are oppressive. Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) argue that even in emancipatory systems, control may be exercise in ways that raise questions about fairness and human dignity; the educational system is not an exception. A participant in this study illustrated this point: "I think if you're a good teacher, as most of us are, and you are really motivated to check on creative assignments and grade everything, we just work ourselves to death (Interview April 25, 2008)".

Another participant admitted: “I seem to have little time for myself even during my conference period because it is always being interrupted (April 25, 2008)”. Our data illustrate that to achieve school goals; some teachers must surrender even individual freedom. Consider the responses of one of the participants:

There isn't enough time in the day to do my work the way I would like to. I force myself to do the best for my students. I really don't feel that I have somebody behind me telling me what to do and what not to do. The problem is that sometimes I feel that I am not prepared enough for my classes. I am my biggest challenge because if you really want to be a good teacher, you'll have to spend twenty four hours a day preparing and doing everything. I still insist that I have a personal life, and that I deserve to live it, but sometimes, it's hard because you come to class not best prepared (April 25, 2008).

Albeit top management in school systems does not implement long working hours for teachers, yet, teachers create personal norms and pressure themselves to work more hours in order to be prepared for their daily activities. But, to accomplish their goals, teachers are forced to give up some aspects of their personal life. A participant in our study expressed her concerns on this issue as follows:

The amount of time that it takes to do the planning and the grading does have an effect in my life. On weekends, what I have to do is that. I have a son who is still on a difficult age, so I spend all my time with him when I can. But the minute he goes down for a nap, I have to go and get my paper work, and work on it. If I don't finish it then, I have to stay up late Saturday night or Sunday night. I take horrible advantage of my husband and my mother in law. We go pick up my mother in law on Sundays night because she stays with my son. And, the minute she is there, I tend to push my son off on her. This last Sunday, I spent all day grading. Monday morning, I woke up at four thirty in the morning to finish my grades up. I feel really bad. I don't really know what can be

done. I guess I should cut some responsibilities to find some spot for that, but I like said, I have really a lot of work (April 25, 2008).

This research's findings suggest that teachers' relationships involve processes that are oppressive and empowering simultaneously. This study also demonstrates that some of those processes raise questions of fairness and human dignity (Papa, Singhal, & Papa, 2006). We may ask for instance, "How is the mental and physical health of the teachers working under those conditions being affected?" The reflections of some of the teachers interviewed for this study answer these questions. One of the participants declared:

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night. I'm losing sleep now. I wake up in the middle of the night thinking, "Ok, what I am doing wrong? What can I do different? Why they don't want to do this? What I am going to do if every student in my class fails the TASK test? That is going to make me look bad. They're not going to blame the students; they are going to blame me." So, it affects me personally. I worry. I get stressed because I'm afraid of what results are going to come out of this standardized test, and evaluations, and all that. So, it affects me personally (April 16, 2008).

Another participant expressed:

Sometimes you are put in the position where you don't know who to blame, and you're in the middle. Should I blame the student? Is it his fault? Or, is it my fault? Maybe I am doing something wrong. Maybe I need to do something more. Maybe I'm the one that's incompetent, not the student, you kind of struggle with that too. It affects your moral. It affects your confidence in yourself because you feel like it's you who is failing, not the student (April 24, 2008).

The dialectic tension of *empowerment* vs. *oppression* is prominent in teacher's relationships. Our data suggests that the teachers' *empowerment* that comes through the mandated demands can also have an

oppressive edge. However, this study also shows that teachers' relationships with their administrators produce other dialectical tensions: for instance, the dialectic opposition of *solidarity* vs. *autonomy*, which is illustrated in the following section.

4.4 **Teacher-Administrator-Colleagues Dialectic of *Solidarity* vs. *Autonomy***

In the interplay of opposite forces in teachers' relationships, the dialectic tension of *solidarity* vs. *autonomy* is embodied in teachers' relationships with administrators. However, this dialectical tension appears in teachers' relationships with other teachers as well. The dialectic tension of *solidarity* vs. *autonomy* appears in teachers' relationships when teachers recognize that they need to work in cooperation with administrators and colleagues in order to reach common goals, but at the same time, they are forced to work independently. Findings in this research suggest that teachers feel a generalized lack of support from administrators and colleagues. For example, a participant declared, "I think administrators are over their heads. I think there are more problems in school that they have the tendency of not to back up the teachers (April 28, 2008)."

Another participant admitted, "How can you have a good outcome if you are not getting support or help? (April 30, 2008)". This study reveals that while some teachers acknowledge the need to work in solidarity with their administrators, the amount of demands placed over their shoulders, as well as other professional pressures, force them to work in isolation. Yet, findings in this research illustrate that some teachers consider invasive the excessive amount of administrators' interventions in their daily activities. Consequently, those teachers find less supervision from administration, alleviating. A participant expressed: "The Principal is not on your toes case all the time to chunk you (April 25, 2008)."

The dialectic contradiction of *solidarity* vs. *autonomy* emerges also in the relationship between teachers and their colleagues. Some teachers find positive working in solidarity with their colleagues while other teachers give more value to their individual work. Expressing the significance of working in solidarity with colleagues, a participant revealed, "May be I got lucky in this school because, especially

within my department, they collaborate with me.” He also admitted, “I kind of depend on them for help. And there’s mutual respect for each other and for the work that we do (April 30, 2008).” Even though teachers recognize the importance of working together to reach individual and school goals, there are also teachers that prefer to work in autonomy. Nonetheless, this study shows that teachers, who have the tendency of working in autonomy, have the need of working in solidarity with others as well. A participant admitted: “Teachers tend to be kind of independent, work by themselves. There is not much sharing, or working together, or anything.” And he added: “Most of the teachers try not to work with other teachers, or maybe not do the part they should (April 24, 2008).” Other participant observes:

There’s a mentality in teaching that “this is my classroom, this is my deal”. They don’t want to involve anyone else. That means that they don’t want to ask for help, but they need it. And, they don’t want to usually offer help when someone needs it (April 19, 2008).

Participants’ observations suggest that even when teachers tend to work in autonomy, that tendency involves the need of working in solidarity with their colleagues. Baxter and Montgomery contend that relationships with other people, more than enhancing self identification, help to expose a person to new ideas, and provide a broad base of information for social comparison purposes. Relationships with other people facilitate social cohesion on a large scale, linking otherwise unconnected groups in larger collectivities (1996). Illustrating this point, a participant explained her ideas about how the support of others could alleviate her work burden:

Probably just collaborating with other teachers, and finding out how they handle their situations with their parents, and how they handle their situations with the curriculum, would be helpful. May be following their footsteps would also be helpful, taking advice from them on how to tutor a certain topic in certain way, and that sort of things, so that it is not so stressful on me, because I can’t be available twenty four hours a day for tutoring (April 18, 2008).

Findings of this study reveal that although teachers' roles are mostly enacted in the four walls of their classrooms, their job involves subscribing to other common goals that require a substantial amount of work. To be able to reach those goals, teachers require the support and assistance from administrators and other teachers as well. More importantly, teachers, as social beings, have the natural need to communicate with others. Baxter and Montgomery assert that the self is substantiated, matures and develops in interaction, through interpersonal contact and communication with others (2006). Along this line of thought, our findings reveal that teachers who tend to work independently to reach individual and collective goals can be adversely affected. For example, a participant admitted that working in solidarity is critical for her:

Now other teachers help me, but in the past, I used to get myself sick. I used to have all kinds of problems with my stomach caused by stress and conflicting feelings at work. But, after getting myself so sick, I learned to take care of myself. My younger sister has a quote that always tells me when I talk to her about my problems at school, "Don't worry. Get busy". Now, I don't worry, I try to find solutions and I ask for help (April 25, 2008).

Teachers acknowledge the need to work in cooperation with administrators and colleagues, but on some occasions they prefer to work independently. Thus, the dialectic tension of *solidarity vs. autonomy* surface in teachers' relationships with administrators and colleagues depending on teachers' workload, personal preferences, and teachers' individual needs. The dialectic tension between *solidarity vs. autonomy* that appears in teachers' relationships with administrators and other teachers is not a solitary set; it also intercepts with other dialectic tensions. The dialectic tension of *unity vs. fragmentation* is another set of opposite forces that appears in the process of teachers relating with administrators and other teachers. This set of opposite forces is explained in the next segment.

4.5 **Teacher-Administration-Colleagues Dialectic of *Unity vs. Fragmentation***

The dialectic tension of *unity vs. fragmentation* is another central set of contradictions that orbits around the teachers' relationships in school settings. Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) argue that when people feel a sense of community, members are motivated to continue their association with one another, and thrive on it. In agreement with this assertion, findings in this study show that teachers feel supported when they work in cooperation with administrators and with other teachers. When teachers feel a sense of social cohesion with other people in their work places, they can often overcome their struggles. A participant expressed his feelings in the following manner: "Sometimes I feel like, "Oh My! What I am doing here?" It is like, "I don't want to be here." But, these kids, and the teachers too; they are the ones that keep me sane, because I can relate to them (April 30, 2008)." Aspects of unity come into sight when teachers act together to accomplish the educational goals that require the energy and collective efforts of all the teachers. The dimension of *unity* appears in teachers' relationships when teachers consider that they are not only working in cooperation with others to reach common goals, but that the others also have to overcome common struggles to reach those goals. A participant illustrated his feelings of unity:

I keep my sense of humor. Then, I step back and say, "This is happening, and it is not something that is just happening to me. It's something that we all are dealing with." So, I ask myself, "How I am doing it?" "I am already doing it the best I know how to do it?" If I don't, I redo it. I am doing my best, and it's all I can do (April 22, 2008).

Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) contend that the most important dimension that emerges when people connect with others is interpersonal identification. When people connect with one another and commit to accomplish something of value together, they derive agency. Despite differences, teachers must recognize that they comprise a community. While connection and acceptance does not solve all the teachers' problems, feelings of connection ease the state of isolation that teachers face when the opposite force of *fragmentation* appears in their relationships with others (Papa, Singhal, & Papa, 2006).

Teachers' relationships in school grounds seem to be saturated by the dialectical tension of *unity* vs. *fragmentation*. According to Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) *fragmentation* is likely to occur when there exist multiple, competing voices and interpretations in a discursive social setting. The authors affirm that it is this multivocality what often separate people from one another rather than unify them. For instance, in the educational system, where exists a great deal of ambiguity regarding rules and norms, teachers may find difficult to interact with others. A participant in this study talked about this situation in his work place saying: "It is very difficult to get along with other teachers. As a group, we don't really have unity." And, he added: "Everybody seems to be going in their own direction (April 24, 2008)." This lack of unity in teachers' relationships drives the teachers to isolate themselves from others, even when they share a common physical space. A participant described how her routines at work isolate her from the other teachers:

I know very few of the teachers. I come to school, I come in my room, I eat here, and I leave at five at night, because I have so much to do. I'm so busy, I don't have time to really go out and see anybody (April 28, 2008).

Our data demonstrate that *fragmentation* produced by excessive workloads is common in teachers' relationships. Also, this research reveals that fragmentation in teachers' relationships caused by disproportionate demands or by feelings of lack of support by administration, drive teachers to think about quitting their job. A participant confessed:

I'm annoyed, but it doesn't really make me angry. The little frustrations are not getting me upset, except when I'm given impossible schedules. That makes me angry. When I'm given situations that there is no way I can handle it, I get really upset. And, as I said, my solution is to leave (April 22, 2008).

Fragmentation also occurs when there is not a form of identification that unifies people to communicate, work, or play with one another in ways that are personally or socially rewarding (Papa, Singhal, & Papa

2006). Those who are in a fragmented state often feel a deep sense of isolation from others. Our data shows that feelings of isolation are prevalent in teachers' relationships. A participant illustrated this notion:

I sometimes actually feel like I am alone. Maybe the amount of people that I can say would really help me, it will probably count on one hand. But the majority of the time, I feel like I'm alone. I feel overwhelmed with the amount of work. Every day they ask me for something else. Now they want this, now they want that. In a classroom where it is kind of like a public setting, you're basically dealing with public, and you want to be left alone because you have so much staff piled on you every day, that you don't ever see that light at the end of the tunnel (April 16, 2008)

Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) argue that depression and anger are also common among people who experience *fragmentation*. Moreover, the authors sustain that if *fragmentation* continues, a person may lose the ability to connect with others even when the others show compassion (2006). Accordingly, the previous participant added:

Because of the way some of my colleagues are, I'm afraid to go and ask them for help. I think they are going to say, "You haven't done that yet?" or "You don't know how to do that?" And, the ones that would help, they are so overwhelmed themselves that I feel bad bothering them, taking them away from the tons of work they have to do, to come and help me with my tonnage, if you wanted to call it that way (April 16, 2008).

Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) argue that although a community (*e., g. an education system, a school system*) may be comprised of diverse people, unity within a group implies oneness in spirit, sentiment, aims, purpose, interest, and feelings (*Italics added*). The authors affirm that even complex groups comprised of many related parts may display unity if the members act as a totality or as a whole. Displays of unity occur when people in a community act together to accomplish a goal that requires the

energy and the collective efforts of all of its members (Papa, Singhal & Papa, 2006). Unity may also be exhibited when group members provide social support to one another. Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) claim that social support could take the form of emotional support, informational support, and instrumental support. The authors affirm that emotional support is exhibited when one person lets another person know they are cared for. Supporting those notions, our data demonstrates that teachers' relationships are saturated by the dialectic tension of *fragmentation* vs. *unity* caused by deep feelings of need of emotional support. A participant lamented:

I think that you need to have a passion for anything you do. My passion is to change futures. But no matter who you are you have to have that pat on the back saying, "Hey, you're doing a good job!" I don't care who you are. If you're the president of the United States, whoever, you always have to have that pat you on your back saying, "You're doing a good job!" Because, that makes you continue to do it. And we don't get enough of that. Why can't they stroke and say, "You're doing a good job!" The individual, not as, "Ah, that's my type! Everybody did a good job." No, that's not good enough! One thing that I made a comment about in the office one time was that every time somebody is called to the office, it is for something negative. I asked, "Do you ever call anybody to tell them they've done something good?" No comment, because it doesn't happen! You get called to the office only if it is a negative thing, "You did this", "A parent called about that..." But nothing positive! Why can't we have more positive strokes? If we just have that pat on the back as an individual teacher, not as a group, it would make everything so much better! (April 25, 2008)

In agreement, another participant expressed:

The administration is very responsive to my needs, I have to say that, but I feel that there can be more a personal relationship with them and myself (April 24, 2008).

Schooling is identified as an emotional charged business (Sutton & Wheatly, 2003). Our study shows that in school systems where feelings and emotions are ever present, teachers' relationships are fulfilled by *fragmentation* derived by a lack of emotional support. Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) argue that social support can take the form of informational support too. Informational support involves providing facts or advice that may help the other person solve a problem. *Fragmentation* caused by a lack of social support in the form of informational support seems to be common in teachers' relationships in school settings. The participants' articulations show perceptions of a lack of support from administration to teachers. Consider the conversation of one of the participants in this study:

I work with the teachers and ask for help for them. But, I think administrators are very politically obscure. If they don't like you as a teacher, you're not going to have a good schedule. They're not going to make your life very easy. That is something very sad that they can't be more professional. If there are concerns that they have, go to the teachers and say, "These are the problems you have and improve these", But instead, they just go behind the scene and say, "Ok, we don't trust this teacher with the tenth grades because of the AYP (*Adequate Yearly Progress required by the Education Department*). We don't trust this teacher to teach this level because of this test" So, they are going to try to find another spot for that teacher. That's kind of sad that they're not more open in trying to work with the teachers, and help them to become better teachers. I think instead of having in mind, "This is a bad teacher. We can't fire them. So, let's throw them where is hard." That's a bad choice because we are supposed to be helping everyone become better teachers. If someone has a weakness, or someone is not doing well just help them, instead of sending them to a spot till they...do a response (April 18, 2008). (Italics added)

Other participants in our study supported the notion that teachers do not receive social support from their administrators. A participant said:

I get the sense that they're more out to get you, or they're waiting to see until you make a mistake. That's when you finally see something. There's very little constructive criticism, or very little interaction that's actually helpful to help you become a better teacher (April 25, 2008).

The need of support from administrators is evident in our interviewees' articulations. According to Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006) social support can also take the form of instrumental support, which is, providing an individual physical or material assistance in completing a task. Our study provides evidence that *fragmentation* caused by absence of social support in school settings is prevalent in teachers' relationships. For example, one of the participants noted:

Through the years I've noticed that new teachers, if they are not with a certain group, they don't help them that much. They will say that they will help them, if they become a protégée. But, for the most part, a lot of these people don't get help. It is almost like a social Darwinism. Let's see if this person can make it. So, the first two years of teaching can be really rough because you don't really have the support network (April 24, 2008).

To accomplish tasks and reach common goals teachers need to work in collaboration with their colleagues. However, our study shows that although teachers feel the need of working with others in camaraderie, some teachers may feel differently. Thus, that lack of instrumental support produces *fragmentation* in teachers' relationships with their colleagues. Nonetheless, when teachers feel a sense of cohesion with their coworkers, they are motivated to continue their associations with one another and thrive on it. This enactment produces the dialectic opposition of *unity*. This study also reveals that even though *unity* does not solve all the problems that the teachers have to endure; it diminishes feelings of isolation caused by *fragmentation*.

Using relational dialectics as a perspective, Baxter and Montgomery affirm that social life exists in and through people's communicative practices, by which people give voice to multiple (perhaps even infinitive) opposing tendencies (1996). They sustain that social life is an unfinished, ongoing dialogue in

which a polyphony of dialectal voices struggle against one another to be heard, and in that struggle they set the stage for future struggles. Accordingly, this study illustrates that teachers' relationships are saturated of opposing tendencies that emerge in the process of teachers' relating with the different parties. Teachers' daily routines include interactions with administrators, colleagues and students. Thus, countless sets of opposing forces emerge in teachers' relationships with administrators and colleagues, but their relationships with their students involve dialectic tensions as well. Hence, teachers' relationships with their students warrant some careful attention as well.

4.6 Dialectical Tensions in Teachers' Relationships with their Students

Teachers' closest relationships in school settings are those of teachers and students. However, this research shows that there is also a vortex of contradictions taking place in the process of relating between teachers and students (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Findings of this study illustrate that the dialectic tensions of *nurture* vs. *discipline*, *respect* vs. *suspect*, and *consistency* vs. *flexibility* are significant in teachers' relationships with their students (see Table 3.7). This section focuses on the explanation of these dialectic tensions.

4.7 Teacher-Student Dialectic of *Nurture* vs. *Discipline*

In addition to cultivating their students in their subject areas, one of the duties that the state requires from a teacher is that of being a discipline mediator. Teachers have to follow and reinforce discipline norms so that they and their students can feel protected from disruption and emotional threat; and so that they can maintain order in the classroom that is essential if subject learning is to take place (Frank, 1998). While exercising discipline in schools, teachers have to follow a range of discipline models and techniques regulated by the school district or by the schools in particular. However, findings in this study illustrate that when deciding upon an approach for classroom discipline, teachers experience tensions that arise from their desire to use educational justifiable models of discipline, and their obligation to reinforce rules and regulations that they might consider incongruous in an educational

setting. This study shows that the dialectic tension of *nurture vs. discipline* emerges when teachers question the legibility of mandated discipline guidelines that they consider restraining to their students' academic formation. Take the example of one of the participants in this study. He noted:

I think sometimes we have rules that are just rules because they are supposed to be, but they are not really important; like wearing caps in the classroom, or trying to monitor the dress code, or take up children's cell phones. Then you get into an altercation with them (April, 24 2008).

During our interviews, the participants talked repeatedly about school norms against the use of cell phones, I-Pods, and use of laptops in classrooms. However, data in this study reveals that educators find those norms more intrusive to teaching than the actual use of technological devices in the classrooms. In some cases, teachers consider technology skills necessary to education, and an essential part of students' preparation. Hence, teachers feel divided between following norms implemented in schools against technology devices, and their own judgment concerning those norms. Reflecting on the need of using technology tools during class, and on district and school rules and regulations against their use, a participant comes to the conclusion that the use of technology is an every day event that should be implemented and supported in classroom practices. He declared:

Maybe I am too liberal. I know there are rules that we have to follow, but to me, they just create a very hostile environment. We are trying to have the students become more technologically savvy and educated for their jobs and everything. But all that come with technology; with all these obvious advances, new things, new gadgets, new technological devices that they are going to use. They are pum, pum, pum, pum, pum, texting! You get a job and you don't know how text? You are in big trouble! You don't know computers! Technology is the way of the future, and whether you like it or not, it is going to happen. But, we have rules against the use of some technological devices in school, and that only creates a very hostile environment because students do need to use technology either we like it or not (April 24, 2008).

In line with our previous participants, another interviewee agreed:

Just take for example cell phones and AMP3 players; it's the school policy that they are not supposed to have them on campus. Well, look where we are at this world today. We know they have them, and I don't see that there's a problem. When I talk to my kids I say, "You know it is school policy not have them, not to have AMP3 players" I tell them, "You are not supposed to have them". But, in my opinion, if they are doing their work, and they are doing everything they're supposed to, why should I care if they're listening to their music? I don't get that! Who cares? That's what I see. That's how they study at home while they're using their phone and other things. And, that's how they should conquer the world (April 25, 2008).

The dialectic tension of *nurture* vs. *discipline* arises in teachers' relationships with their students when teachers have to follow discipline procedures that they consider unnecessary and obtrusive to classroom instruction. In this instance, the teacher decides that following the school policies against the use of technology is more intrusive to classroom instruction than breaking the norms against technology use.

The participant continued:

I already told them, "If an administrator walks in and she says, "Oh, he's using a cell phone!" I'm going to say, "I don't know. They know they're not supposed to." Am I breaking the rules? Of course I am, because I think in this age group they do learn what's right what's wrong. It's like cussing, I cuss, but not with them. I know when and when not to do it. And I don't feel bad about it. I don't feel bad about going against policy in that respect. I don't see the big deal. If you have control in your class, what is it going to matter? (April 25, 2008)

This participant admitted that she understands the importance of students' attention during instruction, but she considers that the students know when the use of cell phones or other devices is inappropriate. She noted: "I teach them to keep the phone off when we are working. They just do what they should do." She declared that breaking the rules against the use of technology in class is not important when the

class is under control. So, she allows her students to use them, even though, she knows her behavior may have effects that can be negative to her and her students.

Our data reveal that teachers often feel trapped between fulfilling their duties as educators; and their function as discipline agents, whom are supposed to reinforce guidelines that they consider incongruent in an educational setting. For instance, a participant declared that some rules and school policies are not only hard to reinforce and obtrusive to instruction, but they can also become problematic for teachers' professional standing. She stated:

Some of the rules or school policies, I think, are pretty silly, things like the dress code. If a student comes in and they are practically dressed for a day at the beach, then yes, I think there's a problem because that is distracting. But some of the things with dress code rules, like taking some students out of the classroom because they have one small hole in their jeans, I think it's silly. Most of the times, I tend to oversee things like that. Unless is something like when a kid has an obscene word on their shirt, I am going to notice, and I'm going to recommend for dress code violation, or make them change. But sometimes, I receive notices from administrators saying that such and such student was in your class first period, and was sent to the office third period, "He or she was wearing this, and you did not notice!" "You didn't fulfill your duty as a teacher by reinforcing the dress code violation." But, what I'm doing when my kids are in the room is that I'm focusing in them, in teaching them. I have a higher goal in mind. And having to look at these little tiny picking things is now really getting in the way. It's really annoying (April 25, 2008).

The dialectic tension of *nurture* vs. *discipline* seems to be prevalent in teachers' relationships with their students. Our study elucidates that teachers are pulled between the forces that impel them to follow their primary responsibility as educators, and the forces that push them to comply disciplinary techniques. A participant reproved:

They have this thing about dress code in this school. They tend to pick on behavior issues-students when we have a majority and a minority few that are still breaking the dress code, but it is view in our society as more acceptable for them, for the dress code. It is kind of turning the blank view on it. For example, hair of natural color. My student wears black, how you call it? Streak? And that is breaking dress code. When we have a student that's a cheer leader that her streak is blond, but is still not her natural color, and nothing happens. So, is not consistent. My student is disciplined for an ear piercing or face piercing, but for example, flip-flops are not allowed, and everyone is wearing flip-flops. Following all these discipline issues on dress code really gets into the path of teaching, especially because they are not consistent (April 22, 2008).

Our study shows that the dialectic tension of *nurture* vs. *discipline* evolves in teacher's relationships with their students when they have to choose between enforcing discipline regulations that they consider disruptive to the learning environment, and directing their attention to teach their students in their subject area. However, some teachers are willing to take risk choosing to focus in educating their students, instead of opting for enforcing rules and regulations that are against what they consider more beneficial to the students, than intrusive to their education. Though, in teachers' daily interactions with their students, the dialectic tension of *nurture* vs. *discipline* is not an isolated set. We found other sets of dialectic tensions evolving in teacher's relationships with their students. Our data illustrates that in the daily interactions of teachers with their students, the dialectic opposition of *respect* vs. *suspect* is also evident. The dynamics of this set of dialectic oppositions is explained next.

4.8 **Teacher-Student Dialectic of *Respect* vs. *Suspect***

The central mission of the teachers is that of educating their students. To achieve that mission, teachers have to conform to certain responsibilities that include complying with policies and procedures regulated by the educational system, the school district, or their particular campuses. One of the mayor procedures that the teachers have to follow is to enforce discipline procedures. Data in this study reveal

that adhering to their responsibility of enforcing school discipline guidelines, in some cases, distorts teachers' primary goal, educating their students. Our study shows that most teachers treat their students with respect in order to create the best learning environment. However, they also have to maintain an atmosphere of wariness to prevent possible students' misbehavior. The dialectic tension of *respect* vs. *suspect* emerge in teachers' relationships with their students when educators have to decide between creating a learning environment based on respect for their students, or assuming a vigilant position to prevent possible class disruptions caused by students breaking school policies and procedures. One of the participants offered his opinion in this matter. He alleged:

You treat them like young adults and they behave like young adults. You give them their respect, they respect you back. When you see this little bitty, bitty things, "Oh, your jeans have a whole in the knee, change them". Stuff like that, I think it is a waste of time, it is a waste of energy, and it only makes a hostile environment between students and teachers. It doesn't help education. And, I'll say, we should ignore things that are insignificant, and we should focus in the big picture, which is forming young adults (April, 24 2008).

Teachers are encouraged to create learning environments where their students are free of fear and feel respected. But at the same time, they are supposed to be suspicious that discipline problems may erupt at any time (Sugai, G. & Homer, R., 1999). One of the participants declared: "Teachers are hold responsible for students' academic progress, as well as for being vigilant for possible discipline disruptions (April 24, 2008)." Findings in this study suggest that teachers' relationships with their students embody the dialectic tension of *respect* vs. *suspect* that emerges when teachers have to choose between creating a learning environment based on respect and trust, and taking their assumed position of discipline guards.

Teachers face dilemmas in their everyday practice as educators. Furthermore, teachers' duties include also dealing with students who display behaviors that are highly disruptive to the

teaching/learning process (Sugai, G. & Homer, R., 1999). In such cases, teachers are hold responsible for reinforcing disciplinary sanctions. One of the participants noted:

There is a code in school, and you are supposed to follow it, especially if you hold the teacher accountable. You hold the teachers accountable for scores, for grades, for everything; may be even for where the students are, and for where they have to be. I see it, especially because I teach in a particular setting. I've been lucky enough to have the opportunity to teach in the Alternative Program; which is a program for our kinds that are basically taken out of the regular classroom. They do something bad, and they are put in Alternative for a certain number of days, or months, or a semester, if is bad enough what they did. So, they are down there the whole semester if they did something really, really bad; that would be like drugs on campus, or alcohol, or showing up to school drunk, or high, or fighting, or continuous tardiness. If it is too much, after two or three referrals, obviously you are not willing to adjust, so you get put in there. Something that wouldn't put you there, just get regular detention; let's say you are tardy, you get a tardy card, and then you just have to go to lunch detention. And you don't show up to lunch detention, you go to what they call ISS, which is in school suspension. That is just for like a day or two. They caught you ditching once, you go to ISS just for like a couple of days. But see, when it's something heavy like drugs, alcohol, ditching continuously. You disrespect a teacher; you go to this Alternative Education program. And, depending on the severity of what you did, you are there from a month to a semester (April 24, 2008).

Even though teachers acknowledge the need to follow school discipline procedures to maintain an environment free of disruptions, they are often caught in the situation of having to enforce disciplinary procedures that they consider as being unfair to the student being disciplined. The participant added:

But, what I've seen is that very often there is a student that ends up in Alternative, and you can tell is a student with not a lot of economic resources, and then you see the ones whose parents

make money, and it is very common where you just see parents with power or money come to school a few times threatening, “I am going to bring my lawyers”, and all of the sudden, the administrations says, “I think we committed a mistake putting your son or daughter in Alternative”. And, they go back into the regular classrooms. But, if it is a regular kid that didn’t have that parents that came and threaten, and bring lawyers, then that kid is in Alternative for the whole semester not matter what his fault was. I have seen it many times. And, that is something that really bugs me that there is not consistency in the way that this code is, or that the kids are hold accountable to the rules of school. It is disappointing because is not fair. I don’t think it is fair (April 24, 2008).

Another participant expressed her point of view in the following way:

I truly believe that everybody should be treated fairly and with respect no matter their ethnicity or their economic background. I don’t care, and that is partly why I get in trouble sometimes, because I treat everybody fairly and I don’t show any kind of prejudice because of economic background or anything (April 25, 2008).

Our data shows that the dialectic tension of *respect* vs. *suspect* surfaces in teachers’ relationships with their students when they have to decide between trusting their students, and complying with their duty as discipline mediators. Lewis (1999) states that State mandates, teacher training curricula, or staff development programs may induce teachers to use discipline approaches that run contrary to their own ideas of what discipline should be. Hence, the dialectical tension of *respect* vs. *suspect* appears in teachers’ relationships with their students when teachers have to create educational environments based on respect, but they also have to be watchful of possible students’ misdemeanors.

Research shows that in their daily interactions, teachers face dilemmas associated with being firm, fair, and consistent when implementing school discipline (Lewis, 1999). However, a number of factors may operate to cause teachers to be reluctant to implement their preferred approaches to

discipline. In this arena, the dialectic contradictions of *respect* vs. *suspect* intersect with other dialectical forces that inhabit in teachers' relationships with their students. In the countless sets of opposing forces taking place in teachers' relationships with their students, we found that teachers struggle with other leading sets of dialectic tensions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Data in this study elucidate that the dialectic tension of *consistency* vs. *flexibility* emerges in teachers' relationships with their students when teachers face the dilemma of complying with their professional obligation of being consistent when assisting their students, and their internal desire of serving their students in an individualistic way. The dialectic tension of *consistency* vs. *flexibility* that develops in teachers' relationships with their students is illustrated in the next section.

4.9 **Teacher-Student Dialectic of *Consistency* vs. *flexibility***

A dialectic tension that emerged frequently in teachers' verbalizations was that of *consistency* vs. *flexibility*. This dialectic tension develops when the teachers encounter situations where they question the legitimacy of being consistent with all their students. This study reveals that in some situations, teachers find hard to be consistent with their students, especially when they encounter situations in where fairness is in question. One of the participants illustrates a special situation where teachers have to decide between being *consistent* and being *flexible*. She uttered:

All the teachers are trying hardest to get the kids to learn, and to perform, and to do it legally fairly. We are not just giving them a grade for nothing. We saw the outcry that happened when the school district told us that we had to give the students 50 the first six weeks to pass them, minimum, the first six weeks regardless of what they had made. A lot of teachers were very upset with that. So, what's going to happen? We are all concern! How far is that going to go? Where is the stopping point where we are not going to be giving them something to try to tweak the results? And then, because of the outcry, and actually the unity of teachers in a unanimous group saying, "Hey, these kids haven't done one thing, haven't turn one assignment, why I'm

going to give them a 50?” “As opposed to this kid that is trying hard; who is turning work, but maybe hasn’t mastered the skills, but is doing something, and showing some effort; and then, we are going to be asked to give him failing grades” (April 25, 2008).

The dialectic tension between *consistency* vs. *flexibility* emerges in numerous situations during the process of teachers’ relationships with their students. In this case, teachers face the dialectic contradiction of *consistency* vs. *flexibility* when they have to choose between giving the same minimum grades to all of the students regardless of their effort, and being fair with those that work hard and get failing grades. They often feel impelled to help students, but in a way that they consider fair for all. The participation of one of the interviewees illustrates this point. She noted:

I’m trying what I can to help the kids and still, I actually say, “I’m conveying to these kids the skills that they need, instead doing magic tricks to make up the numbers, or the statistics look good. They actually are getting the skills that they’re going to need in the real life world”. That’s how I do it. It is frustrating. But I still try to give them what they need (April 28, 2008).

Our study shows that teachers feel a tremendous responsibility of helping their students the best they can. Hence, when they have to make decisions regarding their students’ well being, and when being consistent is in the best welfare of their students, then, teachers tend to bend their practices in order to better prepare their students. A participant explained:

I think the students are treated like little babies. And then, they get out of here, and then they are going to go to college, and then they are going to have a job. I don’t see how that helps them. I think that instead of shinning students to success with fewer things; we should keep those standards high, treat them like young adults, not like babies. They are young adults. That is what they are. I think there is a lot of time and energy wasted in stupidities, instead of being applied in the actual formation of the student (April 24, 2008).

Other participants in this study agreed with this position. They explained that parents and administrators do not want students to experience failure, but in their point of view, failure is positive because it motivates the student to become better. Consider the point of view of a participant. He uttered:

Not exposing the students to failure kind of skews away from the motivation of the students, because they never really learn responsibility. They never really learn to rise up their challenge when there's some kind of adversity. Everything now at school is at hand; there is always help. They're babied, they're nurtured. You always have the parents that don't want their kids to experience anything that might be negative, but that 'is' negative. They are going to the real world, and out there, they're not going to hold their hands. When they go to the work force, they're not going to hold their hands. I mean, they're going to have to learn to defend themselves and hold responsibilities over actions. I think in high school, teaching responsibilities should be one of the main things we should be emphasizing, but we don't. They always seem to be absolved of responsibility; when they misbehave in class; when they cheat; when they do this; when they do that. We are always trying to find ways to kind of cover it up, or look the other way, or give these kids a chance, because you know, he is an important member of a sport team here, and we can't afford to lose him or her. And other excuses like that. So, there're always these exemptions that we are making for the kids. So, they haven't learned to take responsibility for their own actions (May 5, 2008).

This participant, as almost all the teachers in this study, shows a high degree of concern for their students' success. Of all the teachers' relationships that were explored, the relationship between teachers and their students seems to be the closest one. Hence, the dialectic tension of *consistency* vs. *flexibility* emerges in the process of teachers relating with their students significantly, and in different circumstances. The intervention of one of the participants of this study illustrates this point. She admitted:

If a student is having a really a hard time personally, like a death in their family, then I will have to modify for them. If they have some sort of personal emergency that's going on in their lives, then I will have to slow down and re-teach, or modify their tests in some way, so that they don't feel the pressure of so many demands placed on them (April 18, 2008).

Another participant agreed with this position:

Ah! Teachers are very rich on some issues, like if the students come to the door two minutes late, I need to write them up on a tardy card. That it's odd to me; it wastes my time. I could be doing what other teacher do, like, "Ah, your foot was not all the way in the door; you're tardy!" I mean, what's the big deal? Grading procedures? Some teachers would not give an inch to a kid who may be is having problems at home. "I don't care, you have to sign it" "That's the way it is." "That's it and that's your grade". I think you have to basically treat everybody as an individual. And understand that there are going to be things going on in their lives. Just like there are things going on in our lives, and we need to, like I said, treat everybody special in a different way (April 15, 2008).

The opposing forces of *consistency* vs. *flexibility* flourish in various situations during the process of teachers' relating with their students. Our data demonstrate that while teachers are obligated to be consistent in dealing with their students, often, they consider the peculiarities of the situation, and act according to their personal judgment. In these instances, teachers opt for being flexible. In some cases, to be able to fulfill their students' academic needs in the best way, teachers have to accommodate their teachings practices, or even the mandated curriculum of their subjects to their students needs. For instance, some teachers in this study declared that they find the "old school mentality" and outdated teaching materials problematic to their students' success. Consequently, they decide to be flexible, and change their mandated curriculum in order to help their students better. The expressions of one of the participants illustrated a similar situation:

Some of the things I like to do in my classes, particularly with literature, are outside the scope and sequence of the books that I can use. I decided that I am going to bring in some materials that may be out of scope and sequence, but that my kids will be more likely to read and understand. So, I am going to try to bring more culturally relevant materials into my classes, as much as I can get away without being fired in order to help my students. So, that I don't run into a situation like the one I am on this semester, in which I'm going to fail probably 12 to 14 kids out of the 80 to 90 that I have because they just didn't turn in the work. Why they didn't turn in the work? Sometimes it is because they are lazy. Sometimes it is because what they are reading has little cultural relevance to them. They don't understand. They may be asking, "Why I am reading this?" They don't understand, so they don't do their work (April 22, 2008).

This participant explained that to be able to help his students he has to be an advocate for them, and often he needs to defend his position. He declared that being flexible in order to help his students, is not free of risk of problems with administration, but he is willing to face the consequences of his acts. He admitted:

I say this in my classes and I will say it again, "If you ever be to the Village Inn there at Mesa and the Freeway, and you see two dogs, one a yellow Lab and one the ugliest little red dog you ever seen, and they have silver cups in their mouths, please give generously because Mr. Mouth is unemployed (April 22, 2008)."

Teachers' relationships with their students are full of dialectic tensions that erupt in different situations during the process of their relating. We found that the dialectic tensions of *consistency* vs. *flexibility* intercept with other sets of dialectic tensions that emerge in teachers' relationships with their students. The information gathered in this study shows that another set of dialectic oppositions appears in teachers' relationships with their students significantly. The dialectic opposition of *connection* vs.

disconnection seems to be predominant in our participants' articulations. The next section will discuss the interplay of this dialectic set.

4.10 **Teacher-Student Dialectic of *Connection* vs. *Disconnection***

A set of dialectic forces that emerges significantly in the participants' accounts is the dialectic set of *connection* vs. *disconnection* (See Table 3.7). This dialectic tension seems to be prominent in teachers' relationships with their students. The participants' articulations give significant hints of the existence of this dialectic tension in their relationships with their students. This research shows that the dialectic forces of *connection* vs. *disconnection* are significant, since in the extent that teachers feel connected to their students, is in the extent that they feel successful as educators. One of the participants explained this matter saying, "One of the good things about teaching is the interaction with your students; if they are motivated to do something, you feel like you did something. You feel like you did a good job (April 15, 2008)." The force of *connection* with their students can also be significant to the teachers when teachers' responsibilities become stressful, and they feel overwhelmed by their duties. A participant expressed, "All these kids...they're the ones that keep me sane, because I can relate to them, and it kind of makes me feel good (April 19, 2008)." In return, the teachers also recognize the need of the students to be connected with them. One of the participants said:

Being a teacher is more than just go and teach the material. Sometimes, the students need someone to talk to them, someone to maybe tell them what's going on in their lives, and maybe be a shoulder to lean on. And, when students come in and tell me, "Hey, thank you for listening to me." When I talk to them, that really means a lot to me, because being a teacher goes beyond...It is more than teaching Science or Literature. It goes beyond that (May 15, 2008).

The dialectic tension of *connection* vs. *disconnection* appears in the relationship of teachers and students when teachers feel that their students are not interested in the subjects they teach. A participant he expressed, "There are some students that are unmotivated, and those are the ones I have trouble with, in

terms of getting them to learn. But I don't have any trouble with discipline. They are not really hostile to me; they are more indifferent. They just sit there and do nothing (April 19, 2008)."

Most of the participants of this study mentioned that one of the biggest challenges for teachers today is motivating their students to participate in, and find interest in learning. One of the participants affirmed, "Motivating the students is definitely what takes out the most energy (May 15, 2008)." Also, our data show that teachers feel the opposite force of *disconnection* from their students when their students are not motivated to participate, or to learn the subjects they teach. A participant explained, "The cooperation is not good because they are not prepared at the level they are supposed to be at, and probably because of that they have no interest in the subjects that you need to teach them (April 19, 2008)." Our data reveals that *disconnection* caused by lack of students' motivation to learn, and lack of interest in their education is prevalent in school grounds. A participant lamented:

I have a lot of students that just give up. They don't do anything until there is no chance for them to pass anymore. They don't bring the materials; they don't do assignments; they don't do homework; they don't do anything. They are not interested at all. They are there to get any grade. And, it creates discipline problems because if they are not interested in being there, they just waste their time doing something else, or just sitting there. They are not interested, so they get distracted doing something else (April 18, 2008).

Another participant admitted that the problems caused by the lack of students' interest in the subject matter need immediate attention. She stated:

Sixty percent of the students should not be passing, but they have to pass. I have to pass them or I will get in trouble. I think that passing the class is the biggest issue. It is bigger than the pressures for grades. It's not about grades; it's just getting the credit and getting out of High School. That is why I think that something else has to be done to change that. You have to teach not for the grade, not for the credit, but for the sake of learning the subject (April 22, 2008).

As this participant, other participants expressed their concerns about the prevalence of lack of students' interest and motivation that pervades in schools. One of them testified:

I think that in the many years that I've been teaching, the students have changed; their mentality has changed; their personalities have changed, and I find harder and harder to understand them. They don't like to listen. They like to be doing things, which is good. It used to be times when they were thrill to watch us do something. Now, they don't want to watch us, they want to do it, which is good, but the attention span is shorter. Also, they don't value education. When I started teaching, many, many years ago, I had wonderful students, and they really appreciated education. They really wanted to learn and they thought education was going to help them. Now, they don't care if they don't learn, they don't care if they fail. If I give them the chance to make up a test, they don't always do it. This is a minority, but I think it's a growing minority (April 24, 2008).

Our data suggests that teachers seem to be aware that lack of students' motivation is generalized, and it is becoming problematic. A participant explained:

Something went wrong a long time ago. I don't know what it was because I have been teaching only three years. But something went terribly wrong because the students are so used to having their grades doctored so to speak, so that they can pass, that I feel I am doing the work now, not them (April 22, 2008).

Teachers perceive the lack of students' interest as a force that they have to face. One of the participants expressed his opinion about the situation. He lamented:

It is hard to keep them in school and make them have interest in their studies, rather than going out and party, or whatever. There is a force between, or struggle between their path in education, and their social path with their friends and stuff. There is definitely a force that pulls a lot of students, especially at this age in high school. It is present, it is very strong, and it is hard to keep

students along the... I don't say the right path because who is to say what's right or wrong, but at least focused in their studies (April 22, 2008).

Most of the participants in our interviews expressed awareness of changes taking place in the educational system that affect students and teachers. The articulations of one of the participants illustrated this point:

Basically, the entire system has had to adjust, and it is not being good. And I think that all the factors go back to the system. For example, at one time, we would consider irresponsible not teaching the students responsible behavior and skills. Now, we have all these ways to lower our expectations because is such a mass epidemic of kids coming into the classroom, and just not being able to do what kids used to be able to do, and in such massive numbers, that the "norm" is that if the students have low grades, it is probably something wrong with the teacher, or the school, or the system. Rather than, maybe there is something going on out there that is sabotaging their ability to learn (April 18, 2008).

Moreover, our data reveal that teachers perceive the dialectic forces of *connection* vs. *disconnection* that emerge in their relationships with their students as a force caused by major changes occurring not only in the educational system, but in society in general. The conversation of one of the participants pointed up this assumption:

I think the major massive changes in our culture, in our society today that is what is making it more and more difficult to students to learn. So, the problems in the classroom, within the classroom, are really not within the classroom. They're from the society outside that is causing them. I struggle to try to get the students to learn. And, there's a constant push forward. So, I struggle to get them back off, to ease off, and to make it easier to accommodate their lower skills, because the skills are not as they used to be as what they had in the past. Things changed a lot, and students changed a lot. But, it's not the kids that self change, but the culture and the

society are influences on them and had affected them. So, in that sense, it has been a change; all the technology, the computer games, the internet, and so on. There's so much distraction. It is hard for the students to actually deal with the technology; they are overwhelmed. And, we have to learn to deal with those changes (April 25).

Nevertheless, the information obtained in this study shows that even when teachers feel the dialectic force of *disconnection* from their students affecting them strongly, they also feel connected to them in the fight for the same goals. One of the participants noted: "But, despite of all of that, the students still continue to learn, and they are wonderful kids in class. They care about their own future and their own learning. Even though they are fewer and fewer, but there still are." (April 15, 2008). The dialectic opposition set of *connection* vs. *disconnection* that pervades in teachers' relationships with their students interplay with countless sets of contradictions that emerge in the process of teachers' relating with their students.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) recognize: "There is not a finite set of dialectic contradictions in personal relationships to be "discovered." Supporting, this assumption, this study found multiple sets of dialectic contradictions arising in teachers' relationships as they interact with different parties in school grounds. However, based in our analysis of teachers' interactions in school grounds, we affirm that there is a group of dialectic tensions that is predominant in the process of teachers' relationships in school setting. This research determined that the dialectic tension of *control* vs. *emancipation, empowerment* vs. *oppression* emerge significantly in teachers' relationships with administrators, while the dialectic sets of *solidarity* vs. *autonomy* and *fragmentation* vs. *unity* are central in teachers' relationships with administration and with other teachers. This study also found out that in the knot of contradictions that emerge in teachers' relating in school grounds, the dialectics tensions of *nurture* vs. *discipline, respect* vs. *suspect, consistency* vs. *flexibility*, and *connection* vs. *disconnection* are prominent in teachers' relationships with their students.

The core assumption of relational dialectics is that relationships are organized around the dynamic interplay of opposing tendencies as they are enacted in the interaction (Baxter & Montgomery, 2006). From a relational dialectic view, Baxter and Montgomery affirm that the ongoing interplay between oppositional features is what enables a relationship to exist as a dynamic social entity (2006). Our data encompass hints of countless sets of dialectic tensions emerging in the participants' articulations. Even though this study focused only on the analysis of a reduced number of dialectic sets that were found prominent in the participants' expressions, more dialectic tensions were being found with deeper scrutiny of the data. Therefore, several dialectic tensions are present in teachers' relationships in school settings.

4.11 **Summary**

The present chapter reported in detail the findings of the present research. The first part of this chapter analyzed the dialectic tensions found in teachers' relationships with administrators and with their colleagues. The second part described the dialectic tensions found in teachers' relationships with their students. In the next chapter, the conclusions, implications, and limitations of this study are presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

This research had two purposes at its core: first, to explore the feasibility of utilizing dialectics as a theoretical framework to examine teachers' relationships in schools; second, to explore the nature and type of dialectic tensions present in teachers' relationships with administrators, other teachers, and students. Generally speaking, relational dialectics seems to be an appropriate framework to analyze teachers' relationships in school settings due to its reliability to explain the opposing tensions that exist in teachers' relationships. Utilizing relational dialectics to examine teachers' relationships, we found multiple dialectic tensions in the process of teachers' relating with others in school settings.

This study revealed that the dialectic tensions of *control vs. emancipation*, *empowerment vs. oppression* are prominent in teachers' relationships with administrators; while the dialectic tensions of *solidarity vs. autonomy* and *fragmentation vs. unity* are fundamental in the relationships of teachers with administrators, and in teachers' relationships with other teachers as well. This study also revealed that the dialectic tensions of *nurture vs. discipline*, *respect vs. suspect*, *consistency vs. flexibility*, and *connection vs. disconnection* are prominent in teachers' relationships with their students. The results of this study elucidate that teachers' relationships are complex processes that entail multiple opposite forces interplaying simultaneously. Moreover, this study proves the viability of dialectic theory to study teachers' school-based relationships.

5.1 Future research

The purpose of this study was to examine the existence of dialectic tensions in teachers' relationships. Some limitations of this study should be considered. First, the information obtained in this study was based on a limited number of interviews with teachers who worked full time at the high school level. Hence, this study warrants similar research with a larger number of participants working full time a different school levels. Also, Baxter and Montgomery affirm that dialectic contradiction often

play backstage in the relational processes without the parties' conscious knowing awareness (1996). Hence, it could be that the participants were not consciously aware of the dialectic tensions present in their relationships with others, which a researcher could read into as patterns in their discourses. It may also be that the perceived tensions found in this study were important only for this population.

Second, this study focused only on a one sided view of the relationship – from the perspective of the teacher. This approach does not allow for a complete view of the extent to which both sides of the relationship are in (dis)agreement about the importance of the dialectic tensions taking place in the relationship. Perhaps administrators, peers, and students have a similar/different perspective of the importance of contradictions that emerge in their relationship.

In essence, this study offers certain key insights about relational dialectics that teachers experience, consciously or sub-consciously, and opens a space for further exploration of tensions, contradictions, and dilemmas in teacher-centered relationships.

5.2 **Limitations**

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In essence, this study offers certain key insights about relational dialectics that teachers experience, consciously or sub-consciously, and opens a space for further exploration of tensions, contradictions, and dilemmas in teacher-centered relationships.

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First, I want to thank you for your willingness to participate in this project. The primary purpose of this study is to expand the understanding of teachers' experiences in school settings. We are interested in exploring teachers' perceptions of the push and pulls of opposite demands in their relationships with other people in their work places. There are not right or wrong answers. Please, feel free to respond with confidence that your name and other identifying information will not be shared with other individuals. All your responses will be coded and that number will be used for all the analysis and reporting. I am going to be asking you to complete different research instruments related to your personal information, as well as about your experiences in your work place. However, the entire time to complete this information should be no more that 50 minutes. Are there any questions before we begin? (*Answer any Questions*)

Appendix B

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: Exploring Dialectical Tensions in Teacher's Relationships in School Settings

Principal Investigator: Griselda Rodríguez

Department: Communication

Introduction

You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research project described below. Please take your time making a decision and feel free to discuss it with your friends and family. Before agreeing to take part in this research study, it is important that you read the consent form that describes the study. Please ask the study researcher or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

Why is this study being done?

The primary purpose of this study is to expand the understanding of teachers' experiences in school settings. We are interested in exploring teachers' perceptions of the push and pulls of opposite demands in their relationships with other people in their working places. Approximately, 30 teachers will be involved in this study that will take place either at the Communication Department of UTEP campus, or at a location that meets the requirements of safety, confidentiality, and ethics.

You are being asked to be in the study because you are a male or female over the age of 18 years old and actively working as a school teacher.

If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will last about 40 to 50 minutes.

What is involved in the study?

If you agree to take part in this study, the research team will have an interview with you in where you will be asked about some personal biographical information. Also, in this study, you will be asked a variety of questions that have to do with the perceptions you have about the push and pulls between opposite demands in your personal relationships with others in your work place, as well as about your feelings of satisfaction in your profession. You will be required to respond to different instruments in oral and written form. All the instruments used in this study will be coded to protect your identity. Your answers in oral form will be tape recorded. The recordings will be transcribed and decoded for data analysis. After the transcriptions of the recordings are done, the recordings as well as all the other instruments used in this study will be stored in a locked cabinet in principal investigator's office. Only the principal investigator will have access to the recordings and to the data collected. At the end of this study, any identifiable data will be destroyed and the recordings will be erased.

What are the risks and discomforts of the study?

We do not anticipate any physical or psychological risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

What will happen if I am injured in this study?

The University of Texas at El Paso and its affiliates do not offer to pay for or cover the cost of medical treatment for research related illness or injury. No funds have been set aside to pay or reimburse you in the event of such injury or illness. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form. You should report any such injury to Griselda Rodriguez by e-mail grisrodr2001@yahoo.com and to Lola Norton of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UTEP at (915-747-8841) or lola@utep.edu.

Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

We believe that the final results of this study may be used to develop programs directed to enhance teachers' relationships in their work places that at the same time may improve teachers' satisfaction in their profession.

What other options are there?

You have the option not to take part in this study. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

Who is paying for this study?

There is no funding for this study.

What are my costs?

There are no direct costs. You will be responsible for travel to and from the research site and any other incidental expenses.

Will I be paid to participate in this study?

You will not be paid for taking part in this research study.

What if I want to withdraw, or am asked to withdraw from this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty.

If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. However, we encourage you to talk to a member of the research group so that they know why you are leaving the study. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them.

The researcher may decide to stop your participation without your permission, if he or she thinks that being in the study may cause you any harm.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact the principal investigator Griselda Rodriguez by email at grisrodr2001@yahoo.com.

Also, you may contact Lola Norton of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UTEP at (915-747-8841) or by email at lola@utep.edu.

What about confidentiality?

1. Your participation in this study is confidential. None of the information obtained will identify you by name. All records will be coded and stored in locked cabinets. Only the principal investigator will have access to the data obtained in this study.

2. The results of this research study may be presented at meetings or in publications; though, your identity will not be disclosed in those presentations.

Mandatory reporting

Please, understand that if information is revealed concerning illegal activities, the law requires that this information be reported to the proper authorities.

Authorization Statement

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I know that being in this study is voluntary and I choose to be in this study. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I will get a copy of this consent form now and can get information on results of the study later if I wish.

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Time: _____

Consent form explained/witnessed by: _____

Signature

Printed name: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Yes I want to participate _____ **No** I do not want to participate _____

Structured Written Interview

Person ID # _____

page _____ of _____ total pages

Gender _____

Age _____ **Date of Birth** _____

Race/Ethnicity

African-American _____ Asian _____
Caucasian _____ Hispanic _____ Native American _____ Other _____

Current Marital Status

Married _____ Single _____ Divorced _____ Widowed _____

Years of formal education completion

BA/BS Degree _____ MA/MS Degree _____ Phd/EdD Degree _____ MD
Degree _____

Years of teaching experience

-5 _____ -10 _____ -15 _____ -25 _____

Grade levels taught

Elementary _____ Middle School _____ High School _____

Dialectic Contradictions in Teacher's Relationships Study
Research Questions

1. What are the biggest challenges of being a teacher?
2. What are the biggest rewards of being a teacher?
3. Describe the quality of your relationship with your students?
4. Describe the quality of your relationship with people in your work place other than your students?
5. Do you feel that there are any contradictions (I mean any opposing force, any push and pull force between opposite demands that may create tension) in your relationship with your students? If yes, please describe what those contradictions are like.
6. Do you feel that there are contradictions in your relationships with people other your students? If yes, please describe what those contradictions are like.
7. Do you think those contradictions have any negative outcome? If yes, please explain in which ways.
8. Do you think those contradictions have any positive outcome? If yes, please explain in which ways.
9. How do you manage those contradictions? Please, explain.
10. Do you feel that the contradictions in your relationships in your work place have any effect on your personal life? If yes, please explain.
11. Do you think those contradictions create long-lasting tensions?
12. What help, if any, would you like to receive from others to deal with the tension created by contradictions in your relationships?
13. Is there anything else about your personal relationships in school that you would like to share?

Vita

Griselda Flores Rodríguez was born in Porvenir, Bravo District of Chihuahua, México. The fourth daughter of Everardo Flores and María de la Luz Cháirez de Flores, in the spring of 1997, she entered El Paso Community College as an ESL student. In the spring of 1999, she transferred to The University of Texas at El Paso. She received her Bachelor's Degree of Arts in Foreign Language Education in the spring of 2001. After receiving her Bachelor of Arts, she worked in the position of Bilingual Elementary teacher at Fort Hancock Independent School District. In the spring of 2004, she entered the Graduate School at The University of Texas at El Paso. While pursuing her Master Degree in Communication, she was working at El Paso Independent School District, where she currently works, in the position of Spanish and ESL teacher.

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This thesis was typed by Griselda Flores Rodríguez