"WE'RE GOOD FRIENDS": OUT-OF-CLASS RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
TEACHERS OF ESL AND THEIR ADULT STUDENTS

By

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When I first volunteered as a classroom assistant in an adult English as a Second

Language (ESL) class, I was struck by the many relationships the teacher developed with

her students. She was not only English teacher, but also served a variety of other roles.

She became a friend who ate meals with students in their homes, brought her young

children to social gatherings to play with students' children, visited students in the

hospital when they had babies, hosted a baby shower for a student in her home, gave

house-warming and other gifts to students, and brought students to Thanksgiving at her

parents' home. She served as a social worker and provided for many of her students'

needs: she collected clothes for students and their children, brought job ads to students

looking for employment, helped students find medical resources, and drove students to

appointments. She even facilitated business or employment relationships by arranging

for students to work as servers at her sister's wedding and helping a student obtain

employment in her husband's office. She did all this in a caring, generous and sincere

way.

At that time, I was a lawyer employed by a state attorney general's office. As a

lawyer, professional rules governed my interactions with clients and other attorneys. As

a state employee, more rules created rigid boundaries for me. I was not allowed, for

example, to accept gifts from either the individuals who benefited from my legal work or

the other attorneys involved in my cases. ESL teachers appeared to have a more flexible and multifaceted world.

Since becoming an ESL teacher of adults, I have often wondered about the identity I wanted to create for myself as a teacher. One aspect of that identity is my relationship with students. That relationship could be limited to what occurs in the classroom, or it could extend to interactions beyond the classroom. In order to help me decide whether I want to have out-of-classroom interactions with my students, and, if so, what kinds of such interactions, I wanted to learn about how experienced teachers of ESL to adults handled this subject. Is it common for them to have out-of-classroom interactions with their students? Are most of the interactions based on friendship, providing assistance, economic relationships, or something else? How do the out-of-classroom interactions begin and how do they develop? What types of interactions are appropriate? In what ways are they helpful to the students? How do teachers avoid hurting their students or "burning out" from over-entanglement? What potential benefits and risks of harm do the ESL teachers themselves consider in evaluating the appropriateness of these interactions?

My research grew out of these questions. Before I present my review of relevant literature, the methodology of my study, my findings, and my conclusions, I present some preliminary information in this chapter. I introduce the subject of dual relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students. I then explain my role in this study, my background and biases. Finally, I state the specific research questions that guided my study.

Dual Relationships

An ESL teacher has a dual relationship when she not only teaches English to her students but also has a second, different kind of relationship with them (e.g., as a friend, business partner, or employer.) The appropriateness of many kinds of dual relationships is complex. Let us consider a common situation: an ESL teacher of adults goes to her student's home for dinner. As a dinner guest, the teacher is no longer acting within her role as a teacher. Her new role is that of a social friend or guest. Is the change of role a problem? Maybe both the teacher and the adult student are comfortable with the situation and enjoy each other's company. Such socializing can be a good opportunity for the student to practice English. The student may also be happy to host her teacher as a way of giving back to a teacher who has spent numerous hours to make classes enjoyable and useful for the students. In addition, the teacher may appreciate the opportunity to learn more about the student, her circumstances and needs, her culture, and her interests and goals.

On the other hand, this simple and typical social interaction could be a problem. A student could feel exploited or taken advantage of if, for example, she is having the teacher to dinner only because the teacher's comment that she likes Asian food made the student feel obliged to cook her native Vietnamese food for the teacher. Cooking this special meal, however, could be a burden in light of the student's already stressful and busy life and tight budget. In addition, this out-of-school relationship can cause problems for the teacher too. Socializing with students might interfere with the teacher's ability to fairly evaluate the students for a promotion to the next level or it might cause the teacher

to feel overly busy and burned out. Finally, other students in the class may resent the special relationship of the chosen student or lose respect for a teacher they feel is unprofessional.

The issue of dual relationships has been studied in various contexts. Examples include faculty and undergraduate students (Holmes, Rupert, Ross & Shapera, 1999), faculty and graduate students in counselor preparation programs (Bowman & Hatley, 1995), faculty and students in masters in social work (MSW) programs (Congress, 2001), speech-language pathologists and members of their social model aphasia groups (Sherratt & Hersh, 2010), sports and performance psychology practitioners and their clients (Aoyagi & Portenga, 2010).

There has been little serious consideration of dual relationships, however, with respect to teachers in adult basic education and ESL settings. A survey about ethical issues in adult education shows that teacher-student relationships, including concerns about how friendly teachers should be with students and how much socialization outside the class is appropriate, are a major concern of adult education teachers in British Columbia, Canada (Gordon & Sork, 2001). In addition, Johnston has written about the teacher-student relationship and ESL teachers' involvement in students' lives from the perspective of the values underlying teaching (2003).

Yet, there is an absence of studies about teacher-student relationships in the ESL/Adult Basic Education (ABE) context. As a result of the lack of professional guidance, some teachers may become entangled in harmful relationships with their students. Other, more cautious, teachers may create overly rigid boundaries because they

do not understand what is appropriate or how to evaluate the appropriateness of a variety of situations. Such teachers can miss opportunities to help their students, learn from them, and enjoy friendships with them.

It is my hope that my research will promote further discussion and study of out-of-class relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students. I hope that additional study of this subject will eventually produce a better understanding of the relationships, their benefits and risks, and ultimately lead to more satisfying relationships.

My Role, Background and Biases

Since January of 2008, I have been a part-time ESL teacher of adults in a large ABE program in an urban area in the Midwest. In this program, I have taught English to beginning students and to intermediate students, as well as math to ESL students. Before I became a teacher, I had been employed as an attorney but volunteered in adult ESL on a once a week basis. I initially tutored one adult woman from Korea. After I stopped tutoring her, we continued to see each other socially on an occasional basis, and I began to volunteer in a classroom setting. I became social friends with two of the women students who were part of that class. One was from Bolivia and one was from Syria. Each of them had regularly worked with me in small group or individual pull-outs. We saw each other socially outside of class both during and after the time when I volunteered with that program.

My role in conducting this research was to interview other ESL teachers of adults in the metropolitan area where I teach. In so doing, I asked those teachers to share their

experiences and thoughts with me. It was my hope that together we might create a better understanding about teacher-student relationships.

I began my research with certain assumptions and biases. I believed, first of all, that most ESL teachers of adults are well-meaning people who genuinely care about their students and want to help them. I also assumed that few of the teachers have given much focused thought to the benefits and risks of the out-of-classroom interactions they have with students. Finally, I assumed that most of these teacher-student interactions worked out well, with the benefits outweighing any harm that might have occurred.

Guiding Questions

This research was aimed at answering the following two questions:

1. What kinds of out-of-class relationships do ESL teachers of adults have with their students?

2. What potential benefits and risks of harm do ESL teachers of adults consider in evaluating the appropriateness of out-of-class relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students?

Chapter Overviews

In this chapter, I discussed my interest in out-of-class relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students and my motivation for studying the subject. I explained my background as a new ESL teacher of adults and my desire to understand the relationships other teachers have with their students in order to help me determine and create my own identity as a teacher. I further described the absence of studies about teacher-student relationships in the ESL/ABE context and the resulting need for my

study. Finally, I introduced the context of my study in an urban area of the Midwest and my role in the study as the interviewer of other teachers of ESL to adults.

Chapter Two reviews relevant literature. The literature discusses the moral complications of these relationships, summarizes existing policies and rules about out-of-class interactions between ESL teachers and their adult students, sets forth reasons why rules and policies might be inadequate, and offers some factors that might be considered in evaluating the appropriateness of these relationships. The chapter concludes with the recognition that there is an absence of studies describing the out-of-classroom relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students in ABE settings and an absence of studies about the factors that teachers consider in evaluating the appropriateness of these relationships.

Chapter Three describes my research design and methodology. The chapter explains how my research falls within the qualitative research paradigm. It also describes the steps in my study. I began by interviewing four teachers of ESL to adults. The interviews were recorded and later professionally transcribed. I used the transcripts to analyze the data by topics and themes within interviews and then across the various interviews. Finally, the chapter explains that I followed standard ethical practices throughout the process.

In Chapter Four, I present the results of the study. The chapter begins with descriptions of the primary out-of-class relationship of each of the teachers I interviewed. It then summarizes the major benefits of these relationships: they offer a close connection or friendship between people, they enable the teacher to help a student in significant

ways, they provide opportunities to learn about another culture, and they give teachers a new perspective on their own culture and lives. Finally, the chapter focuses on the teachers' recognition of potential problems, including the major amount of time and energy the relationships can take and possible adverse effects upon the school, other students and the student involved in the relationship.

Chapter Five contains my reflections on the data. My major conclusions are that the out-of-classroom relationships tend to begin when a teacher recognizes that a student needs help and the teacher believes that the teacher is the best or only person available to provide that help. As the relationships develop, they often become complex and multi-faceted, so that they do not fall within any single category (e.g., friendship, financial, or helping with life problems.) Finally, the rapidity with which students leave adult ESL/ABE classes helps to reduce any potential harm from the out-of-classroom relationship a particular student has with the class teacher. Chapter Five also explains that the study I conducted is limited by its small scope. In addition, the chapter discusses the main implications of the study: there should be more discussion about out-of-classroom relationships and more information given to teachers about resources available to help students with their problems. Finally, the chapter suggests some areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter looks at existing literature relevant to out-of-classroom relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students. It begins with a short discussion of the moral complications of these relationships. It explores applicable rules and policies, and then questions whether rules and policies can provide adequate guidance for this kind of situation. Finally, it summarizes some of the factors that teachers use or should use to evaluate the appropriateness of out-of-classroom relationships. It concludes with the recognition that there is an absence of studies describing the out-of-classroom relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students in ABE settings and an absence of studies addressing the factors that the teachers consider in evaluating the appropriateness of these relationships.

Complexities of the Teacher-Student Relationship

Teachers' caring for and about their students is an important part of teaching (Aultman, Williams-Johnson & Schutz, 2009; O'Connor, 2008; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2005). The relationships they form with their students require teachers to make frequent moral judgments, i.e., judgments about what is good and bad, or right and wrong (Johnston, 2003). In relating to students, teachers frequently face dilemmas where values conflict.

For example, Johnston (2003) tells a story from William Ayers' book *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*. In that story, a student came to school without money and his teacher (Mr. Ayers) lent him 50 cents to buy lunch. Johnston recognizes that lending money to one student is not consistent with the values of fairness and equality, which would seem to require treating all the students in the same way. Yet, as Johnston concludes, other values require that teachers deal with students as individuals with their own individual situations (p. 150). The teacher-student relationship has to be negotiated (and constantly renegotiated) with each student. It must be based not only on abstract principles, but also on individual circumstances and needs (Johnston, 2003).

Through their interactions with students, teachers build relationships with their students. Those teacher-student relationships, in turn, affect students' motivation, intellectual development and achievement (Aultman, Williams-Johnson & Schutz, 2009). Although all good teachers care about their students and many are involved to some degree in their students' lives, different teachers make different decisions about how extensive their involvement will be (Johnston, 2003). One way that some ESL teachers of adults become involved in students' lives is through out-of-classroom relationships.

The inter-cultural nature of relationships between teachers of ESL and their adult students may complicate these relationships. Americans tend to have a different concept of friendship, for example, than people from many other countries (Stewart, Danielian & Foster, 1998). Americans generally use the word friend to describe many people, including some who might more accurately be called acquaintances. These social friends or contacts are often limited to a particular situation or time. In various other countries,

people are more likely to have fewer friends but a greater and longer-term commitment to them. Thus, cultural differences between teachers and their students can easily lead to misunderstandings, disappointments, and hurt feelings.

Moreover, the decisions by ESL teachers of adults about out-of-classroom relationships may involve particularly complex moral judgments because of the needs and vulnerabilities of their students. New immigrants, in general, may at times feel overwhelmed by their new environment, the new culture surrounding them, and the need to create new lives (Hafernik, Messerschmitt & Vandrick, 2002). In the urban metropolitan area where I teach, a high percentage of the state's immigrants are refugees; 25%-50% in a given year are refugees, compared to a national figure of 8% (Davies, 2004). Two particularly prominent refugee groups in the state are Hmong and Somalis. In fact, the state has a larger population of Somali immigrants than any other state and a larger population of Hmong than any state except California (Davies, 2004). Some refugees faced traumatic war experiences and/or torture and suffer from related mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety disorders, and PTSD (Minnesota Department of Health, 2007). When newly arrived refugees lack support systems, monetary resources, and cultural knowledge about various subjects, including the relationships considered appropriate in this country, they may be especially needy and vulnerable. ESL teachers of adults may therefore find themselves especially eager to help their students in ways beyond the traditional teacher-student relationship, but also in need of guidance about appropriate ways to do so.

Adult ESL Programs' Rules and Policies

An ESL teacher seeking guidance regarding out-of-classroom teacher-student relationships might begin with any rules or policies of the program where he or she teaches. Many programs in the metropolitan area I am studying, however, provide little guidance.

One school district's ABE program has an employee code of conduct that states, in part:

> [W]e are committed to the following actions:
> - We respect the rights and contributions of all individuals in our workplace.
> - We create work environments that do not tolerate harassment, bullying or intimidation.
> - We promote a work environment that is free from substance abuse, violence, bias, and discrimination.
> - We operate in ways that recognize the value and needs of people of diverse cultural, economic and social backgrounds.
> - We do not discriminate against learners, or co-workers on the basis of age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status or any basis recognized in law.
> - We provide for the safety and well-being of each other and our participants.

(Minneapolis ABE Code of Conduct). In sum, this code prohibits relationships that are violent, bullying, intimidating, harassing, or discriminatory (on the basis of gender or other specified characteristics). It does not address the variety of other possible relationships, although the school district is "currently working on a district policy that covers social networking and relationships of staff/teachers and learners of any age" (C. Peterson, personal communication, July 8, 2010).

Similarly, another large school district with a major adult ESL program has a policy, applicable to all employees, that prohibits sexual harassment and sexual violence (St Paul Public Schools policies). Beyond that, the district's adult ESL program "doesn't have a specific policy" about teacher-student relationships (J. Weaverling, personal communication, July 8, 2010).

Smaller programs in community-based organizations may have detailed policies or no policies at all. Two community organizations that provide various services, including ESL programs, to refugees and immigrants have Volunteer Conduct Agreements that prohibit interactions between staff and students for personal financial gain. They also prohibit staff from dating learners, making sexual invitations, and sending sexually implicit or explicit messages that cause the recipient to feel uncomfortable. Finally, they prohibit staff from attempting to convert students to particular religious or political beliefs (Agreements of the Neighborhood House and the Minnesota Literacy Council).

Another example of a community organization that has tried to instruct its volunteer tutors of ESL what interactions with students are inappropriate begins its policies by prohibiting sexual harassment and offensive behavior toward students. The term offensive behavior is undefined. The policies also list certain boundaries for in school and outside of school behavior. In school, tutors are not allowed to lend or borrow money, buy or sell merchandise, or provide legal or financial representation or assistance. Outside of school, tutors are instructed that driving students to school is not part of their

duties and are asked to avoid situations and interactions in which there is an appearance of a conflict of interest (Guadalupe Alternative Programs Tutor Manual).

Various other small adult ESL programs (i.e., Metro East ABE, SW ABE, Duluth ABE, and Lao Family) do not have written policies or procedures regarding teacher-student relationships (S. Helland, personal communication, July 7, 2010; P. Thomas, personal communication, July 7, 2010; B. Tamminen, personal communication, July 8, 2010; J. Hanslin, personal communication, July 9, 2010).

In sum, most programs do not have comprehensive policies or rules about out-of-classroom relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students. As discussed below, perhaps the complicated nature of these relationships makes it difficult to construct meaningful, relevant, and acceptable policies and rules.

Inadequacies of Rules and Boundaries

Policies provide rules, which set forth a boundary that the professional is not allowed to cross. In other words, a line separates appropriate behavior from inappropriate behavior. Many issues involving dual relationships are addressed in this way. For example, the American Counseling Association has a Code of Ethics that prohibits sexual or romantic interactions between a counselor and a current client (Kaplan et al., 2009). Rules like this are one way to tell people which relationships are appropriate and which ones are not.

Unfortunately, many situations are too complex for a simple rule or boundary. For example, professional boundaries might normally prohibit social workers from telling clients their home phone numbers, but a social worker in a rural setting might give her

home number to a potentially suicidal client when alternative resources are not available (Davidson, 2005). Some people discussing professional boundaries might call this a boundary breach rather than a boundary violation. A boundary breach is a transgression of the usual line under circumstances where it is not exploitive or harmful, and may even be helpful to the client; in comparison, a boundary violation is always harmful and cannot be justified (Austin, Bergum, Nuttgens, & Peternelj-Taylor, 2006; Davidson, 2005). By giving more flexibility to the boundary metaphor, the notion of boundary breaches recognizes the impossibility of covering all situations in rules and the need for allowing professionals to cross a generally accepted standard in particular, unusual circumstances.

Other people have suggested further modifications to the boundary metaphor. Davidson prefers envisioning appropriate professional relationships in terms of a continuum, with the ideal in the middle and unacceptable extremes at each end (2005). At one end, labeled Entangled, are relationships that are over-involved, where the professional meets her own emotional or social needs through the relationship, in a way that is not helpful to the other person. At the other extreme, called Rigid, the inflexible and insensitive professional ignores the unique needs of the other person.

Even the continuum metaphor is limited by its linear nature and may not fully reflect the complexities of the teacher-student relationship. As Johnston explains, "In considering all the different cases and kinds of relationships between teachers and learners I have seen over the years, it seems clear to me that the nature and level of this relationship has to be determined by each teacher and in each context; there is no fixed right and wrong" (2003, p. 101).

Austin, Bergum, Nuttgens, and Peternelj-Taylor suggest some metaphors that might better apply to this kind of fluid relationship (2006). The metaphor they prefer is that of a territory. A territory is the land that lies between the separate lands of two Canadian Aboriginal tribes. In the territory, members of both tribes could travel, but they had to act with vigilance, attentiveness, and respect for each other. Similarly, if professionals envision their relationships as a territory, they must "consider the vast number of contingencies that inform the relational dynamic" (Austin et al., 2006, p. 90).

In sum, because of the complexities of teacher-student relationships, boundaries and rules may not be sufficient to guide teachers in navigating them successfully. Perhaps teachers need something other than rules or policies, some guidance that is more flexible and allows them to consider the context in all its particularities. A possible form that guidance might take could be considerations or factors to be considered in evaluating the appropriateness of a relationship.

<div align="center">Considerations for Evaluating Out-of-Classroom Relationships</div>

As Johnston says, "Some teachers socialize with their students; others disappear at the end of the day and reappear the next morning. Neither practice is inherently right or wrong" (2003, p. 149). A teacher must determine the extent of relationships he or she wants, and the appropriate student-teacher relationship will depend upon not only the teacher's values but also the particular student and the particular circumstances (Johnston, 2003). What considerations, then, help determine the appropriateness of a particular teacher-student relationship? What considerations have teachers used? What considerations have experts advised them to use?

Teachers in elementary and secondary school settings struggle to negotiate boundaries in their relationships with students in order to maintain appropriate involvement and caring relationships while keeping the distance necessary for appropriate classroom control and effectiveness (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009). These teachers tend to articulate their considerations for relationship boundaries in terms of a line that separates the role of teacher from the role of a friend. As one teacher explained, "Sometimes I'm probably too friendly because they think we're friends. I have to tell them I'm the teacher. They're the student. We're not friends. Friends come over to my house and we play pool or we go out to a movie or go to concerts or go out to dinner together" (Aultman, et al., 2009, p. 642). Because of the age differential between the teachers and students and the fact that the students are children, a friendship or any other out-of-classroom relationship between the teacher and these students is likely to raise serious concerns about exploitation.

Teachers of undergraduate students face a broader variety of potential out-of-classroom relationships, such as sexual, social, business/financial, and personal/counseling. Most attention has focused on sexual relationships and sexual harassment (Holmes, Rupert, Ross & Shapera, 1999). Blevins-Knabe has suggested some considerations or guidelines for dual relationships between professors and students (1992). The first step, she says, is to consider the professor's role, the student's characteristics, and the particular situation. The second step includes a list of questions to determine if the teaching role is compromised by the relationship. The final step includes

answering more questions, primarily addressing the risk of exploiting either the student or the professor.

Dual relationships with graduate students raise similar issues. Congress (2001, 1996) has studied these teacher-student relationships in the context of MSW programs. She offers a list of considerations for evaluating whether such dual relationships in social work education are appropriate. The first consideration involves the type of dual relationship. Her survey identified seven categories: sexual relationships, professional employment (e.g., having a student work on the professor's research project), nonprofessional employment (e.g., employing a student as a beautician), social-individual (e.g., having a drink or a meal with a student), social-group (e.g., attending a student's party or inviting a student to the professor's home for a party), therapeutic, and professional-collegial (e.g., collaborating on a professional paper) (2001). Of these relationships, sexual relationships are the most dangerous. Congress then asks whether the relationship exploits, or has the potential of harming, the student. The next consideration is whether the dual relationship takes undue advantage of the educator's greater power. Other considerations are whether the relationship impacts other students (e.g., gives an advantage to the chosen student) and whether the relationship is with a current student (more dangerous) or former student (less potential harm). She ends with a recommendation for consultation with colleagues about the appropriateness of the relationship. If the educator is reluctant to do so, she concludes, that may be a sign of serious ethical concerns (1996).

Perhaps, however, dual relationships with adult basic education students raise different concerns from those with undergraduate or graduate school students. I found little discussion about considerations for evaluating the appropriateness of out-of-classroom relationships in the context of adult basic education. One relevant study surveys adult education practitioners in British Columbia about their views on a need for a code of ethics and the ethical concerns they encountered in teaching adults (Gordon & Sork, 2001). It found that the most frequently cited ethical issue involved the confidentiality of student data, but the second most common ethical concern was teacher-student relationships. The respondents' concerns ranged from dating or sexual relationships to the appropriate amount of extra-curricular socialization with students. Unfortunately, this study merely reported upon the results of a survey and did not discuss the considerations the teachers used to evaluate the appropriateness of such relationships.

A second study, which focuses on the importance of interpersonal relationships in Canadian adult literacy programs, contains a comparison of two teachers' views on the appropriate amount of involvement with students (Terry, 2006). The teacher favoring less involvement expressed concerns that the over-involved teacher (who spent many hours trying to address students' nonacademic problems and would drive students to social service or counseling appointments) was nurturing student dependency as well as spending time on such problems at the expense of addressing students' academic learning needs. The study does not, however, make clear whether the literacy program included any ESL students or whether all of the students were native English speakers.

Finally, I turn specifically to relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students. A book examining ethical issues encountered by ESL teachers offers the guidance that the teachers "have the responsibility to treat students humanely, with respect, and without showing favoritism, both inside and outside the classroom" (Hafernik, Messerschmitt & Vandrick, 2002, p. 81). The main concern, at least as expressed by Hafernik, Messerschmitt and Vandrick, is the power differential between the teachers and students and the resulting potential for exploitation of the students. Accordingly, these authors caution against asking for favors like babysitting, requesting help learning the students' language, and any gestures of friendliness that students might interpret as coercive or necessary to comply with in order to get a good grade or pass the course. Furthermore, they suggest that teachers should consider whether students' gifts are related to the teacher's power (e.g., to buy a good grade or some other favor). Their advice is aimed, however, at ESL faculty in postsecondary institutions, not ESL teachers in the ABE or community-based programs.

The Gap

The out-of-classroom relationships that ESL teachers of adults have with their students in ABE or community-based settings are largely unstudied. Even studies about teacher-student relationships in adult basic education settings with native-born students and studies about ESL programs in postsecondary institutions are not directly relevant to relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students in ABE or community-based programs. The differences in settings, circumstances, and students could be significant. In postsecondary institutions, teachers have substantial power over their

students as a result of their discretion in giving grades and the other benefits related to the formal academic setting. In ABE or community-based programs, teachers frequently have less power. Grades may not be given at all, and even if there is a class to be promoted into, promotion may depend on a standardized test score rather than a teacher's discretion. This reduction of the power differential and more informal setting could lead to more out-of-class relationships and/or different considerations in evaluating their appropriateness.

Similarly, teacher-student relationships involving adult basic education teachers and native-born students may be different from the relationships involving ESL teachers and immigrant or refugee students. The students they teach have different needs and situations. ABE students who were born in the US may be more likely to have friends, family and existing support systems. They may also have certain expectations regarding teacher–student relationships as a result of their previous educational experiences in the US. In addition, they and their teachers may be less interested in learning about each other's cultures through out-of-classroom relationships.

Because of the unique situations of ESL teachers in ABE or community-based programs, I wanted to study specifically the out-of-classroom relationships that they have with their students, as well as the considerations these teachers use to evaluate the appropriateness of these relationships.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

This study's aim was to describe the out-of-classroom relationships ESL teachers in ABE or community-based programs have with their adult students and the factors they

consider in evaluating the appropriateness of such relationships. I had the following two questions:

1. What kinds of out-of-class relationships do ESL teachers of adults have with their students?

2. What potential benefits and risks of harm do ESL teachers of adults consider in evaluating the appropriateness of out-of-class relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students?

Summary

In this chapter, I summarized existing literature relevant to out-of-classroom relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students. Existing rules and policies of ESL/ABE programs vary in their coverage and amount of detail. The relationships in my study have not only the moral complexities of all relationships between teachers and students, but also additional complications resulting from some students' extra vulnerabilities and needs as recent refugees. In light of these complexities, boundaries or rules may not be flexible enough to provide adequate guidance in this area. Perhaps more flexible guidance could result from a focus on factors to consider instead of strict rules. Accordingly, this chapter looked at literature discussing possible considerations to be used in evaluating dual relationships. Finally, it concluded that because the out-of-class relationships between teachers of ESL and their adult students in ABE programs are complex and significantly different from other

teacher-student or professional-client relationships, they deserve a study of their own. In the next chapter, I explain the methodology of my study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my study was to learn about out-of-classroom relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students. I wanted to answer the following two questions:

1. What kinds of out-of-class relationships do ESL teachers of adults have with their students?

2. What potential benefits and risks of harm do ESL teachers of adults consider in evaluating the appropriateness of out-of-class relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students?

In order to answer my questions, I interviewed ESL teachers. In the interviews, I asked the teachers to tell me about their out-of-classroom relationships with students. I also asked their thoughts and opinions about the risks and benefits of these relationships. I tried to learn how teachers evaluate the appropriateness of hypothetical relationships as well as relationships they have actually had.

Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, I describe the methodology I used in my study. First, I present the rationale and description of the qualitative research paradigm. Next I explain how data were collected and the procedures that were followed. The following section describes how the data were analyzed. Finally, verification and ethics are addressed.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

My study is a kind of qualitative research. Merriam describes qualitative research as research that is "interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (2009, p. 13). According to Merriam, qualitative research has four main characteristics: the focus is on process, meaning and understanding; the primary instrument of data collection and analysis is the researcher; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive. Two additional common characteristics are that the study's design is emergent and flexible and the sample selection is nonrandom, purposeful, and small (Merriam, 2009).

My research fits Merriam's description of qualitative research. First, my goal was to understand teachers' experiences, opinions and beliefs. I was interested in how teachers make sense out of their relationships and the process they use to interpret or make meaning out of their experiences. Second, my data collection technique was interviewing, which is a typical way to collect data for qualitative research. I (as the researcher) was both the instrument of data collection and the primary instrument of data analysis. Third, my process was the inductive process of gathering data to build hypotheses or theories, rather than deductively testing hypotheses. Fourth, my product is descriptive in nature; it uses words and quotes to describe what I learned, rather than numbers or graphs. Finally, my design was flexible and able to respond to changing conditions, and my sample was small and nonrandom. For all these reasons, my research fits the qualitative research paradigm.

Data Collection

<u>Participants</u>

The participants in my research were ESL teachers of adults. The teachers either work or have worked in ABE programs of a school district and/or a community-based organization.   I interviewed four teachers.

I recruited my participants by informal contacts.   It was a sample of convenience. Based upon my knowledge about the participants, including the information they provided on a consent form, I chose three teachers to interview. I attempted to select teachers who had had at least one significant out-of-classroom relationship with their students and seemed willing and able to describe those experiences and articulate their thought processes, opinions, beliefs and values. I later added one teacher who had had very limited experience with such relationships. I wanted to learn that teacher's reasons for not participating more frequently in out-of-class relationships with students and thoughts about the risks or potential dangers of such relationships. All the participants had taught ESL to adults for a significant period of time, but they varied with respect to previous teaching experience, gender, and other characteristics. I did not make any effort to obtain a random sample or select based upon such characteristics.

<u>Location/Setting</u>

The location of this study is a large metropolitan area in the upper Midwest.

<u>Data Collection Technique</u>

The data collection technique was interviews. Interviews are a good way to find out about teachers' reported behavior (e.g., the kinds of out-of-classroom relationships

they have with their students) and their opinions and attitudes (e.g., the risks and benefits that they would consider in evaluating the appropriateness of a certain kind of relationship) (McKay, 2006). A problem with interviews is that teachers may report what they think they should say instead of what they really do or believe (McKay, 2006). I tried to reduce this problem by conducting the interviews in a nonjudgmental way and assuring confidentiality. It might also have helped that I am a teacher (a peer) rather than a program administrator. I recorded the interviews and had them professionally transcribed.

<div align="center">Procedure</div>

I recruited my participants informally. My first step was to talk informally with other adult ESL/ABE teachers about the research I wanted to do. I then sent approximately 30 informal emails to potential participants, i.e., teachers who were currently or had recently taught ESL to adults in ABE programs of a school district and/or a community-based organization. The emails stated that I was a student in a MA in ESL program and was performing some research as part of that masters program. It explained that I would be interviewing teachers about out-of-classroom interactions they have had with students (e.g., social friendships, business or employment relationships, assistance of a social work nature) and their thoughts about the potential and/or actual benefits and risks of those interactions. I then asked them to let me know if they had had out-of-classroom friendships or other interactions with their students and might be willing to be interviewed. I indicated that if they responded, I would give them more information about my project in a letter.

When teachers indicated that they might be willing to be interviewed, I provided them with a letter. The letter provided further information about my research. It summarized the research I would conduct: a description of the out-of-classroom interactions between adult ESL teacher and their students, including the kinds of interactions, their potential benefits and risks of harm, and how teachers evaluate those benefits and risks. It indicated that I was looking for teachers who would be willing to be interviewed, in a recorded interview that would last approximately an hour. It stated that the final product would be a printed capstone in Hamline's Bush Library and published through the Hamline website. It promised that I would keep the identity of participants confidential by using pseudonyms and modifying any identifying details or characteristics. Finally, it concluded by asking recipients willing to be interviewed to fill out the attached consent form and return it to me. The consent form attached to the letter said that the signer had received and reviewed my letter about conducting research on adult ESL teachers' interactions with students outside of the classroom and the signer was willing to be interviewed as part of my research. It then had lines for the teacher's signature, printed name, date, and contact information. Finally, it requested that the teacher briefly describe the kind(s) of out-of-class interactions he or she had with students.

I received six completed consent forms and chose three of those teachers to interview. My selection was based upon trying to get interesting and varied stories about their out-of-classroom relationships, as well as the teachers' apparent willingness and ability to describe their experiences and articulate their thoughts clearly. Later, I

recruited an additional participant. I used a similar process of email, followed by formal letter with attached consent form. I added that fourth participant because I wanted to interview a teacher who had not had significant out-of-class interactions with students. I thought my study would be more interesting and balanced if it included the perspective of such a teacher, especially regarding the risks and potential dangers of out-of-class relationships.

I conducted four separate, one-on-one interviews. I first interviewed the three teachers who had had significant out-of-class relationships with students and then the one teacher who had not. Each interview was conducted in a location chosen by the teacher: the teacher's home, a meeting room in a library, a restaurant, and a private room in the school where the teacher taught. The interviews were recorded. In the interviews, I asked the teachers to describe the out-of-classroom relationships they have had with students. For teachers who had had interactions with many students, I requested that they focus on one significant relationship. I asked about their thoughts and opinions about out-of-classroom relationships, including the risks and benefits they would consider in evaluating the appropriateness of typical relationships and the risks and benefits they have actually thought about with respect to the relationships they have had with students. I began each interview with a few major questions to cover, but I tried to let the interviewees' answers and interests influence how our conversations developed.

After the interviews, I invited the participants to send me additional thoughts or information through an email. Only one participant sent an email, which was in response

to an email I sent with some follow-up questions about an area where I wanted additional detail.

Data Analysis

I had the interviews professionally transcribed. I initially read the transcript of each interview separately, to focus on that teacher's description of his or her out-of classroom relationships, his or her opinions and beliefs. I tried to identify key ideas, topics, or themes in that interview. I grouped together comments at different times in the interview that seemed to be related or connected to each other in some way. Then I began to compare the data in different interviews. I looked for comments by different teachers about the same topics or themes, to see what they agreed upon as well as how their experiences and ideas differed.

Data analysis requires some consideration of reliability. In many kinds of research studies, according to Merriam, "reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (2009, p. 220). In qualitative research like my study, however, repeating the study would not give the same results. Different teachers will have different relationships with students, describe them differently, and have different thoughts and opinions about how to evaluate their appropriateness. The question we should ask, therefore, is not one of reliability (in the sense that the results can be replicated) but one of consistency (in the sense that the results are consistent with the data collected) (Merriam, 2009).

To accomplish consistency, I relied on peer examination. Peer examination (also called peer review) means having a colleague or knowledgeable person review the data

and assess whether the findings are consistent with the data (Merriam, 2009). My

primary advisor and secondary advisor performed this function. In this way, I established

that the findings in my study are consistent with the study's data.

Verification of Data

Since I researched teachers' constructions or understandings of their relationships

with students and their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs about them, there was no one fixed,

absolute, or objective reality to accurately record in my study (Merriam, 2009). My

research is qualitative. Accordingly, internal validity and verification of data were

accomplished as explained above, in the discussion about reliability, by peer

examination.   Another possibility might have been to share portions of my preliminary

analysis with the interviewees and obtain their feedback. The purpose of such a process

is to make sure that the researcher understands what the interviewees are trying to tell

her. Such member checks, also known as respondent validation, can increase internal

validity or credibility (Merriam, 2009).   I decided, however, that the data in the

interviews were sufficiently clear and that member checks were not necessary.

Ethics

This study protected participants' rights in the following ways:

1. Hamline's Human Subjects Research procedures were followed.

2. Research objectives were shared with participants.

3. Participants signed consent forms before being interviewed.

4. Participants were notified of their right to withdraw from participation at any

    time.

5.   The interviews were professionally transcribed.

6.   My study refers to participants and their students with pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the methodology I used in my study. My study was qualitative research. I collected my data by interviewing experienced teachers of ESL to adults. The interviews were professionally transcribed. I analyzed my data carefully and followed standard ethical practices to protect the rights of the participants. The next chapter presents the results from the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In order to learn about out-of-classroom relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students, I interviewed four experienced ESL teachers of adults. I wanted to answer the following two questions:

1. What kinds of out-of-class relationships do ESL teachers of adults have with their students?

2. What potential benefits and risks of harm do ESL teachers of adults consider in evaluating the appropriateness of out-of-class relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students?

This chapter presents the results of my study. I describe the primary out-of-classroom relationships that the teachers I interviewed have developed with students. I then discuss the benefits that they related from the relationships, including feeling a close connection to a student and the satisfaction of helping that student in significant ways. Finally, I turn to the problems or risks of harm that they identified, such as the relationships can be very time-consuming and interfere with the normal teacher-student relationship.

The Relationships

Each of the four teachers I interviewed described the primary out-of-classroom relationship that he or she has had with students. I will call the teachers Sally, Tina, Nan and Alex.

<u>Sally</u>

Sally has been teaching ESL to adults for more than 10 years. She interacts with students outside of class to socialize with them and to assist them in achieving their goals. For example, she frequently gives students her cell phone number. Her purpose is to enable them to use her as a job reference. She feels that her work (school) number will not be sufficient because she would rarely be there to answer calls to that number. She feels that many employers want to contact references immediately, and her willingness to share her cell phone number could make the difference between a student getting a job offer or not.

Sally has an ongoing relationship with a former student that began during her first year of teaching ESL. At that time, one of the students in her low beginning level class was a young man from Mexico whom I will call Jose. One day he brought fruit, his checkbook, and a pen to her classroom after class and she helped him write checks to pay his bills. Soon after that day, he brought an insurance application, forms to fill out, and more fruit! She thinks she began to help him because he never explicitly asked if she would help; he just brought his papers and she began to help. Also, she did not think she could refer him to other resources since he was undocumented and would not have

trusted agencies that might have otherwise been able to provide services. So, she began helping him.

After Jose's sister arrived in the US and joined Sally's class, Sally became friends with her too. Sally then began to see Jose and his sister outside of school. Sally wanted her family to meet them and the two families had a big dinner together. By this time, Jose and his sister were no longer students in Sally's class.

Jose had met his fiancee in Sally's class, and Sally was the maid of honor at their wedding when they married three years later. When they had a child, Sally attended the birth and they gave her the honor of naming the child.

Sally's friendship with Jose's sister also continued. When Jose's sister decided to get married, Sally helped her pick out her wedding dress and wedding invitations. After the ceremony, they unwrapped the wedding presents and sent thank-you cards together. When Jose's sister had her child, Sally attended at that birth also.

Jose has done work for the co-op where Sally lives, including several days of work at Sally's home. The co-op paid Jose what it would have paid anyone else to do the work. Jose has also done house painting for Sally's mother and one of her sisters. They also paid him the going rate. One of Sally's sisters has also helped Jose and his family financially.

Sally sees Jose and his wife at least once a week. Jose and his family attend holiday celebrations (Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day) with Sally and her family; they have been to the homes of Sally's mother and both of her sisters. Sally expects Jose and

his family to be at her house this Christmas, even though Sally's own child will not be there this year. Sally considers Jose and his family to be part of her family.

Tina

Tina has taught ESL to adults for almost 10 years. She has had a variety of out-of-class interactions with students. Tina gives her phone number to any student who asks for it. Students often call her to stay in touch after they are no longer in her class. Sometimes friendships develop. For example, she and her husband go to dinner and concerts with a husband-wife couple that is close to their age. Also, Tina still talks on the phone and has occasional lunches with two students who are now starting college. The student with whom she is still the most involved, however, is a young man whom I will call Abdi.

Approximately two years before I interviewed Tina, Abdi was one of her students. One day in class, in order to practice the future tense, Tina asked the students to write some sentences about what they would do after class. Abdi showed Tina his sentences, one of which was "I will tell my teacher my troubles." He stayed after the class ended and told Tina that his wife was abusing him. Tina asked some questions to understand what was happening, thought about what resources at the school might be helpful, and took him to speak with the school's social worker. The social worker called to find a shelter and Abdi said he would go the next day. Tina ended up taking him to the shelter and staying with him during the intake process. Later, when he was ready to move from the shelter to an apartment, Tina loaned him the money he needed for a deposit and first month's rent. She has also helped him with money for an attorney (who is handling

custody issues and other legal matters relating to his divorce and an order for protection) and has given him Cub Foods grocery cards and Super America gas cards.

The relationship between Tina and Abdi has grown into a friendship. Tina and her husband have shown Abdi free places he could visit in the surrounding area, including a market, a concert and a park. Tina and Abdi occasionally go to lunch together (sometimes with Tina's husband). Tina and her husband have been to Abdi's apartment, and he has been to their home. When Tina and her husband moved, Abdi helped her husband clean the garage and perform other tasks.

Tina and Abdi still talk on the phone frequently and see each other about once a week.

Nan

Nan has been teaching ESL to adults more than 5 years. She has had one significant of-of-classroom relationship with a student. The student is a Somali woman, whom I will call Saida.

Soon after Nan began teaching a small class, Saida invited her to lunch at her house on a Saturday. Nan went to Saida's home and enjoyed the lunch. Nan felt it was a purely social relationship at that time. Soon after the lunch, however, Saida began to ask Nan for help. Saida is a single parent with five children and she does not read or write English. Nan began by helping Saida understand forms from the county regarding public assistance. Soon she was also attending meetings with Saida and her job counselor, giving her rides to doctor's appointments, helping her understand her cell phone bill and switch to a more appropriate phone plan, assisting with parking ticket problems that

occurred after she got a drivers permit, and taking Saida and her children to school conferences. Saida signed releases and Nan began to talk directly with the county employees, Saida's health care providers, and the administrators and teachers at the schools where Saida's children attend. The two women continued to also have a social relationship, including having lunch together, going shopping together, and conversing about American and Somali culture. For a while, Nan was spending about two or three full days a week helping Saida function in American society, socializing with her, mentoring her, and assisting Saida's children.

Now Nan has less time to spend with Saida because she has become busier with other parts of her life. Also, Saida has become more independent and so doesn't need as much help from Nan as she used to. Nan still talks frequently with Saida's children and does activities with them, and she speaks with or sees Saida approximately every two weeks. The women continue to feel very close with each other. Saida has told Nan that she is her "second mom" and Nan says she loves Saida and considers her to be like a daughter.

Alex

Alex has been teaching ESL to adults for more than 10 years. He does not generally interact with students outside of school.

His only out-of-school interaction with students was a party at the end of a school year. The party was hosted by one of his female students. Alex, who is a married man, was concerned before the party that it might turn out to be just one or two people instead of a party. About 20 people came; one of the guests was another student from the school

where Alex taught, and the others were friends or family of the woman giving the party. The party was a backyard picnic, the weather was beautiful, and it was a "really nice experience." Yet, Alex has chosen not to repeat the experience. He feels he doesn't have time; he is busy with his own family and social life. Also, he believes that teachers should maintain some distance from their students.

<div align="center">Benefits of Relationships</div>

The three ESL teachers who have had significant relationships with students outside the classroom identified numerous benefits of these relationships. Those benefits fall within the following four categories: human connection, helping someone who needs help, learning about another culture, and learning about our own society and gaining perspective on our own lives.

One major benefit of these relationships is the close connection the teacher feels with another person. Tina said that she made a lifetime friend, even though she was not looking for new friends: "it was just something that brought us together, and maybe it's similar values, maybe it's similar intellect … some kind of chemistry that I can't identify." Sally described her relationship with Jose and his family as so close that they "have become part of [her] family." Nan also became very close to Saida: "I love Saida and her children, and I want to be a part of their life for a long, long time." These teachers are clearly enjoying the feelings that come from the close relationships they have developed.

A second benefit is the gratification teachers feel as a result in helping their students in significant ways. The out-of-classroom relationships often develop from the

teacher's providing assistance to a current or former student. For example, Sally's relationship with Jose began by her providing assistance. Because Jose and his family were new immigrants when she first got to know them and had little English, "they needed so much when they first came here that it was a lot of helping in the beginning." Similarly, Nan's relationship with Saida was primarily a result of the assistance she provided: "it did begin when she would receive forms from Ramsey County and didn't know how to read them, and so she would show it to me and ask me what it meant and I would try to interpret it….I just started offering to help her, and the more I offered the more she started leaning on me, I guess." Later, Nan concluded: "So she does lean on me a lot, and I am kind of a caregiver kind of person." Tina also has clearly helped Abdi deal with the difficulties he was facing. She articulated how the opportunity to help a student is satisfying: "I think most teachers are in the profession because they have something to give.… [T]his is a way to help a fellow human being to get beyond where they're at, to jump some little hurdle that's holding them back, and so those are great benefits." Thus, teachers find these relationships gratifying because they enjoy helping others who need assistance to adjust to and succeed in their new lives in this country.

Third, these relationships give the teacher an opportunity to learn about another culture. Nan spoke the most about this benefit from her relationship with a student. She has enjoyed learning from Saida about Somali culture and the Muslim religion. As she explained, "[W]e have some really interesting conversations on her perspective on Somali culture….[I]t's been really interesting to me because I feel like I'm seeing the culture from a really more personal angle than an awful lot of people would see it, a job

counselor wouldn't hear this kind of conversation, a teacher at school doesn't have time and there isn't that same ability to develop this kind of personal relationship, so for me it's almost like an anthropological relationship where I'm learning about the culture, and so I enjoy it…[W]e talk about the Koran, we talk about her faith, Islam…[Nan asks] about things I don't understand and why do they believe this and why do they believe that…[B]ecause she trusts me we're very open with each other."

Finally, some teachers find that their out-of-classroom relationships with students give them a better understanding of America and a new perspective on their own lives. Nan said her relationship with Saida introduced her to the struggles faced by poor people in America, including the difficulties parents facing parents who can't afford to spend money freely on their children for school events and other kinds of expenses. For Sally, the relationship she has with Jose and his family gives her an important perspective on her life. Her realization that Jose and his family miss the rest of their family and long for them come to this country helps Sally appreciate her own family members, and seeing the appreciation and admiration that Jose and his family have for her simple home gives Sally a better appreciation of the material comforts of her life.

<div align="center">Potential Problems of Relationships</div>

In spite of their significant benefits, out-of-classroom relationships present several potential problems. One is that they can be very time-consuming. Other concerns involve possible adverse effects on the school, other students, or the student involved in the relationship.

First, the relationships often take a significant amount of time and energy. Nan used to spend 2 or 3 full days a week with Saida, her family, and her problems. Tina sees Abdi about once a week and talks frequently with him on the phone. Sally has seen Jose and his family at least once a week for ten years (except when she or they have been out of the country.) Because these out-of-classroom relationships can be so time-consuming, Tina recommends that teachers considering out-of-classroom relationships think about what they have time to do (and if they don't have time to become involved, consider what they can suggest to help meet the student's needs.) Nan also sees the demanding nature of out-of-classroom relationships as a reason to avoid further ones: "I love [Saida] and her children, and I want to be a part of their life for a long, long time, but I don't feel I have the time or energy or the desire to try to get involved with another family or student. It is time consuming and it's emotionally [draining]." Similarly, Alex avoids out-of-class relationships with students so that he can spend more time with his family and friends.

Second, the teachers spoke of potential problems with their role and responsibilities as teachers. One concern was that a student's relationship with his or her teacher might affect the classroom and other students in that classroom. For example, Nan mentioned that a teacher might give "special privileges" to a student with whom she was friends or "cut them a little slack," and other students might believe they were treated less favorably or feel jealous. Nan explained that she did not have to deal with such problems because Saida dropped out of school soon after Nan first went to her house for lunch. If Saida had continued in school, Nan doesn't "think I would have continued my relationship on a personal level to the depth that I did." In fact, Nan has avoided

developing such a relationship with other current students in part because she now believes it could "create problems as far as that line between a teacher and a student and a friend and a friend."

Tina also suggested that out-of-classroom relationships with current students could lead to the problem of accusations of favoritism, even if the accusation is false, and therefore it is desirable to postpone some possible relationships until the student is no longer in your classroom.

Sally suggested, however, that any line between current students and former students is fluid and unclear. In a big school, teaching assignments and students' schedules both change so frequently that a former student can easily become a current student a few months later: "you don't know when they'll come back to you, so you don't want to do anything that sets them apart from the other students in your class, and make them feel different." Furthermore, teachers and students frequently transfer from program to program. Because "it's a small ESL world," Sally believes it's best to consider all ESL students to be potential students of hers. Accordingly, she said that with hindsight she might have handled her earlier out-of-classroom relationships differently. Nevertheless, she also suggested that the concern about favoritism is overblown. ESL teachers of adults have little power of the traditional sort (e.g., they don't give grades) and the rare student who feels that his or her teacher doesn't like him as much as another student or treat him as well as another student can simply be moved to a different class.

Alex emphasized the need for some distance in the student-teacher relationship. Part of his concern was related to the fact that he is a male, married and older than many

of his students. He would not want to be alone with a female student who might possibly misunderstand his intentions. In addition, he is concerned about favoritism and how the other students in the class might respond. Finally, he felt that complicating the student-teacher relationship with other relationships could interfere with a teacher's ability to teach effectively. He explained it this way. If a teacher lends money to a student, the student might feel guilty if he or she is unable to pay it back promptly. Then the student might stop coming to class, or feel uncomfortable in class. When a student feels uncomfortable, it can interfere with the student's ability to learn while in the class.

In addition, Alex expressed the concern that an out-of-classroom relationship with a particular student could inadvertently hurt the student involved. He repeatedly described students as vulnerable.   Immigrant students, he suggests, are often so respectful of their teacher that they give the teacher some sort of power over them. Although Alex believes the teacher does not really have power over them (since teachers in these ABE programs do not give grades and even class promotions are more a matter of passing a standardized test than of teacher discretion), he feels that students' mistaken perception of a power imbalance complicates relationships outside the classroom. This inequality is further increased by many students' vulnerability. They are "sometimes lost and confused, they've got the language issues, and they've got all the stresses and strains of coming to a new country." Many are refugees who have experienced or seen traumatic situations. As a result, Alex believes that they are vulnerable and easily hurt. Hurt feelings from individual relationships are particularly likely when cultural differences could easily lead to misunderstandings. Because of these factors, according to Alex, "we

have to respect and keep those boundaries so that those students don't become victims."
In other words, Alex is concerned that out-of-classroom relationships between a teacher
and student could end up hurting instead of helping the student involved in the
relationship.

Finally, two of the teachers expressed concerns about possibly subjecting the
school to legal problems or liability. Alex mentioned that teachers aren't allowed to drive
students and, if a student is at a teacher's home and gets injured, there could be legal
issues involving whether the school had any liability. Tina also mentioned schools'
concerns about any lawsuits that could arise from relationships between teachers and
students.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

This chapter described the primary out-of-classroom relationships that Nan, Sally,
and Tina have developed with students. The teachers have enjoyed benefits, including
feeling a close connection to a student and the satisfaction of helping that person in
significant ways. They also recognize that these relationships can be very time-
consuming and interfere with the normal teacher-student relationship. Alex, who does
not generally have out-of-classroom relationships with students, most clearly emphasized
the need for distance in the student-teacher relationship and the increased potential for
harm caused by the vulnerabilities of the students. The following chapter presents my
conclusions for the research I conducted.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In this research project, I sought to answer two questions: What kinds of out-of-class relationships do ESL teachers of adults have with their students, and what potential benefits and risks of harm do ESL teachers of adults consider in evaluating the appropriateness of out-of-class relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students? To answer these questions, I interviewed four ESL teachers of adults. I presented my results in chapter 4. In this chapter, I will address my major conclusions, the limitations of my study, its implications, and suggestions for further research.

My Conclusions

I have three main findings. First, the out-of-classroom relationships of the teachers I interviewed are multifaceted and complex, rather than falling within simple and discrete categories. Second, they tended to develop naturally, based upon a teacher's perception that a student needed help and the teacher's belief that he or she was the best or only person available to provide that help. Third, although out-of-class relationships with current students generally create greater dangers than relationships with former students, the rapidity with which students leave adult ESL/ABE classes helps to reduce any potential harm from an out-of-classroom relationship between a particular student and his or her teacher.

I was surprised by the answer the data provided to my first research question, i.e., what kinds of out-of-classroom relationships do ESL teachers of adults have with their students. I had expected that the relationships would be easy to categorize. For example, I had thought some relationships would be friendships, in which the teacher and student socialized and possibly developed such a strong attachment that they felt like best friends or family. I had expected that other relationships would be more like that between a social worker and her client, where the main focus was the teacher's providing assistance to the student. Third, I had guessed that other relationships would be primarily economic or financial, in which money is earned or loaned.

What I found, however, was that the relationships described in my data combined these different types of relationships. A relationship might fall in one category initially, but develop in ways so that it later fell predominantly into other categories. For example, Sally initially helped Jose with life skills and tasks, but later he did paid work for her and her family. As she spent more time with him and his family, they grew they grew to be such close friends that she now considers him and his family to be part of her family.

Similarly, Nan's relationship with Saida is also more complex than simply falling into one category. First, Nan went to lunch at Saida's house and anticipated a purely social relationship. Then the major focus of the relationship became Nan's assisting Saida to function in American society. During this time, Nan also loaned money to Saida (by putting a $3,000 television for Saida on her credit card). Now Nan considers Saida to be like a daughter.

Tina's relationship with Abdi was also multifaceted. She described it as both "a friendship" and "an elder advising a younger." The relationship also included assistance of both a social service and a monetary kind. Tina took Abdi to a shelter, sat with him during the initial interview, and helped him find a lawyer; she gave and/or loaned him money (for his deposit and first month's rent when he moved from the shelter to an apartment, for his attorney, Cub foods grocery cards and Super America gas cards).

In sum, the three out-of-classroom relationships I described are multifaceted and complex. They reflect not only the teachers' abilities to connect with other people and care for them, but also the real needs of the students for substantial assistance and help in creating their new lives in this country.

Second, the three teachers who had significant out-of-classroom relationships with their students seemed to allow them to develop intuitively, without feeling constrained by boundaries or rules. The teachers did not rely upon abstract concepts like boundaries or evaluations of appropriateness to govern their relationships. Sally expressed a concern that other people might think she overstepped some boundary, but she saw herself and her students as equals and sought what she called "authentic" relationships with them. Tina talked about doing "what's in my heart." As a result, my second research question (what potential benefits and risks of harm do ESL teachers of adults consider in evaluating the appropriateness of out-of-class relationships between ESL teachers of adults and their students?) may have seemed a bit irrelevant to the interviewees. They could tell me about benefits and risks, but evaluating the appropriateness of relationships was not their interest. They did not make a logical or

analytical consideration of appropriateness before or during the development of their out-of-classroom relationships.

Instead of relying on an evaluation of appropriateness, the teachers developed their out-of-classroom relationships primarily as a result of meeting the students' need for help. Tina most clearly articulated that many teachers' out-of-classroom relationships stem from the teachers' attempt to meet the needs of students. When asked hypothetically about the advice she might give a colleague considering whether it would be appropriate to become friends with a student in her class, Tina responded that the teacher should consider whether she feels connected to the student and whether she would be able to help the student. She explained that students who approach teachers could be doing it in part to seek out a friend "but they're also looking for some kind of assistance, or they know that you can help them with a certain issue." Accordingly, when Abdi asked Tina, "Why are you so good to me?" she told him, "I'm available here to help you, something brought us together."

The relationships I studied seemed to follow from not only the students' needs, but also the teachers' beliefs that there was no one else that could or would assist with these problems. Sally described the student's isolation: "[F]or the students that I've connected with outside of class, it has been, they have nobody else, and you sense that…. [T]here isn't a community of students from that particular country in the schools where we are, and they really don't have this cultural community or this religious community or even a [same] gender friend in the class." Furthermore, since Jose was undocumented at that time, he did not trust any agency to help him. Accordingly, when Sally didn't see

that there was any place to refer him for help, she began to help him herself, and the relationship followed.   Tina also concluded that there were not other resources to help Abdi when he needed money to move from the shelter to an apartment, partly because it would be "total mortification" for him to "go to an organization of his culture and ask for money because his wife abused him." Similarly, Nan explained that Saida needed her help filling out forms and doing other daily life tasks because Saida could not read and "didn't have a strong support system here." In fact, "she doesn't really trust Somali people outside her family to read her mail … and most of her family can't read. So she doesn't have anyone close to her that she can really lean on, and so she leans on me."

Not only did the out-of-classroom relationships develop when the teacher saw no other option for getting the students the help they needed, but such relationships also failed to develop when the teacher felt that there were other ways to get the students assistance with their problems. For example, Nan learned about other resources after her relationship with Saida began, and now she no longer feels that she herself has to help students with their problems. She does not have the time, energy or desire to have another out-of-classroom relationship like the one she has with Saida, and so she refers students who need help to others in the school who can help them or direct them to agencies that can help. Similarly, Alex's belief "there are other ways for the student to get assistance" may help explain why he does not have significant out-of-classroom relationships with students.

Third, the teachers generally believed that out-of-classroom relationships with current students present bigger risks of harm than relationships with former students.

Tina explicitly suggested that some kinds of relationships should not occur with current students but instead be limited to former students. She said that friendships may be appropriate with former students, but when she was teaching she was "very careful to not have someone come to my house or to go to their house." She also recommended not entering into financial relationships (paid work, loaning money) with current students. She recognized that distinguishing between present and former students would reduce the possibility of problems in the classroom, like resentment by other students. Nevertheless, as Sally explained, former students may become present students again in the future. Thus, such an approach would not solve the problem.

Neither is such an approach entirely consistent with the way Nan and Tina's out-of-classroom relationships began. They began as relationships with current students. Nan first went to Saida's home when Saida was in her class. Nan said she felt excited and honored to be invited into Saida's home but didn't think about possible complications in the classroom that might arise from the social visit to a current student's home. Similarly, Tina began to help Abdi, including loaning him money, while he was in her class. She said that she loaned money to him at that time because he needed to leave the shelter, had to have the money to get an apartment, and didn't seem to have any other way to get the money. In sum, it seems that the desire to connect with students and the practical needs of students may have caused teachers to begin out-of-classroom relationships with students, regardless of whether they were current students.

Moreover, perhaps these teachers were not particularly concerned about whether their relationships began with current or former students because of the reality that

current students generally quickly become former students. In adult ESL classes in ABE

settings, like school districts or community organizations, class enrollments change

frequently. Students move on to other classes or drop out of school so quickly that class

turnover can be total or close to complete within a six- month period. Such realities

played their part in the out-of-classroom relationships described in these interviews.

Saida, for example, dropped out of school soon after Nan's visit to her home. Nan thinks

that this change enabled her to allow the relationship to grow: "I don't think I would have

continued my relationship on a personal level to the depth that I did" if Saida had

remained in the class.   Similarly, Tina emphasized that the semester ended just a couple

of weeks after she loaned money to Abdi, so he has been a former student for most of the

time during their relationship. In sum, the fact that relatively few students stay in a

particular teacher's class for more than a few months in these programs makes it likely

that out-of-classroom relationships with current students will soon be relationships with

former students, with fewer risks and dangers associated with the relationships.

Finally, I return to the literature discussed above in Chapter 2. The three teachers

with out-of-class relationships clearly were not governed by simple rules or boundaries.

Their fluid relationships with students are better understood through a metaphor, such as

that of a territory (Austin, Bergum, Nuttgens, & Peternelj-Taylor, 2006). In the territory,

teachers and students could interact, but successful interactions required vigilance,

attentiveness and careful respect for each other's situations and needs. Furthermore,

although the teachers did not consciously analyze or attempt to determine the

appropriateness of their relationships, they were aware of potential risks. Relevant

considerations they expressed include those listed in literature concerning teacher

relationships with undergraduate and graduate students, such as whether the relationship

compromises the teaching role (Blevins-Knabe, 1992) and whether it impacts other

students (Congress, 1996). Overall, the teachers appeared to base their actions on the

particular circumstances. They would likely agree with Johnston's conclusion "that the

nature and level of this relationship has to be determined by each teacher and in each

context" (2003, p. 101).

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

A major limitation of my study is that although my goal was big, the study's

scope was small. The purpose of my study was to learn about the behavior and beliefs of

teachers or, more specifically, to describe the kinds of out-of-class relationships ESL

teachers of adults (in ABE programs run by school districts or community based

organizations) have with their students and the potential benefits and risks of harm the

teachers consider in evaluating the appropriateness of these out-of-class relationships.

That was a broad goal. There are many ESL teachers of adults in ABE programs, many

of them have out-of-classroom relationships, and each of those relationships is unique.

To obtain a full and accurate description of those relationships, I would have needed to

conduct many interviews. Similarly, I would have needed to interview many teachers to

be able to make an accurate description of the potential benefits and risks of harm that

teachers consider.

I interviewed only four teachers. It was a sample of convenience. I initially chose

three participants who appeared to have had significant out-of-classroom relationships

with their students and seemed willing and able to describe those experiences and articulate their thought processes, opinions, beliefs and values. I later added one teacher who had had very limited experience with such relationships in order to hear his reasons for not participating more frequently in out-of-class relationships with students and his perspective about the risks or potential dangers of such relationships. All the participants had taught ESL to adults for a significant period of time, but they varied with respect to previous teaching experience, gender, and other characteristics. I did not make any effort to obtain a random sample or select based upon such characteristics.

Thus, my study is clearly limited by interviewing only these four teachers, rather than a much larger number or even a sample selected on a basis other than convenience. As a result, it provides insight into the behavior and beliefs of the four teachers I interviewed, but not necessarily into the kinds of relationships or benefits and risks considered by other teachers.

Moreover, I collected limited data from each participant. I interviewed the teachers for not more than one hour and then invited them to supply me with additional information they thought of later by email or another means of their choosing. One teacher sent a brief email after I emailed some follow-up questions to her. For the other three teachers, no additional data were collected. By not expecting much more than a one-hour interview, I minimized the amount of time and inconvenience for the participants. One-hour interviews, however, may not have been sufficient to enable the participants to think through their ideas, articulate them fully, and explore any contradictions or complexities. I tried to avoid the problem of obtaining merely thoughts

of the moment by clearly communicating the types of questions I was interested in to the participants before the interviews. Nevertheless, my study was limited by the short interviews I conducted. It is possible that additional methods of data collection, such as follow-up interviews a week or two after the initial interviews, could have led to the collection of data that were clearer, fuller, or more thoughtful.

<div align="center">Implications</div>

My study has two main implications. First, teachers could benefit from more discussion about out-of-classroom relationships with current or former students. Second, more information about resources available to help students with their problems should be given to teachers.

The first implication stems from the findings that the teachers I interviewed frequently had multi-faceted out-of-classroom relationships with students and they did not have well developed frameworks for evaluating the appropriateness of these relationships. Sally seemed particularly aware of the gap. She said that she had been told both to give out her cell phone number to students and not to give it out by one supervisor at one school during one school year. Furthermore, she pointed out, different schools have different expectations or rules about these relationships. Finally, she said, guidance that one program gave about limits to interactions with students that teachers were mentoring was not helpful since it was focused on all the things that could go wrong to such an extent that she felt it made it harder to have authentic relationships based on trust, caring and respect. She concluded that the present situation is often confusing and,

as a result, she sometimes feels guilty about the relationships she has with students and tries to hide them from others.

I suggest that, instead of leaving teachers alone to struggle with these questions and feelings, ABE programs and continuing education seminars should assist them by encouraging and facilitating discussion of the subject. Teachers don't want or need rules imposed by administrators or others, but they would benefit from opportunities to share their knowledge, experiences, and feelings with each other.

Second, I return to the finding that these teachers' out-of-classroom relationships often developed from teachers' beliefs that students needed help and no one else could or would help them. As Sally suggested, when a teacher knows of resources that could help the student, the teacher can simply refer the student. The teacher no longer feels like she has to provide the assistance herself. Thus, knowledge of available resources allows the teacher to make a choice between simply helping the student get to the right place to get the assistance and providing the assistance herself. Appropriate referrals could reduce burnout and exhaustion among these teachers by helping them use their time wisely and save time and energy for their own interests, families and social lives. Moreover, appropriate referrals might provide more useful help to the students involved, since the agencies and social workers involved may have more extensive knowledge about programs and resources that would benefit the needy students.

I do not intend to suggest that more knowledge about referral opportunities should or would eliminate teachers' out-of-classroom relationships. Just as Tina helped Abdi get help from a school social worker, the caseworker at the abuse shelter and an attorney,

other teachers will find important supporting roles to play in assisting their students. Furthermore, my research found that the social-work type of assistance was only one part of the out-of-classroom relationships that developed. Teachers may still want and enjoy the relationships for other reasons. Nevertheless, it is important that more information about available resources be communicated to teachers so that teachers can make an educated choice about how and in what capacities they can best relate to their students. As Alex pointed out, he can develop strong relationships and connections with his students in the classroom. Not every teacher wants or needs to have out-of-classroom relationships with students. Regardless of whether a teacher chooses to have out-of-classroom relationships with students, each teacher needs to have as much information as is possible about the resources that might be helpful to students who seek help with their problems.

<div align="center">Further Research</div>

Further research is necessary to get a more complete picture about the out-of-classroom relationships that teachers of ESL to adults (in ABE programs of school districts and community organizations) have with their students and how the teachers view the benefits, risks, and appropriateness of those relationships. My study of four teachers is clearly inadequate. More questions remain than were answered. Would a larger study lead to different conceptions of these relationships, how they developed, what their benefits and risks were, and how the teachers evaluated their appropriateness? Furthermore, additional study of Tina, Nan, and Sally's out-of-classroom relationships with students would be useful to get a fuller picture of how their relationships are

influenced by other parts of the teachers' lives and affect other aspects of the teachers' lives. If time permitted, I would also like to know more about these three teachers' out-of-classroom relationships with other students. For the purpose of this study, I focused primarily on one relationship for each of them.

Moreover, I would like to know more about students' views of these out-of-classroom relationships. How do students view the risks and benefits of the relationships? Interviews of both the teacher and the student participants in particular relationships could answer many interesting questions. Do students see them the same as the teachers do? For example, if the teacher feels the student is a friend or family, would the student characterize it in the same way? Do the students and the teachers always have the same ideas about what is good and what is bad in the relationship? If not, are the differences related to their status as student or teacher, to cultural differences, or other factors?

Finally, interviews of administrators of the adult ESL programs might be beneficial. What do they know about the extent of out-of-classroom relationships between teachers and students in their programs? They might be especially likely to know about out-of-classroom relationships that caused problems. If so, do they see these relationships primarily as potential problems? Or, do they recognize the benefits that these relationships can provide to the teachers and students?

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

The purpose of my study was to describe the out-of-classroom relationships that ESL teachers of adults have with their students in ABE and community-based programs

and the factors teachers consider in evaluating the appropriateness of such relationships.

My goal was to provide insight into out-of-class relationships and teachers' views and

beliefs about their benefits and risks. The research I conducted gave me some insight

into this subject. Out-of-classroom relationships between teachers and their students

exist and are likely to continue to exist. Their development reflects teachers' and

students' desire for close, human connections as well as students' significant needs and

teachers' willingness to assist them with those needs. My study, however, was small and

limited. The subject is important and deserves further study. Additional research should

neither over-emphasize nor ignore the risks and potential dangers of out-of-classroom

relationships. It is my hope that the insights from my research, together with further

discussion and study, will provide guidance to ESL teachers of adults in the future.

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