ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: High School Teacher Perceptions of Student Morals and Ethics and the Influence of These Perceptions on Teacher-Student Interactions: A Qualitative Case Study

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In studies on teacher perceptions of student behavior, researchers found consistently that teachers’ perceptions impact students’ future behavior and the way students interact with teachers (Gay, 2000; Llamas, 2012; Modlin, 2008; Myers & Pianta, 2008). The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore high school teachers’ perceptions of students’ morals and ethical frameworks in relation to classroom behaviors and what the implications are for these perceptions on how teachers interact with their students. Through this study, I examine how teachers interact with their students in behavior-related situations with relation to their own and their perceptions of their students’ ethical frameworks and moral theories, particularly Consequentialism, Respect for Agents, Social Contract Theory, Virtue Theory, Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development, and Noddings’ Ethic of Care.

As researchers have found, the topic of teacher perceptions is significant to student-teacher interaction and, consequently, student behavior (Gay, 2000; Llamas, 2012; Modlin, 2008; Myers & Pianta, 2008). This study concentrates on the moral and ethical values that are the foundation of the student-teacher relationship through the teachers’ perceptions. Myers & Pianta (2008) found that student behavior was directly related to the teacher-student relationship,
although some teachers do not believe this to be true (Modlin, 2008).

Findings from the four participant interviews and journals include various common perceptions teachers hold of student morals and ethics related to the students’ behaviors, such as the social construction of student morality and emerging moral standards of high school students and how these perceptions influence the way teachers interact with certain groups of students, including high ability and African American students. The findings in this qualitative case study contribute to literature on teacher perceptions and the impact of those perceptions on students.

*Keywords*: ethical frameworks, moral theories, ethics, morals, teacher perceptions, teacher-student relationship, student behavior, African American, high school