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# Perceived Lack of Teacher Empathy and Remedial Classroom Conflicts

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Perceived Lack of Teacher Empathy and Remedial Classroom Conflicts:  
A Phenomenological Study

by

Henry W. Young, Jr.

A Dissertation Presented to the  
College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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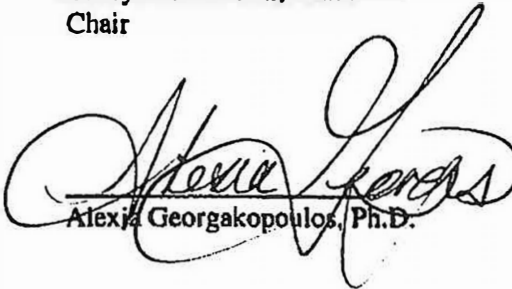
**Nova Southeastern University  
College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences**

This dissertation was submitted by Henry W. Young, Jr. under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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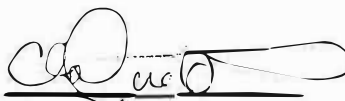
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## Abstract

In light of earlier research pertaining to empathy, it is reasonable to believe that certain teachers feel empathic toward students in remedial classrooms. It is also evident that teacher empathy is something that students relish. However, a perceived lack of teacher empathy among students in remedial classes is a concern. The general problem addressed in the study was the effect of teachers' lack of empathy on remedial college students' perceptions of teacher–student conflict. The specific problem addressed in the study was the limited research on the impact of teachers' empathy on remedial students' perceptions. The purposes of the study were to understand remedial students' perceptions of teachers' empathy and to assess the perceived impact of lack of teacher empathy on teacher–student conflict. Participants consisted of 10 students enrolled at Cuyahoga Community College remedial English classes in Cleveland, Ohio. The phenomenological study explored the lived experiences and perceptions of these students in developmental/remedial classes. Students participated in face-to-face recorded interviews. Data were analyzed using NVivo software. Four main themes and several subthemes emerged from the data. Recommendations were offered to help facilitate resolution of teacher–student conflicts that may emerge out of perceived lack of teacher empathy.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

It has long been established that empathy and empathic manners of communicating are central to intercultural competency (Lau, 2011). To note, empathy is a concept that occurs most specifically “when employed between interactants from disparate cultural backgrounds” thereby eliciting “mindfulness, awareness, advocacy, and sensitivity” (Lau, 2011, p. 5). Moreover, empathy and cultural empathy facilitate the cultivation of relationships and alliances—this occurring, relevantly, in the learning context (Lau, 2011). Although the importance of students’ abilities, experience, and interest contributes to the efficiency of the learning process, instructors’ skill, passion and relationship methods with students also play an important role (Lau, 2011). Indeed, studies show that there are multiple factors that influence the learning outcomes of students, including one involving the interaction between students and their teacher (Arghode, 2012; Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012).

Teachers’ empathy towards their students affects the exchange of information between them because student-teacher interaction has been positively associated with instructional effectiveness (Cooper, 2010; Arghode, 2012). It is unfortunate that there continues to be teachers who may not appreciate the importance of how they interact with students in the learning process. There are those who appear too strict or aloof for students to be comfortable in exchanging information with them; others may appear weak, so that students do not develop enough respect for them; and there are those who are quite lenient in the learning process, so that students do not exactly gain insights in the class. The ideal relationship is one where there is respect, a mutual exchange of information, and a degree of camaraderie that does not cross the boundary between

teacher and student. As a result, researchers have long endeavored to enhance the “pedagogical relationships between teacher and learner” (Arghode, 2012, p. 129).

Arghode (2012) emphasizes that learning encompasses “mind, body and emotions and is embedded in social and physical situations and practice” (p. 129). Because emotions are closely intertwined with any form of interaction, it has been suggested that emotions are powerful factors that affect knowledge transfer. Just as important, it has been established in literature that an ethos of deep and empathic care for learners—especially children—and their welfare is a core value of purposeful teaching (Boyer, 2010). What this means is that teaching is not merely about imparting information. Instead, it is about cultivating knowledge and good values in learners, especially young ones who are yet to be molded into productive, valuable, and responsible individuals. Teachers are then expected to have a true sense of calling, thus making their profession more than a job that can provide an income. Teachers may be considered ineffective if they do not have a deep and emphatic care for the welfare of students.

Deep care and empathy from teachers are vital sources of personal happiness and “daily attitude renewal” for students considering that these qualities are also essential in inspiring young people to care about their learning (Boyer, 2010, p. 313). To note, an instructor may develop a caring relationship with students by trying to apply the perspective of the students so as to get a view of his or her needs (Burton, 1990). Moreover, empathy is considered an emotion that is other-centered, which arises from observing another individual and then imagining oneself in his or her situation (Rumble, Van Lange, & Parks, 2010). Some studies have shown that empathy enhances helping and cooperation, usually under contexts that cannot simply be understood according to

considerations of long-term interest or anticipated reciprocity (Rumble et al., 2010). Hence, empathy is likely to motivate generous behavior. In addition to these, research also revealed that for empathy to lead to helping behavior, two conditions need to be met: first, that an individual perceives another person is in need, and second, that an individual imagines him/herself in the other's situation and emotional mindset. In relation to this, for a need to be perceived, a person has to be aware of the differences between the current state and the previous or potential states.

It is noteworthy that the developmental or remedial classroom is a significant learning environment. However, a large percentage of students in remedial classes not only struggle with learning issues but also with behavioral issues both in and out of school (Donalson & Halsey, 2007). More often than not, many of these students do not believe that they have what it takes to succeed in school. Some of them even refuse to undertake any academic tasks at all. Regardless of whether it is they or the system that fails, a good number of them sit through school simply waiting until they turn 16 years old so that they can drop out (Donalson & Halsey, 2007). Many students in remedial classes exist in a culture that is distanced from the classroom. Thus, they do not see the significance between the activities that they have to accomplish in school and the world outside of it. Janke and Peterson (1999) explained that for a good number of such students with emotional and behavioral issues related to school, they had an underlying desire to have that "one person who was always there for me no matter what I did or what I was going through" (p. 36). That person could be the student's mother, father, sibling or best friend, but, in many cases, it was his or her teacher who believed and listened (Janke & Peterson, 1999).

In light of the earlier discussion pertaining to empathy and how this leads to helping behavior, it is reasonable to believe that certain teachers feel empathic toward students in remedial classrooms. It is also evident that teacher empathy is something that students relish (Boyer, 2010). Thus, it would be important to gain insight regarding the perceived lack of teacher empathy among remedial class students. Specifically, what are the impacts of perceived lack of teacher empathy? What types of conflicts could arise due to this perception? What are the feelings and thoughts of remedial class students when they perceive that their teacher is not empathic? To note, there is a limited amount of research on the subject of empathy and its association with conflicts in the classroom between teacher and students. This paper presents research designed to understand the relationship between teachers' empathy and the impacts a perceived lack of teacher empathy has upon students.

### **Rationale**

Empathy may be described as the ability or skill of identifying the feelings and perspectives of other individuals (Bahr, 2008). Empathy has further been suggested to be one of the most significant areas of learning (Bahr, 2008). Earlier research designed to investigate how empathy influences the teaching skills of instructors indicated a positive connection between instructors' empathy and their teaching skill, and this is related to the traditional belief that it is impossible for instructors to help students learn effectively if these instructors do not know the students well enough (Bahr, 2008). The ability to view issues from other people's points of view increases the comprehension of their feelings and emotions. The importance of empathy in the facilitation of a positive academic environment cannot be overemphasized.

The function of instructors' empathy in developmental/remedial teaching is yet to be adequately investigated. Generally, instructors are considered to possess the academic knowledge required for the specific courses or subjects they teach. However, this academic knowledge concentrates specifically on learning theories, instruction delivery techniques, and teaching methods. Prior to this study, an investigation of the influence or importance of teachers' empathy/lack of empathy in the developmental/remedial class and in teacher-student conflicts had not been performed. If not enough research attention is given to the role of teacher empathy in remedial classes, students may not receive the best holistic support needed for educational success. In order to explore the perceived relationship between teacher empathy and teacher-student conflict appropriately, this research applied an interpretive phenomenological qualitative research method.

Most studies conducted on teacher empathy focused on traditional classroom settings, which involved students who do not have the same challenges as those attending remediation classes (Warren 2014). Research on teacher empathy in traditional classrooms may not be generalized to all educational settings because the experience of students in remedial classes is different from students in traditional classrooms (Ouzts, 1982). Compared to students in the general population classroom settings, students in remediation classes often experience educational and emotional challenges that could prevent their educational success (Donalson & Healy, 2007). This study addressed the gap in the literature by exploring the experiences of teachers regarding the role of empathy in conflict resolution in remediation classes.



### **Goal of the Study**

The phenomenon that was explored in this study was the perception of college students attending remedial classes regarding the importance of empathy in teachers. Remedial instruction has been subjected to harsh criticism as well as intense media scrutiny over the past years. However, remedial instruction is not a new phenomenon, having had a long history in the United States. Indeed, the basic concept of remedial instruction dates back to the times of the Colonial Harvard College wherein students not pursuing theological instruction received tutorship in Greek and Latin (ASHE, 2010). In 1849, the University of Wisconsin introduced its first remedial education program in subjects such as mathematics, writing, and reading (ASHE, 2010). Subsequently, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, over half of the total students entering their freshmen year at Princeton, Yale, Harvard, and Columbia University were not able to satisfy entrance requirements and were thus placed in remedial classes. Furthermore, by the 1970s, a good number of World War II veterans entered remedial classes so that they could commence their college educations through the help of the federal GI bill (ASHE, 2010). Starting in the 1970s, the debate on the merits of remedial instruction further intensified such that there was strong opinion that remedial education had to be totally eliminated in four-year colleges and universities. More recently, some have proposed that remedial education be relegated to community colleges, while demands have increased for the private sector to administer pre-college courses (ASHE, 2010). From the mid-1990s to the present, the most commonly used activities in the context of remedial instruction have been access programs, learning assistance, learning enrichment, opportunity programs, and developmental education (ASHE, 2010).

It was during this last historical phase that many students attending remedial classes not only had learning problems or disabilities but also had issues with their attitudes (ASHE, 2010). It is not uncommon to find that students in developmental or remedial classes display learned helplessness, lack of motivation, as well as poor efficacy (Donalson & Halsey, 2007, p. 4). These factors highlight more than ever the fact that remedial students need help and empathy from significant persons in their young lives, including their teachers. However, at issue here is a dearth of information pertaining to the associations between perceived lack of teacher empathy and teacher-student conflicts. Therefore, the goal of this study was to delve into this topic for the goal of making recommendations that will be helpful in facilitating the resolution of teacher-student conflicts emerging from a perceived lack of teacher empathy.

### **Research Questions**

The problem that was addressed in the study is the limited research on the function of instructors' empathy in developmental/remedial classes. Empathy can be an important quality among teachers because of the enhanced positive interaction that can be engendered, serving as an important educational resource for students in remediation class (Barr, 2008; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). The purpose of the study was to delve into the topic of teacher care and empathy for the end goal of making recommendations that will be helpful in facilitating the resolution of teacher-student conflicts that emerge out of perceived lack of teacher empathy. Based on the research problem and the purpose of the study, four research questions were formulated to explore the role of teacher empathy in conflict resolution in remediation classes based on the experiences and perceptions of teachers. The corresponding research questions addressed in this study include the

following:

RQ1: What are the impacts of a perceived lack of teacher empathy upon students in remedial classes?

RQ2: What possible types of conflicts may arise between teachers and students because of a perceived lack of teacher empathy?

RQ3: What conflict resolution strategies should teachers use in order to address such conflicts?

RQ4: How can empathy be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in the field of peace education and conflict resolution because of the insights gained about the role of teacher empathy in developmental/remedial students, as well as how this perceived absence could lead to situations of teacher-student conflict. This study addressed the gap in the literature regarding teacher empathy and how its perceived absence in remedial classes affects conflict resolution. Without a deeper understanding of the role of teacher empathy in remediation classes, unmet needs of students may be a barrier to their educational and learning success (Burton, 1990).

This study is significant because teachers, students, administrators, parents, policymakers, and society in general can benefit from the results of the study. The results may serve as the foundation for instructional practices in remedial classes that emphasized empathy to develop the conflict resolution skills of students. Empathy is a quality that can facilitate positive interaction between teachers and students, which can be

particularly useful in remediation classes where students need more support and assistance to overcome challenges (Barr, 2008; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Zhou, Valiente, & Eisenberg, 2003).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will present the literature review. The topics that will be covered in this chapter are: (a) the concept of empathy; (b) teacher empathy, including teacher empathy in classrooms and the perceived lack of empathy of teachers; (c) teacher quality; (d) remedial student base; and (e) peace education. The chapter ends with the discussion of the study's conceptual framework, focusing on conflict theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Developmental/remedial classes have remained a contentious subject, due to the complexity involved in the learning process. The rationale behind the need for developmental/remedial classes has continually been argued. The proponents of the developmental/remedial school consider the system too important, as it allows students to make up for the academic shortcomings experienced in primary and secondary education, while the opposition of this system argues that it reduces the educational standards and lessens the value of post-secondary academic credentials. They also argued that the increasing number of students who are not academically prepared enrolling into universities and colleges demoralizes the educational system (Bahr 2008).

Typically, students attending remedial or development classes are those who have insufficient reading, writing, or mathematics skills (Koch, Slate, & Moore, 2012). In cases such as these, the goal of development courses is to help students develop pre-requisite skills. Young and Ley (2003) explained that remedial students have unique needs and that teachers have to be able to meet diverse learner needs. Moreover, it is not unusual for remedial students to feel stigmatized and thus have poor self-perceptions. Researchers have argued that teachers need to know the impacts of remedial class

placement on student self-efficacy (Koch et al., 2003).

In spite of these negative concepts associated with remedial classes, it is important to note that every individual has the right to be educated and should be provided equal opportunities in view of their academic skills. Rather than focusing on the closure of the developmental/remedial academic system, it is important to direct this concentration to ensuring that the objective of establishing the developmental/remedial educational system (which is to ensure the adequate tutoring of academically weak students) is achieved. This paper contributes to the achievement of a major objective—the establishment of the developmental/remedial system—as it seeks to understand the importance of teacher empathy and how its perceived absence could possibly cause conflicts between teachers and students.

Understanding the negative influence of teacher-student conflicts on learners' academic success, as well as on the general performance of the academic system, is not enough. It is important to note the applicable methods for the resolution of such remedial classroom issues. The increment in the empathic level of instructors is attributed to the better understanding of, and appropriate response to, students (Barr, 2008). Even though there is limited research on perceived lack of teacher empathy and possible teacher-student conflicts in developmental/remedial classes, the next section of this review focuses on crucial frameworks that served as the foundation for analysis in this research.

### **The Concept of Empathy**

Based on the understanding of the significant influence of students' apathy on the educational system, different techniques have been experimented with to evaluate their influence on students' apathy. There has however been no particular method capable of

reducing the percentage of apathetic students without reducing the number of enrolled students. However, one method, which has not been given much attention, especially as it regards developmental/remedial class students, involves instructors' empathy.

Empathy has been described as the ability of identifying with another individual's emotions, as the ability to feel and see things the way others feel and see—i.e., to share a similar perspective (Bahr, 2008; Cherniss, 2000). The condition of empathy or the act of being empathic was described by Rogers (1959) as the ability to comprehend the inner structure of reference of a different individual with precision—understanding their emotional reactions while maintaining detachment. Even though researchers such as Rogers (1959) have explained that empathy is inherent at birth and possessed by every individual, it is important to understand that this characteristic can only be developed by interactions and relationships with other people. This is supported by Newton, Savidge, Barber, Cleveland, Clardy, Beeman, and Hart (2000), who explained that people are born with empathy; this can be observed in the emotional reactions of both children and adults to indicators of other people's grief. It may be that simply reacting to the needs of others makes people empathic. Nevertheless, responding to the needs or problems of others should not always be considered dependent on the understanding of the feelings of other people (Burton, 1990). The empathic ability of a person to obtain the perspective of other people is what indicates that they possess empathic abilities (Bahr, 2008; Woolfolk, 2001).

Apart from accepting and valuing another person's emotions, relating evocatively with another individual is also a significant feature of empathy. Haynes and Avery (1979) indicated in this in their definition, which described empathy as the ability of recognizing

and understanding another individual's feelings and perceptions, while correctly conveying that understanding via a tolerant reply. Therefore, in understanding empathy for the purpose of this research, the expectation is for focus to be directed toward evaluating how instructors care for students and relate this care via tolerable responses. The three significant elements of empathy used here are comprehension, value attachment, and interaction.

### **Teacher Empathy**

Empathy is a quality that can facilitate positive interaction between teachers and students (Arghode, Yalvac, & Liew, 2013; Barr, 2008; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Zhou et al., 2003). Zhou et al. (2003) explained that empathy “motivates helping others and the desire for helping others, as well as inhibits aggression, facilitates people’s social competence for interacting with others, and provides a sense of connection among people” (p. 269). However, there has been little in the way of research examining the role of empathy in the school experiences of educators “despite the fact that empathy has been documented as an important disposition for educators to possess in order to facilitate positive interactions among students” (Tettegah & Anderson, 2007, p. 51). Tettegah and Anderson (2007) defined empathy as the “ability to express concern and take the perspective of a student, and it involves cognitive and affective domains of empathy” (p. 51). Empathic understanding is achieved by entering, at least temporarily, into the imagined act or perspective of another person, so that that it can be represented to others in a way that is, most of all, “recognizable and credible to those persons who themselves occupy that perspective” (Tettegah & Anderson, 2007, p. 52).

The outcomes of several research studies related the importance of the application



of empathy by teachers. The consideration that instructors will not be able to apply empathy effectively without understanding what it entails motivated one of these research studies (Barr, 2008). There are certain researchers who asserted that the influence of empathy on relating to students has been overemphasized. For instance, Barr (2008) explained that student-teacher interaction is not influenced by empathy and that it requires more than mere empathy for the efficient negotiation of the difficult relationship between instructors and students. However, the development of empathic capacities must remain of paramount interests during instructors' training (Barr, 2008).

Apart from the need for the development of empathy guidelines for instructors, the culturally diverse nature of the students has also been considered. Some have suggested that empathy is composed of affective, cognitive, and behavioral elements, which instructors believe are evident in their practice. Hence, certain studies show that instructors need to develop empathic natures and behaviors (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Indeed, studies show that it is desirable for teachers in diverse settings to have "an empathic disposition," as this is linked to "increased sensitivity to different cultures" (McAllister & Irvine, 2002, p. 433). From this perspective, individuals who are empathetic are those who "take on the perspective of another culture and respond to another individual from that person's perspective" (McAllister & Irvine, 2002, p. 433). When the teacher is empathetic, this disposition is reported to manifest itself often in the caring relationship of the teacher with students.

Teacher empathy is a complex phenomenon that is not easily quantified or described (Arghode et al., 2013). Affirming the complexity of teacher empathy, studies have shown that teacher empathy may be divided into three categories: (1) positive

interactions with students; (2) supportive classroom environment; and (3) student-centered classrooms (McAllister & Irvine, 2002, p. 439). Notably, positive interactions encompass “listening, being patient, and being supportive,” which “eventually create a better learning climate” (McAllister & Irvine, 2002, p. 439). Despite these dimensions of empathy, Warren (2014) noted that teachers do not always have a clear understanding of empathy and how it affects their teaching practices.

Cooper (2004) noted that empathic teachers tend to be highly moral and “attach themselves mentally and emotionally to their students and generate similar responses in return” (p. 12). Moreover, profound empathy in one-to-one learning relationships arises from an attitude of caring, facilitating climates in which students learn more effectively. This is why certain researchers asserted that depth of teacher empathy connects directly to the degree of empathy shown by students and affects their ability to share and learn from others (Cooper, 2004). According to Cooper (2004), students “grow to like and respect [empathetic] teachers and emulate their behavior, thus they become a positive moral model” (p. 17).

Past research generally indicated that teacher empathy is associated with positive outcomes in students, particularly in enhancing the student-teacher relationship (Arghode et al., 2013; Stojiljković, Djigić, & Zlatković, 2012; Warren, 2014). Having empathy is important in fulfilling the professional roles of teachers (Stojiljković et al., 2012). According to Arghode et al. (2013), students perceived that teacher empathy plays an important role in their learning, specifically in terms of developing connections and extending supportive behaviors.

## **Teacher Empathy in the Remedial Classroom**

Most studies conducted on teacher empathy focused on traditional classroom settings (Arghode et al., 2013; Stojiljković et al., 2012; Warren 2014). Research on teacher empathy in traditional classrooms may not be generalized to all educational settings because the experience of students in remedial classes is different from students in traditional classrooms (Ouzts, 1982). Usually, remedial students have poor conceptions about themselves; they also often feel frustration from “years of being labeled as underachievers” (Ouzts, 1982, p. 191). It is not uncommon for remedial students to be involved in problems concerning discipline. One way that remedial students deal with their frustrations is by assuming the roles of “class clown, bully, cool dude, or anyone of many character parts,” partly because they want to conceal their sense of inadequacy (Ouzts, 1982, p. 191). These issues involving remedial students are very real. Indeed, many of these students will attempt to use every façade imaginable just so they can conceal their feelings of inadequacy. Usual defense mechanisms include having tantrums, fighting, insults, and apathy oftentimes directed to teachers just to disguise frustration and hopelessness (Ouzts, 1982; Donalson & Healy, 2007). Young and Ley (2003) supported these views and stated that the developmental needs of remedial students are such that their teachers should not only have the competencies to address the needs of diverse learners, they should also have the appropriate emotional maturity to demonstrate care and empathy to the learners. Aside from these, numerous studies attested that students in remedial classes feel stigmatized as a result of having special education needs (Dell-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002; Koch et al., 2012).

Despite numerous criticisms, remedial classes can provide myriad advantages.

Among other things, remedial class learners (1) receive more attention from the teacher; (2) have the opportunities to concentrate harder in class for longer periods of time; and (3) do work that is generally more “appropriately differentiated than in the mainstream classroom” (Payne, 1991, p. 62). However, studies using the perspective of students themselves have shown that they place more emphasis on the perceived disadvantages of remedial classes than the benefits (Payne, 1991). For example, students could feel resentful about their remedial classes because they are separated from their friends (Payne, 1991). Second, being in remedial class is a “potent source of social stigma” that significantly and adversely impacts self-confidence and self-concept (Payne, 1991, p. 62). Third, the labeling process inherent in remediation can result in a “downward spiral of self-doubt” such that the child acts according to expectations associated with such labeling—e.g., “I’m thick, therefore I fail” or “I do not think, therefore I am not” (Payne, 1991, p. 62). In light of these, researchers and practitioners alike contend that teacher empathy is crucial for students in remedial classes (Berman, 2004; Payne, 1991; Sharma, 2005; Skvarla, 2007).

Sharma (2005) explained that “excellent remedial teaching is empathic, well-focused, realistically paced instruction that facilitates learning” (p. 217). It is possible only through a complete understanding of the learning process as well as the issues that serve as barriers to its development. Nevertheless, excellent remedial teaching “transcends the methods, materials, techniques and organizational schemes” that serve as fundamental components of efficient remediation (Sharma, 2005, p. 217). It encompasses observable acts but “defies definitive description because it always amounts to acts of individual teachers” who competently and sincerely respond to the

characteristics and needs of individual learners (Sharma, 2005, p. 218).

In the context of remedial students, the importance of teacher empathy cannot be emphasized enough. This is because remedial classes require a person-centered approach that can only be effectively carried out by an empathic instructor (Berman, 2004; Payne, 1991). Carl Rogers, the primary proponent of the person-centered approach, has been said to “elevat[e] empathy to the highest importance in psychotherapy and in education as well” (Berman, 2004; p. 98). Rogers believed that there are three requisite conditions for a “growth-promoting educational climate” to materialize (Berman, 2004, p. 98). The first is the genuineness or “realness” in the teacher (Berman, 2004, p. 98). When a teacher is a genuine person and enters into a relationship with his or her students without putting up a façade, then that teacher will most likely be more effective. In other words, the feelings that this teacher experiences “are available to his or her awareness...and [he or she is] able to communicate them if appropriate” (Berman, 2004, p. 98). The second requisite condition pertains to acceptance, trust, and prizing, which are manifested in different ways. The teacher who has these qualities fully accepts the fear of students as they address new problems, while also accepting students’ satisfaction with learning. Moreover, the teacher’s prizing serves as an “operational expression of his/her essential confidence and trust in the capacity of the human organism” (Berman, 2004, p. 98). The third teacher quality that promotes growth within the remedial classroom is empathic understanding (Berman, 2004; Ouzts, 1982; Payne, 1991; Sharma, 2005). Berman (2004) cited Rogers in stating that “when the teacher has the ability to understand each student’s reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of how the process of education and learning seems *to the student*,” then it is most likely that significant learning can occur (p.

99).

However, the issue at hand is that empathy could be elusive for many remedial teachers (Skvarla, 2007). There are many determinants of this reality. For example, the knowledge that a specific child needs remedial lessons makes some teachers lower expectations of that child (Payne, 1991). Such a teacher may ask, “What more can you expect from a remedial child” (Payne, 1991, p. 62). Indeed, studies show that a good number of remedial teachers feel this way and are generally not empathic to students (Dell-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002; Ouzts, 1982). In other words, there are times when teachers lack empathy toward their remedial students.

As Dell-Amen and Rosenbaum (2002) lamented, the unfortunate irony here is that when there is an absence of empathy, teachers tend to have low student expectations that, in turn, could feed a self-fulfilling prophecy. More often than not, low expectations can make teachers withdraw their attention and praise from weaker learners “which in turn reinforces the very poverty of the student performance that is being decried” (Dell-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002, p. 251). There are also times when remedial teachers, due to certain behavioral issues with their students, start feeling that problematic students do not want to learn. Consequently, they give up on such students and they could start becoming unempathetic “because a sad state of hopelessness may have set in” (Ouzst, 1982, p. 92). In cases such as these, both teacher and student need help because the former may be misunderstood or may have lost hope that the latter is willing to exert greater effort in order to learn. In other words, teachers also need support in order to enhance their, or develop, empathy. There should also be programs in school where teachers are able to express their frustrations in cases where they are not able to do a lot

of progress. To exacerbate matters, remedial students can sense a lack of teacher empathy such that it can “actually contribute to the lack of achievement” (Ouzst, 1982, p. 92).

There is, of course, no truth to this lack of empathy, yet, the student may perceive this because of experience. In other words, a student who is not performing well may believe that the teacher has lost interest since the student has experienced this in the regular classroom setting. This dilemma leads to the next topic in this paper, perceived lack of teacher empathy that will be discussed in the next section.

Before delving into perceived lack of teacher empathy, it is important to explore the possible support tools and mechanisms for teachers so that they can fully develop their empathy. Perhaps the most opportune time in which such tools and mechanisms are made available is when they are still candidates for graduation. Boyer (2010) explains that teacher candidates may be required to participate in empathy development programs, such as the Learning Process Project (Boyer, 2010). This program is relatively simple, encouraging participants to contemplate upon profound personal questions. Indeed, this Program “is an opportunity to share with the class the process of learning—how it feels, the frustrations when things go wrong, the joy of being totally absorbed, and for a lucky few—what it feels like when a skill or a bit of knowledge really becomes part of oneself” (p. 315). The participants were asked to respond to 10 deeply emotional questions, including:

- What was your experience and what did you learn?
- How did it feel to learn this? How do these new thoughts make you feel?
- What were the frustrations like when things went wrong?
- What were the joys of the experience?

Having to respond to these questions present two opportunities to participants: first, to reflect and then write down their thoughts; and second, immediate ability to respond to the activity. Starting with the reflective exercise, participants go through five stages of empathic/cognitive development, wherein at the last stage, participants realize the truth to the popular belief that more mature forms of cognition are associated with higher empathy levels (Boyer, 2010).

Another empathy-development tool that can support teachers' endeavors pertaining to the development of empathy is the Online Empathy Training Tool (OLETT) which seeks to the ability of teachers in higher education to empathically as well as emotionally read emotional texts presented to the user (Hall & Hall, 2009, p. 41). Through OLETT, empathy development is facilitated by a simulated online tutor reading through an inbox of 60 emails at speed. Participants are asked to identify the underlying emotions and covert feelings that the messages arouse. In the second stage, participants are required to compose empathic responses in consideration of what they had understood of the emotional subtexts to three of the emails. Participant responses are then posted to a discussion forum thread. For the third stage, participants are provided with feedback from their learning group on a further thread regarding the skills and accuracy reflected in their responses. The fourth stage involves the completion of a Self-Assessment questionnaire in order to determine the degree to which the OLETT has been effective (ineffective) in developing their empathy (Hall & Hall, 2009).

Meanwhile, a support process that can help in teachers' empathy development is training, an example of which is the 40-hours creativity training conducted at Synectics, Inc., Cambridge, MA. To note, emphasis has been on experimentalism, idea



development, positive interaction, and empathic responses within a highly supportive atmosphere (McConnell & LeCapitaine, 1988). The training also examines the impact of creativity training on teacher empathy and interaction with students. Measurements taken after the training showed that teachers were more open to student ideas and responses, reinforced students, allowed more experimentation, and listened to students more intently.

It has to be noted that empathy and being able to express it requires training in some people. Not every person is capable of expressing empathy in a manner that the other party will appreciate it. There are individuals who may be influenced by their own culture and upbringing to be reserved in this manner. As educators, these inhibitions must be set aside and training can help these individuals. There should be standards on how teachers in remedial classes should continue empathizing students even when it would appear that the latter are not being cooperative. This perception about the students could also be flawed, hence, the need for teachers to have the necessary tools so that they can truly appreciate where the students are coming from.

### **Perceived Lack of Teacher Empathy**

One of the overarching objectives of remedial teaching is to cultivate a relationship with students so that they are not afraid of being scolded, punished, or ridiculed (Ouzst, 1982). It has long been established that learners are aware when they are liked and they also have an acute awareness of their teacher's lack of concern about them (Ouzst, 1982). The point here is that empathy and care from a teacher are crucial in remedial classes, and the teacher can convey and demonstrate these in many ways. Along these lines, it is also important to note that teachers who are tense, too serious, bothered

by interruptions, and very controlling will not be successful in remedial classes (Ouzst, 1982). This is because if remedial students are not motivated, then not only will learning be difficult, but conflicts may arise between teacher and student.

Three types of interaction related to types of empathy are reported by Cooper (2004) to have been identified in the observation of lessons and to include: (i) personalized intensive interaction; (ii) focused group interaction; and (iii) less focused group interaction. Personalized intensive interaction is reported to have been observed when teachers worked one-on-one or with small groups and “where high quality relationships and teaching could be seen all through the lesson” (Cooper, 2004, p. 20). These lessons involved children receiving a great deal of attention and the teacher being closely attuned with the students and their needs and scaffolding learning specifically through integration of the personal and social and academic seamlessly which resulted in “high levels of engagement, sharing, dialogue and continued affirmation for the child” (Cooper, 2004, p. 19). The second category, “focused group interaction” is reported as lessons of teachers with experience and of students and teachers who showed considerable similarities. These were stated to be noticeable for the use of empathy at multiple levels. These teachers used primarily functional empathy but enriched this with fundamental and profound empathy. It is reported that less focused group interaction was observed primarily in student teacher lessons and it was noted that there was more restrictive use of functional empathy. When teachers do not understand students or attach to those students strongly enough to “engender or promote mutual respect...students can be alienated, neglected, ignored, or undervalued. This weakens the moral climate” (Cooper, 2004, p. 20). Empathetic teachers reportedly “exhaust themselves finding

pockets of profound empathy for needing children in corridors and in the entrances and exits to lessons, but it is never enough,” because students tend to blame themselves for their failure to meet individual needs (Cooper, 2004, p. 20). It is possible that when a student perceives a lack of empathy from the teacher, there could be a drop in self-esteem and self-worth that, in turn, could lower his/her motivation to learn.

Students go to school with diverse needs, and these needs must be met before the students can realize academic success (Burton, 1990). Meeting these needs requires “a safe, caring, and supportive classroom environment” (Williams, 2010, p. 1). Williams (2010) emphasized that “teaching and learning cannot occur unless students feel safe,” which is consistent with the hierarchy of needs stated by Maslow (1954). The hierarchy of needs asserts that lower level needs—e.g., physiological necessities, along with matters of safety, love, and belonging—must be met before the higher level needs—e.g., self-actualization and self-esteem—are addressed. Others have posited that schools must be institutions that serve the “whole child” (Williams, 2010, p. 2). Williams (2010) stated that caring teachers “are a significant factor in the success of middle school students. This care can be demonstrated by verbal expression of high expectations, an encouraging pat on the back, and empathetic comments concerning the feelings of each student” (p. 3). As mentioned earlier, there are times when teachers show a lack of empathy as a result of low expectations toward remedial students. However, these are not the only constraints on teacher empathy, as discussed in the following sub-sections.

### **Teacher Quality**

Aside from qualifications and credentials, the personal qualities or characteristics of teachers plays an important role in the effectiveness of classroom instruction. Cooper

(2004) noted that not all teachers are empathic toward their students. Such teachers can alienate their students, especially those teachers who show appreciation only for those learners who perform well in class. As for students who are struggling at the bottom, some teachers believe that they should be punished for not doing well (Cooper, 2004). Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that formal qualifications are not always indications of good teaching. There are some low paid teacher assistants who are highly empathic while there are those with the highest forms of degrees who are simply not empathic.

### **Curriculum Issues**

Sometimes, a lack of teacher empathy does not necessarily mean that the teacher does not care about the welfare of students. There are also times when curricula for remedial classes are too rigid and hectic, such that the teacher has too much to cover in too little time with too many students (Cooper, 2004). Hence, as much as the teacher desires to do so, there is sometimes a limited time for engagement with the remedial student. There are also times when certain curricula are fragmented to the point where remedial classes cannot be regularly held (Cooper, 2004). Just as the curriculum is fragmented, the teacher-student relationship can also become so.

### **Lack of Time**

Sometimes, teachers simply do not have time to show empathy to students as much as they want (Cooper, 2004). A low teacher/pupil ratio, in combination with large class sizes and an overfilled curriculum, has been identified as a teacher problem. For example if a teacher were to compute the average time spent on a given student, including for remedial classes, this would equate with 2-12 minutes (Cooper, 2004). Just as importantly, teachers have “endless work beyond the classroom,” such as preparing

lesson plans, meeting with school administrators as well as with other faculty members and parents so that they have precious little time to engage with remedial students (Cooper, 2004, p. 18). In some schools, teachers are fully aware of the importance of cultivating positive relationships with students through frequency of contact but due to lack of time, they sometimes find it hard just to learn the names of their students, much less develop any deep engagements.

### **Quality of Management**

As will be explained more fully in the Conceptual Framework section of this paper, teachers usually fall under the oversight and management of school administrators or elected public officials. In relation to this, there are times when these managers are themselves unempathetic and do not interact as equals with teachers (Cooper, 2004). Consequently, teachers could feel undervalued and considerably demotivated. There are also certain schools wherein policies denied teachers the opportunity to be empathic to their students. For example, a school might not have a remedial policy and in order to address the special learning needs of students, teachers would have to struggle in cramped rooms shared with other support teachers. In addition to these, government policies also tend to emphasize standardized assessments and competition (Cooper, 2004). As mentioned earlier, this could lead to a scenario wherein students who are better achievers are valued more than poor performers, and it is not uncommon for other students to treat the latter with disdain. These standards and policies create important impacts on the teacher-student relationship, as the teacher is torn between showing emotional care to the students while, at the same time, seeking to achieve academic targets.

### **The Remedial Student Base**

The nature of individual students and their groupings in school also impacts the teacher's ability to show empathy. As mentioned earlier, remedial students commonly have attitude and behavioral issues. Therefore, some of these students could simply be more difficult to empathize with or require more teacher time (Cooper, 2004). However, this also means less available time for others. In remedial classrooms defined by their needy children, teachers have to struggle to meet all their needs while dealing with other constraints (enumerated in this section). Studies attested that children who are apathetic, and therefore more difficult to support, need the most empathy, as they find social interactions challenging (Bowker, Adams, Fredstrom & Gilman, 2014; Horan, Brown, Jones & Aber, 2016; Kohn & Parnes, 1974; Nagel, 2005; Pardini, Cordano, Guida, Grafman, Krueger, Sassos & Emberti Gialloreti, 2016). This is a very important insight, because it considers remedial students as a group with special learning needs, one which is likely to have attitude and behavioral problems, thereby requiring high levels of empathy that teachers sometimes find it hard to provide.

From the review of the limited literature related to the influence of teacher empathy on students' appreciation of academic activities, most of the results suggested a need for teacher training on the development of empathy. This indicates that teacher empathy positively influences the efficiency of pedagogy. Indeed, there are a number of funding programs that seek to enrich remedial education.

Funding for remedial education typically comes from state budgets, supported with funding from non-governmental organizations and some private sector players (Moltz, 2010; Saxon & Boylan, 2001). In Ohio, the setting for this study, state funding

for remedial classes amounts to at least \$750,000 per year (Butrymowicz, 2011). However, Ohio's 2007 budget "quietly mandated that the government phase out money for remediation at four-year universities beginning in the 2014-2015 academic year, and eliminate such funding altogether by 2020" (Butrymowicz, 2011). In spite of this, multiple stakeholders supporting remedial instruction have been designing alternative funding models intended to continue the delivery of developmental education services (Moltz, 2010). For instance, as part of the three-year Developmental Education Initiative funded through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as by the Lumina Foundation for Education, state policy frameworks and strategies have been designing alternative policy structures that would enable continued funding of remedial courses that will not fit into the new semester-course funding pattern of the state (Moltz, 2010). These new policy frameworks do not necessarily mean that separate funds will have to be created for remedial education. Instead, these are policy modifications that may be used to enhance developmental education further. Some of these new frameworks include the alignment of "high school exit standards with college entrance requirements;" the redesign of curricula so that students may avoid remedial classes, and the sharing of data pertaining to student access (Moltz, 2010, p. 38). At this point, none of earlier research studies directly investigated the influence of teacher empathy on students' attitudes toward school in developmental/remedial classes, thereby making it necessary to conduct field research focusing on how a perceived lack of instructors' empathy could lead to student-teacher conflict in remedial settings.

## **Peace Education**

Another important key construct that served as a frame of reference for the study was peace education. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) defined peace education as:

The process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior change that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level. (UNICEF, 2011)

The UNICEF'S approach to peace education is aligned with the Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework of Action, which promotes the notion that education facilitates children's acquisition of skills, including, those relevant to the successful prevention and resolution of social and ethical conflicts (UNICEF, 2011). Just as important, UNICEF's peace education activities constitute an integral aspect of a "comprehensive approach to fulfilling the right to quality education for all children" (UNICEF, 2011). Since UNICEF first started promoting the concept of peace education, it reported that this framework establishes "quality child-friendly learning environments" grounded upon principles that uphold human rights and sensitivity to gender, while requiring health and safety for learners. The underlying rationale of peace education is that quality peace education produces students that possess literacy, numeracy, and significant life skills that encompass "critical thinking, decision-making, communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, coping, and self-management" that may be readily applied to a broad range of contexts that include "peace building, violence prevention, hygiene and sanitation, health



and nutrition practices, HIV/AIDS prevention, and environmental protection” (UNICEF, 2011).

UNICEF’s conception of peace education indicates a convergence of ideas that may be developed into varying types of practical peace education programs. It also represents a theoretical perspective in which many peace education programs may be targeted in order to address conflicts at all forms, levels, and systems of education in all societies (Maebuta, 2011). In other words, peace education must not only serve as an intervention for war-torn countries but be absorbed at every level of the educational system in all countries. This is because, as this study shows, peace as a state of being is impacted by conflicts that could emerge at every level of education: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national, or global levels. Effective peace education is a long-term process rather than a short-term intervention (Maebuta 2011).

### **Culture of Peace**

Peace education cannot be possible if there is no culture of peace within educational system entities. A culture of peace contains values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that spurn violence and conflicts (Maebuta, 2011). This may be achieved by addressing root causes of conflicts so that problems may be solved by means of dialogue and negotiations at the individual, group, or national level (Maebuta, 2011). Moreover, UNICEF’s peace education framework suggested that a culture of peace is genuine if it is practiced in daily life at every level of education. In the contexts of conflict, the thrust of a culture of peace is to ascertain that there are no seeds of conflict. Inside the classroom, educators can encourage this by not ignoring signs of inter-group conflicts. There should be activities meant to build camaraderie among students coming from different

backgrounds instead of allowing students to keep to their own cliques.

### **Critical Peace Education**

While there are different interpretations of notions of peace education, critical peace education emphasizes non-hierarchical and collaborative goals of educators and students that seek to achieve social justice, wherein schools “reflect and reproduce broader social inequalities stemming from structural violence” (Sumida Huaman, 2011, p. 244). Critical peace education is action-oriented and strongly calls for “social transformation through consciousness raising, vision and transformative action” (Sumida Huaman, 2011, p. 244). However, an issue at hand is that while peace education is perceived as essential for educators, students, and societies, it seems to be largely absent in mainstream schools and institutions like universities (Sumida Huaman, 2011). It has been taken for granted that every student and teacher is aware of the need for promoting a peaceful school environment. There is a need to reinforce this with tangible actions so that everyone understands that non-peaceful behaviors that are disruptive to classroom learning and in maintaining social relations are not going to be ignored.

Although there is a constant need for peace-building in the educational setting, in order for peace education to be truly effective, both the form (including the structure of schooling) and content (curricula) must be aligned with the concept of peace. When this is not achieved, it may be said that educational institutions perpetuate structural violence or conflict that could undermine the rationales of peace education. For schools and educators seeking to provide peace education, there is an urgent need to critically analyze the form and content of the relevant academic institution, including its teachers, facilities, curricula, and standards, to make sure that these are aligned with peace.

### **Conceptual Framework: Conflict Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

The conceptual framework for the study was rooted on conflict theory and intergroup conflicts, social identity theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As a collective set of theoretical models and perspectives, the conceptual framework provides lens in understanding the role of teacher empathy in conflict resolution in remediation classes.

Conflict theory was relevant to this study because of the insights gained about the role of teachers as a conduit of positive behaviors in students who are considered marginalized, particularly in addressing conflicts using peaceful means (Bajaj, 2014; Hantzopoulos, 2011; Harris, 2004). Intergroup conflict was also selected because of the insights provided about the real differences between groups in terms of "social power, access to resources, important life values, or other important incompatibilities" (Fisher, 2011, p. 177). Based on conflict theory and intergroup conflict, teachers should be able to possess empathy in order to teach students ways to resolve conflicts peacefully through peace education (Harris 2004).

The social identity theory is important in contextualizing the teacher-student conflict because identity plays an important role in the influencing education outcomes (Tapper, 2013). Based on this perspective, students' identities have to be taken into account in every educational setting. This perspective provides the rational for exploring the role of teacher empathy in conflict resolution in remediation classes, given that studies on the topic are primarily based on students in traditional classrooms (Arghode et al., 2013; Stojiljković et al., 2012; Warren 2014).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs was relevant to this study because of the recognition that students need to be safe in the classroom in order for learning to occur in the classroom (Williams, 2010, p. 2). Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs purports that lower level needs such as physiological necessities, safety, love, and belonging must be met before higher level needs such as self-actualization and self-esteem can be addressed. Teacher empathy can be instrumental in fulfilling the needs of students in remediation classes to self-actualize and achieve their goals.

### **Conflict Theory**

Conflict theories posit that society is composed of distinct groups that have conflicting interests mainly as a result of a competition for scarce resources (Tsang, 2012). So that people can both obtain these resources as well as maintain whatever privileges they are enjoying, dominant groups will seek to directly or indirectly "oppress the disadvantaged groups" (Tsang, 2012, p. 85). Based on conflict theory, teachers fall under the category of disadvantaged groups because they are controlled by dominant groups within the educational system, including politicians, government agencies, educational institution administrators, and, sometimes, parents (Tsang, 2012). As a result, teachers have to conform to national curricula established by these dominant groups, use teaching strategies approved by the people in power, adhere with accountability mechanisms. They are compelled to use recommended textbooks and bow to decisions made through hierarchical organizations. They may be considered oppressed because these constraints leave them little room for autonomy. It must be noted that only in a few instances are teachers even permitted to participate in these activities.

Consequently, teachers can potentially lose control over their own labor, “including their emotional activities at work” (Tsang, 2012, p. 85).

An example of this phenomenon is how the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is being imposed upon teachers. In a nutshell, the NCLB Act requires that all students capable of doing so must be proficient in reading/language arts and math by 2014, based on annual tests for Grades 3–8 (Shannon-Baker, 2012). Schools are required to report test scores based on their “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) (Shannon-Baker, 2012, p. 174). Moreover, these tests are considered “high stakes tests,” mainly because the status of and funding for a school ultimately hinge upon them (Shannon-Baker, 2012, p. 174). The NCLB Act also requires adherence within a system in which administrators and schools are held accountable for improvements in student achievement, as identified in the school’s AYP. In spite of significant support for the NCLB among certain sectors, this policy has nevertheless been criticized because it requires teaching that is “flawed—linear, remarkably narrow, and based on a technical transmission model of teaching, learning, and teacher training that was rejected more than two decades ago” (Shannon-Baker, 2012, p. 177). Consequently, pedagogy focuses on teaching students how to score well in tests even under heavy pressure. Using Boulding’s “peaceableness” as an action concept theory of education, the NCLB Act violates “respect, solitude, imagination, and partnerships” that are valuable in relation to youth education (Shannon-Baker, 2012, p. 170). To note, Boulding’s model holds that education needs to embody and value peace. Because of these aspects of the NCLB Act, there are concerns that conflict might arise between teachers and policymakers, among other stakeholders.

One of the ways in which conflicts can be resolved is through peace education

(Salamon, 2006; Shannon-Baker, 2012). Peace education is the process of having the values and knowledge needed to develop the skills to be at peace with oneself and with others (Page, 2008). According to Hantzopoulos (2011), schools play a role in facilitating peace education for people who are often marginalized such as students enrolled in remedial classes. The professional skills and knowledge of teachers particularly play an important role in helping students develop the skills and knowledge to resolve conflicts peacefully (Harris, 2004).

Peace education is intended in diverse and multi-faceted contexts affecting marginalized individuals (Bajaj, 2014; Salamon, 2006). According to Harris (2004), peace education has five components: (a) explanation of the roots of violence, (b) alternative to violence, (c) different manifestations of violence, (d) an understanding of peace based on context, and (e) omnipresence of conflict. In order for peace education to be effective, it needs have a united worldview, cultivates healing, culture of peace, and peace-oriented curriculum (Danesh, 2006, p. 55). The ultimate goal of peace education is to teach marginalized students to resolve conflicts non-violently, underscoring the importance of teachers having adequate professional skills such as empathy (Harris, 2004).

According to conflict theory, there are even times when teachers are compelled to exhibit specific emotions while discharging their duties. Conflict theory calls this emotional labor (Tsang, 2012). The consequence of emotional labor is that teachers have no choice but to separate their genuine feelings from the emotions that they exhibit in the classroom, especially when faced with the constraints discussed in the preceding section of this paper. When teachers do this, it is not surprising if they eventually suffer from

emotional exhaustion as well as self-estrangement.

There are notable observations that teachers in different parts of the world now reflect similar practices as frontline service employees due to educational reforms (Tsang, 2012). This is because teachers now cater to the demands and needs of educational consumers, composed of children and their parents. Due to their positions of belonging to disadvantaged groups, teachers may be compelled to perform emotional labor.

Under these scenarios, it becomes understandable if one asks about who really controls the emotional activities of teachers. Indeed, this is a baffling question because the review of literature revealed that there are no rules governing such emotional activities, including empathy. However, it must be noted here that even if there are no rules governing the emotional activities of teachers, this does not mean that they are at liberty to display their genuine emotions. To recall, teachers belong to a disadvantaged group that is under the dominance of a more prominent group.

Nevertheless, it is implicit in normal decorum for teachers to “control emotions of anger, anxiety, and vulnerability, and express empathy, calmness, and kindness” at educational institutions. According to Tsang (2012), there are certain emotional expectations from teachers. First, they need to show love and enthusiasm for their students; second, they need to be sincerely enthusiastic as well as passionate about their subject matter; third, extreme emotions must never be shown, such as “anger, joy and sadness;” fourth, they need to genuinely love their profession; and fifth, they should cultivate the ability to laugh at their “own mistakes and the peccadilloes of students” (Tsang, 2012, p. 86).

These expectations about teacher emotions are linked with professionalism. This

is because to a certain degree, if teachers are not able to regulate their emotions, then it is possible that they will be labeled as unprofessional. Alternatively, so that they avoid being labeled as unprofessional, they must do their best to regulate their emotions, according to the aforementioned expectations (Zembylas, 2002). From this viewpoint, emotional labor is a significant aspect of teaching. Nevertheless, from the perspective of conflict theory, emotional labor has several negative impacts, the most important of which is the arousal of negative emotions on the part of the teachers (Zembylas, 2002). Zembylas (2002) noted that due to emotional labor, teachers may experience feelings of guilt, frustration, resentment and shame; consequently, teachers' self-esteem, self-worth and self-perception may diminish. What is worse is that the teacher may direct these negative feelings to students.

### **Intergroup Conflict**

Intergroup conflict was selected for this study because from this perspective, conflict is grounded upon real differences between groups in terms of "social power, access to resources, important life values, or other important incompatibilities" (Fisher, 2011, p. 177). Intergroup conflict is manifested in varying forms and in different settings in practically all societies. For this study, the relevant setting for intergroup conflict is the organizational setting, wherein poorly-managed differences between functions, departments, or teams belonging to the same unit can reduce morale, produce hostility, and weaken motivation and productivity (Fisher, 2011). Usually, such types of intergroup conflict result in a general atmosphere wherein distrust among members hampers organizational success (Fisher, 2011). Aside from these, such conflicts may be further exacerbated by religious, racial, or ethnic influences manifested as "prejudice,



discrimination, and social activism to reduce inequity” (Fisher, 2011, p. 176).

Intergroup conflict is not only rooted in mere misunderstandings or misperceptions, as these are only symptoms of a deeper problem. Rather, intergroup conflict is caused by genuine differences or disparities between groups in terms of “social power, access to resources, important life values, or other important incompatibilities” (Fisher, 2011, p. 177). These causes of intergroup conflicts are further complicated by groups’ contrasting worldviews and the way that group members respond to perceived threats from the “other” group. According to conflict theory, humans are inherently ill-equipped to manage drastic differences with other peoples or groups. Consequently, intergroup conflicts have a propensity to deepen, and without the application of appropriate social processes and institutions, incompatibilities between two or more groups would, understandably, be challenging to manage.

The three main drivers of intergroup conflicts are incompatibilities, behavior and sentiments (Fisher, 2011). Intergroup conflicts become destructive in the event that the goals of two or more groups contradict each other, or create friction. Conflicting values are also important determinants of intergroup conflicts, particularly if members strive to control each other or harbor hostile feelings toward each other. It must be emphasized here that incompatibility, in itself, does not really always lead to full-blown conflicts. Throughout history, incompatibilities pertaining to values, belief systems, and even culture have always existed, yet many communities involved in such incompatibilities have peacefully co-existed. Indeed, the importance of incompatibilities cannot be emphasized enough, because there seems to be general consensus that conflicts are defined by the presence of mutually incompatible goals. Commonly, incompatibility

escalates into a conflict when there are not measures taken to address this incompatibility in a positive manner. Moreover, strong, negative emotions that dominate in situations such as these, and that are left unaddressed, can potentially lead to destructive conflict. As seen here, intergroup conflict is readily applicable to groups of teachers who are dominated by powerful stakeholders, such as policymakers, university administrators, and parents. Such a group of teachers desiring to show positive emotions, such as empathy to students in order to encourage them, could meet staunch opposition from those who develop and design curricula and course contents and who are thus more powerful than the teachers. This scenario highlights intergroup conflict theories, such as incompatibilities, as well as contrasting behavior and sentiments (Fisher, 2011).

As Daniel Katz (1975) explained, other contributors to intergroup conflict are power differentials and contradicting values. Value conflicts between groups may form because of differences in what these groups believe, from different interpretations of principles to worldviews and ideologies (Katz, 1975). Intergroup conflict may emerge over “valued means or valued ends,” over how goals may be attained, or over what their nature or priorities may be (Fisher, 2011, p. 179). It cannot be denied that different groups have varying ways of making decisions, such as democratically or autocratically. On the other hand, power conflict could form when groups endeavor to maximize influence and control against other groups in pursuit of dominance. Intergroup conflict defined by the pursuit for dominance is difficult to resolve because it will entail victory and defeat, or a prolonged stalemate (Fisher, 2011).

## **Social Identity Theory**

Relevant to student-teacher conflict is social identity theory. This theory was selected for this study because it holds that identity plays an important role in the “shaping and implementation of education” (Tapper, 2013, p. 411). Based on this perspective, students’ identities have to be taken into account in every educational setting. They “should not be approached as if everyone in the classroom, including the teacher, is starting from the same place in terms of social status and identity” (Tapper, 2013, p. 411). Instead, SIT holds that intergroup encounters should be considered “in and through students’ larger social identities” (Tapper, 2013, p. 411). SIT maintains that when persons engage with one another, their actions are typically perceived primarily as representative of the different social groups to which they belong instead of as individual manifestations of behavior. Thus, individuals may form the group identities that they prefer, along with the group identities imposed upon them, such as in the case of remedial students. Realistically, interpersonal interactions revolve around this context. According to SIT, the behavior of individuals is “shaped more by their collective identities than personal identities” (Tapper, 2013, p. 412). To note, the underlying rationale of SIT is that a social category, such as, for instance, gender, race, religion, nationality, political affiliation, “provides a definition of who one is” (p. 386). SIT holds that identities are responses to differing contexts and thus are “constructed and reconstructed by relationship with others in the group,” as opposed to those who are located outside the group (Dion, 2010, p. 386).

The core premise of SIT is that in various social situations, people perceive themselves and others as group members, instead of as unique individuals (Insko, et al.,

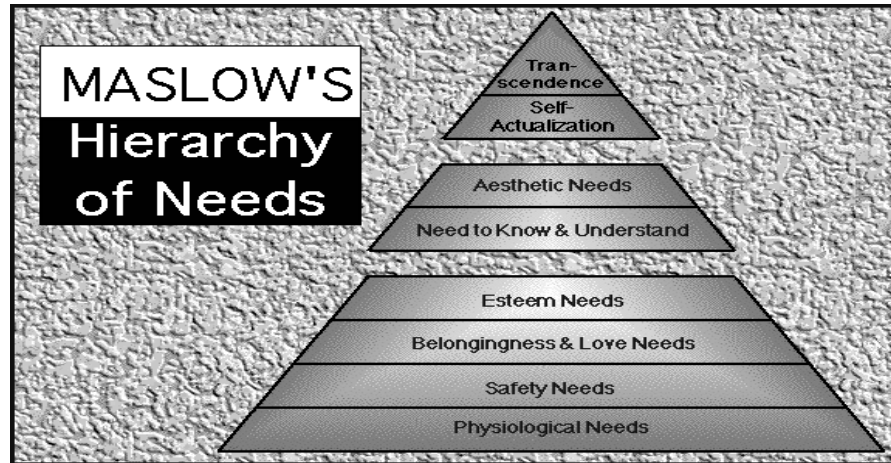
1992). SIT maintains that intergroup behavior hinges upon social identity, which is “qualitatively distinct from interpersonal behavior” (Tapper, 2013, p. 411). SIT separates the conditions under which social identities are likely to become important, such that they become the main determinant of social perceptions and social behaviors. According to SIT, different people use different strategies to cope with a devalued social identity. This is an important insight for this study, as the notion of the devalued social identity may be applied to remedial students by virtue of their labeling as well as teachers by virtue of their oppression of dominant groups. SIT is a social psychological theory, considering that it centers upon social context as the fundamental determinant of self-definition and behavior. Hence, individuals’ responses to given situations are based on their subjective beliefs regarding other groups as well as the interrelationships between them, instead of “material interdependencies and instrumental concerns, objective individual and group characteristics, or individual difference variables” such as other intergroup conflict theories do (e.g., the realistic group conflict theory) (Tapper, 2013, p. 417). Because social identities are among the fundamental criteria by which power is played out, SIT-based models center upon intergroup, and not interpersonal, dynamics, “perceived within both given groups of students and the sphere of macroreality;” these can also center upon scenarios that exist external to, but directly associated with, the “intergroup experience, such as in the given society in which participants live” (Tapper, 2013, p. 417). SIT also presumes that in intergroup encounters (existing social associations), such as power relations, that are external to a specific group will manifest within, and emanate from, that group in the form of asymmetrical power (Inso et al., 1992).

SIT holds that cognitively categorizing the self as a member of a specific social

category that is either in-group or out-group highlights a similarity or dissimilarity from others. Generally, this social classification results in the definitions of selves according to levels of “we” and “us” instead of “I” and “me” (Finley, 2010, p. 248). However, the clustering of people into in-groups or out-groups will not necessarily result in intergroup conflict. Specifically, in-group beliefs or feelings do not necessarily mean conflicting beliefs or feelings to out-group. Rather, it is the desire to attain and maintain “a high-level of personal and group esteem” that can lead to biases and stereotypes that, in turn, can lead to destructive conflict (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011, p. 274). The rationale here is that members of a particular group perceive their group in a positive light so that they see themselves in a positive light as well. This desire for self and group esteem motivates individuals to assess their own group more favorably than the other group. In doing so, group members feel more positive about their own virtues, capabilities and motivations and, by extension, feel more negative about the virtues, capabilities and motivations of the out-group (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011).

### **Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow’s theory provides theoretical support about the role of teachers in serving the “whole child” (Williams, 2010, p. 2). Students need to feel safe in order learn from their teachers (Williams, 2010), which is consistent with the hierarchy of needs stated by Maslow (1954). The hierarchy of needs noted that lower level needs such as physiological necessities, safety, love, and belonging must be met before higher level needs such as self-actualization and self-esteem can be addressed. The hierarchy of needs as presented by Abraham Maslow is conceptualized as shown in the following illustration labeled Figure 1 in this study.



*Figure 1.* Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Huitt, 2007).

Physiological needs include bodily comforts, including hunger and thirst, while safety and security are defined as knowing one is out of the way of danger. Maslow stated that when the needs are not satisfied,

The organism is then dominated by the physiological needs; all other needs become simply non-existent or be pushed into the background. It is then fair to characterize the whole organism by saying simply that it is hungry, for consciousness is almost completely preempted by hunger. (Huitt, 2007, p. 1)

When the individual is hungry then his/her motivation to write poetry, learn, or, in fact, do anything at all is overridden by hunger. Belongingness and love involves the affiliation with and acceptance of others while esteem is the ability to achieve and to be competent, thereby gaining the recognition and approval of others. Maslow held that the individual is only able to act upon the needs of growth after deficiency needs have first been met. The hierarchy of needs is just one perspective of understanding human motivation and behaviors, with others revising or extending this framework. For example, Lomas (2013) also argued that how individuals climb the pyramid in the hierarchy of needs remains elusive. Human motivation can also be understood in terms

of “immediate situational threats and opportunities” (Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, & Schaller, 2010, p. 262).

To summarize, the conceptual framework of the study provides the key theoretical concepts involved in understanding how teacher empathy can play an important role in conflict resolution in remediation classes. Within the educational system, conflict theory provides context to the behaviors and practices of teachers, particularly in negotiating conflicting interests of school leaders and students (Tsang, 2012). As a result, teachers need to follow national curricula established by these dominant groups, use teaching strategies approved by the people in power, and adhere to professional standards.

The social identity theory underscores the importance of context in understanding behaviors and educational outcomes (Tapper, 2013). This contextual perspective provides the rationale for exploring the role of teacher empathy in conflict resolution in remediation classes, given that studies on the topic are primarily based on students in traditional classrooms (Arghode et al., 2013; Stojiljković et al., 2012; Warren 2014). The results of the study can lead to information about teacher empathy that is not available in previous research.

Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs provides a perspective on the importance of teacher empathy in the fulfillment of needs of students in remediation classes. Students need to feel safe in order learn from their teachers (Williams, 2010). Teacher empathy can be instrumental in fulfilling higher level needs such as self-actualization (Arghode et al., 2013; Stojiljković et al., 2012; Warren 2014).

### Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will present the methodological plan for this study. The chapter will

be organized based on the following sections: (a) research design, (b) sampling strategy, (c) data collection, (d) data analysis, (e) instrument, (f) ethics and reflexivity, (g) limitations of the study, and (h) expected contributions of research. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

### **Research Design**

The methodology chosen for the present research study is one of a qualitative nature. Qualitative research involves the in-depth exploration of a phenomenon using tools that can provide rich and comprehensive textual data such as semi-structured interviews (Silverman, 2013). Qualitative research also focuses on the subjective experiences of the participants to understand or make sense of a specific phenomenon, without the intention of generalizing the results. Qualitative research was appropriate for the study because the use of semi-structured interviews was important in capturing the experiences and perceptions of students regarding the importance of empathy in remediation classes. The detailed data that were collected were instrumental in generating recommendations that will be helpful in facilitating the resolution of teacher-student conflicts.

Quantitative research was not appropriate because the research approach is intended in studies that are based on examining the relationship of multiple variables using statistical analyses (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). Quantitative methods would not be able to provide data that can produce detailed descriptions needed to generate themes. Mixed-method approach was not appropriate because the use of the research method is only necessary when there is a convincing justification (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). Adding a quantitative component to the study would not have enhanced the results



because the purpose of the research was based on generating themes central to the understanding of the role of teacher empathy in conflict resolution in remediation classes.

The phenomenological approach has as its focus the illumination of the specific and the identification of phenomena “through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation.” (Lester, 1999, p. 1). In research involving the human sphere this is generally translated into the gathering of information that is perceptive of a deeper nature using qualitative and inductive methods, including interviews, discussions, and observations; this research can also be represented from the view of the participants. Phenomenology emphasizes the study of the experience from the view of the individual, enclosing assumptions that are taken for granted. Phenomenological approaches are epistemological, such that they are based “in paradigms of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasize the importance of personal perspective and interpretation” (Lester, 1999, p. 1). The phenomenological approach serves as a powerful method for comprehending the subjective experience and for gaining deep views into the motivations and actions of individuals, while assisting in sifting through the clutter of assumptions that are taken for granted (i.e., conventional wisdom) (Lester, 1999). Lester (1999) reported that phenomenological research “overlaps with other essentially qualitative approaches including those of: (1) ethnography; (2) heuristics; and (3) symbolic interactionism” (p. 1).

Phenomenological research of a pure nature attempts to provide a description rather than an explanation and to begin from a view free of hypotheses or preconceptions (Lester, 1999, p. 2). Phenomenological methods are especially suited for elucidating the perceptions and experiences of individuals and are suitable in presenting a challenge to

normative and structural assumptions. When an interpretive dimension is added to phenomenological research, it is enabled as practical theory that can not only inform but also provide support to policy and action challenges. Phenomenological research results in the generation of a great quantity of notes from interviews, tape recordings and other such records, all of which require analysis. Analysis in this type of research is not able to be fitted into neat categories. There are many ways to provide a link between various discussions and observations in the study.

Schultz discussed the role that language plays in the understanding of the other (a notion also held by Aspers [2004]) that understanding the other “is a requirement for the empirical phenomenologist. It calls for verbal communication, which is both a means and obstacle to accessing the meaning structure of others” (p. 4). The implication of this understanding in practice is that when the individual understands what the other individual means then a deeper understanding is accomplished (Aspers, 2004, p. 4). Therefore, the idea of meaning is critical in the discussion about understanding, as language can be viewed as the “medium of both objective and subjective meaning;” language is the primary vehicle for each subject in the expressions of mental attitudes (Aspers, 2004, p. 4).

It must be noted that the phenomenological research design is a scientific approach, considering that it is “methodical, systematic, critical, general, and potentially intersubjective” (Wertz, 2005, p. 170). From this perspective, phenomenology is a science that enables individuals to describe the ways through which they experience the world through their conscious acts (Earle, 2010). Hence, phenomenological research requires critical thinking, creativity, and reflective decision-making from the investigator.

It means that this is not just about getting responses from participants but also reflecting on what they could mean. Through the use of phenomenology, an investigator interprets certain phenomena through the lens of participant experience. The phenomenological method is descriptive, and explores the intentional association between participants and scenarios, while providing insight into psychological meanings through imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005).

Notably, phenomenology recognizes the fundamental nature of intentionality, so for studies utilizing this method, “the lived world” is a primary theme (Wertz, 2005, p. 169). According to the phenomenological perspective, people share a life-world that is a structural whole; however, different people interpret this world in different ways, depending upon their earlier experiences in life. Phenomenology enables a researcher to study phenomena in the here and now until it becomes possible to understand and interpret other people’s realities through their own narratives (Addyman, 2010; Heavey, Hulburt, & Lefforge, 2012).

The specific type of phenomenological research design selected for this study was Heideggarian’s existential phenomenology (Dowling, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Existential phenomenology involves the analysis of the experience of a human being based on fundamental ontology (Dowling, 2007). Existential phenomenology was selected because the design is often used in research studies that involve understanding of conflicts, action, and oppression (Tercanlioglu & Akarsu, 2012), which is consistent with the purpose of the study.

### **Sampling Strategy**

This study used purposive sampling in order to recruit information-rich participants (Creswell, 2007). Specifically, this study used homogeneous sampling. To note, homogenous sampling meant that participants were selected according to similarities in characteristics (Williams, 2012). Homogenous purposeful sampling is applicable when the researcher explores a specific phenomenon, as he or she wants to understand the collective experiences of a specific group or community (Williams, 2012). Therefore, this study investigated purposive sample participants who share a common or shared trait of being enrolled at the Cuyahoga Community College English remedial classes. To recruit these students, a formal network was used, composed of professors teaching within the same school. Within this context, the sample population involved 10 students who have completed at least one developmental/remedial English course at the level of English 0980, 0990 (Language Fundamentals 1 &2) and/or English 1010, 1020 (College Composition 1 & 2). Students who had previously been, and who are currently, in the researcher's own Speech classes were excluded from the study.

It is important to mention that the participants of a qualitative study must compose a small and purposive group to allow for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Williams, 2012). Another rationale for keeping the sample population small is to encourage saturation. Notably, saturation is another important determinant in the selection of the appropriate number of participants in a qualitative inquiry. Saturation refers to the point in the data gathering process wherein information could become redundant and therefore negatively affect the efficiency and use of resources (Williams, 2012). Data saturation signifies that themes, dimensions, and qualities have been fully

explored based on the data collected from the current participants in the sample. As Williams (2012) noted, saturation may take place if the number of participants in a qualitative inquiry goes beyond 12 individuals. In other words, after 12 interviews, responses to interview questions may become redundant such that no new information is collected (Williams, 2012). Using this sampling method, not only can the researcher select the appropriate number of participants, he or she can also mitigate ethical concerns regarding undue influence over participants.

### **Data Collection**

The Heideggerian existential phenomenological approach to research maintains that the most informative method of gathering data is through in-depth interviews with participants (Converse, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). In light of this, the researcher proposed to use a questionnaire comprised of seven semi-structured interview questions. The interview method is widely used for phenomenological studies since it permits an in-depth investigation of participants' lived experiences, and this is achieved by interacting and engaging with said participants (Mitchell & Jolley, 2009). Questions were semi-structured, such that they are asked fixed questions but are not given response codes as in structured interviews. This is an effective approach for this study because it permitted participants to share their experiences at length, with their responses not having to stray far from the topic since the researcher prepared a questionnaire beforehand. By using semi-structured interviews based on a prepared questionnaire, the risk of interviewer bias was reduced (Mitchell & Jolley, 2009). Aside from this, the use of fixed-alternative questions means that the researcher was not as challenged in interpreting interview results as in the case of using purely open-ended questions. For this study, seven semi-structured

questions were asked uniformly to all participants. In this regard, the interviews are not “objective accounts of the interviewee’s reality; but rather, should be viewed as an interactional event” through which both researcher and participant “jointly construct meaning” (Garton & Copeland, 2010, p. 533).

### **Data Analysis**

As for the data analysis that was used by the researcher, Giorgi’s (2008, 2009, 2012) steps for a Heideggerian’s existential phenomenological study were performed: (a) collecting phenomenological data; (b) reading whole descriptions; (c) breaking transcriptions into meaning units; (d) transforming meaning units; (e) identifying the essential features of phenomena; (f) integrating features into structures (essences) of phenomena (as cited in Parahoo, 2014, p. 218). These steps by Giorgi (2008, 2009, 2012) as cited in Parahoo (2014) were carefully followed by the researcher in order to form themes that addressed the research questions of the study. The steps also allowed for the lived experiences to emerge and meaningful themes to be extracted.

The first step is the collection of phenomenological data (Giorgi, 2008, 2009, 2012). Each participant was asked if he/she will permit interviews to be recorded. This was a necessary activity because recording the interviews (1) freed the researcher from having to take in all that is being said and (2) allowed the researcher to observe non-verbal cues, such as tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures. After all of the interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed the tapes. Each of the participant responses was analyzed for themes and then coded.

The next steps in the analysis are the reading of transcripts and breaking the transcripts into meaning units through the process of coding (Giorgi, 2008, 2009, 2012).

A code in qualitative inquiry is generally a word or a short phrase that is used in symbolically assigning a “summative, salient, essence-capturing or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2008, p. 3). The data coded during the first cycle of the coding process may range from a single word to a complete sentence or even an entire page of text. During the second cycle of the coding process, the data coded may be in the same precise units or in longer passages of text and may involve the codes being reconfigured. According to Saldana (2008), “Just as a title represents and captures a book or film or poem’s primary content and essence, so does a code represent and capture a datum’s primary content and essence” (p. 3).

According to Bernard (2006), analysis “is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place” (p. 452). Coding therefore assists in providing a method that serves to enable the organization and group of data similarly coded into categories due to their sharing of some characteristic (Saldana, 2008). For this study, the researcher formulated a codebook, which consisted of a compilation of the codes along with the description of the themes they represent. The codebook in this study contained (1) the code, (2) a brief definition, (3) a full definition, (4) guidelines for when the code will be used, (5) guidelines for when the code will not be used, and (6) examples.

The next step in the data analysis is the transforming meaning units and identifying the essential features of phenomena based on patterns and themes from the data (Giorgi, 2008, 2009, 2012). Coding patterns may be characterized by: (1) similarity; (2) difference; (3) frequency; (4) sequence; (5) correspondence; or (6) causation (Saldana, 2008, p. 5). It is a heuristic or an “exploratory problem-solving technique

without specific formulas to follow.” Coding is only the initial step toward an even more rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation for a report. Coding is not just labeling, it is linking “data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea” (Saldana, 2008, p. 8).

The final step in the data analysis is the integration of the different features from the themes that were developed into structures (essences) of phenomena (Giorgi, 2008, 2009, 2012). A composite description of the phenomenon utilizing the themes that were generated was created. The composite description reflects the abstracted experiences and perceptions of the entire sample regarding the role of teacher empathy in conflict resolution in remediation classes.

### **Instrument**

The instrument used to explore the experiences of empathy in this study was questionnaire composed of semi-structured items that was administered to students. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided a handout briefly explaining empathy and how this is manifested. The questions of the instrument can be viewed in Appendix A.

### **Ethics and Reflexivity**

Ethics is a crucial consideration in research; therefore, this study observed exemplary ethical and scientific standards (Creswell, 2007; Tracy, 2010). Before embarking on this study, complete approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Nova Southeastern University and Cuyahoga Community College. The research did not expose the participants to risk and ensured that they were not harmed or be in discomfort or inconvenience. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, who were fully informed regarding study objectives. To note, informed consent refers to



a document that participants needed to sign to show that they were taking part in the study out of their own free will after knowing what was required of them and how the information coming from them will be used. They were made to understand that, at any point, they may withdraw from the study. They may also refuse to answer any of the questions that will emerge during the interview with the researcher. Absolute confidentiality was maintained, and data were governed by FERPA regulations. Collected data were filed under lock and key at the researcher's office at Cuyahoga Community College.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A limitation of this study was that it focused more on the participants' lived experiences. Therefore, there was a lack of first-hand insight from teachers of such classes, which could impact conflict resolutions. The best way to achieve this was to make recommendations based on theory. Also, the research study was susceptible to researcher bias due to the fact that the researcher is a professor at Cuyahoga Community College and has many years of experience teaching developmental/remedial education courses. To lessen the possibility of researcher bias, bracketing was utilized. According to Creswell (2007), bracketing occurs when the researcher suspends his/her assumptions about the research topic. The goal is to limit preconceived beliefs and assumptions in order to increase scientific rigor.

### **Expected Contributions of Research**

There are volumes of studies pertaining to teacher empathy as associated with diversity, leadership, disabled students, and teacher credibility, among other themes. However, a review of extant literature revealed that there is a dearth of information

regarding teacher empathy and how it's perceived absence impacts developmental/remedial students, as well as how this perceived absence could lead to situations of teacher-student conflict. This study aimed to address this gap in the literature. It is anticipated that the results of this study will benefit teachers, students, administrators, parents, policymakers, and society in general. While this study focused on students' lived experiences, it is expected that this study will serve as the foundation for developmental educational instructional practices. This study may also inform the best practices that can be utilized in training materials for instructors who teach developmental education courses.

### **Conclusion**

Through the years, there have been criticisms regarding the negative impacts of remedial classes on students, especially in terms of stigmatization. Moreover, it is not uncommon that in such classes, students not only have learning issues but also behavioral issues. This study intended to find out three things: the importance of empathy to remedial class students, the impacts of perceived lack of teacher empathy, and conflicts that may arise as a result of such perceived absence. For this purpose, a qualitative research methodology was used, specifically in the form of a Heideggerian's existential phenomenological research study.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Chapter 4 is the data analysis and findings of the study. The researcher employed qualitative thematic analysis on the interviews with the ten students pertaining to teacher care and empathy. The purpose of the study was to delve into the topic of teacher care and empathy for the end goal of making recommendations that will be helpful in facilitating the resolution of teacher-student conflicts that emerge out of perceived lack of teacher empathy. A computer program known as NVivo10 was utilized in encoding, clustering, and deriving themes from, the responses of the participants from the face-to-face interviews conducted. The research was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the impacts of perceived lack of teacher empathy upon students in remedial classes?

RQ2: What possible types of conflicts may arise between teacher and student resulting from perceived lack of teacher empathy?

RQ3: What conflict resolution strategies may teachers use in order to address such conflicts?

RQ4: How can empathy be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms?

### **Setting and Demographics**

Interviews were conducted in a small private room at Cuyahoga Community College to ensure that participants and the researcher could communicate well and understand each other while discussing the students' perceptions and experiences with their teachers. Overall, 10 students participated in the study. The students have completed at least one developmental/remedial English course at the level of English

0980, 0990 (Language Fundamentals 1 &2), and/or English 1010, 1020 (College Composition 1 & 2).

All ten participants were African-Americans. Their ages ranged from 38-65 years old. All participants were sophomore students at Cuyahoga Community College. They began their studies at Cuyahoga Community College in developmental/remedial education courses that they successfully completed with a "C" grade or higher.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were analyzed using Heideggerian's existential phenomenological analysis and the computer software program known as NVivo10 by QSR to ensure that the themes addressing the research questions were accurate and reflect the true experiences of the participants. For the purposes of the results section, experiences that received the highest number of references were considered as the major themes of the study and those that received relatively less than the major themes were then tagged as the sub-themes of the study. The sub-themes of the study are the other important experiences from the narratives of the participants related to the research questions. Thematic categories were first formed from the research questions which allowed the discovery of themes based on the codes and experiences shared in the interviews, a breakdown per research question can be referred to in Appendix B to Appendix E.

### **Results**

#### **Major Theme 1. Students resist allowing perceived lack of teacher empathy to become a barrier**

To answer the first research question about the impact of perceived lack of teacher empathy upon students in remedial classes, several themes and sub-themes emerged from

the data (see Appendix B). The major theme that emerged out of the data was that students seem to resist allowing perceived lack of teacher empathy to become a barrier to their learning or to their educational goals. It is important to note here that based on this theme, the focus is on students' perceived lack of empathy and how they respond to it. There is no indication from this theme that teachers are not empathic. As Participant 9 states, "when a professor doesn't show empathy, uh, it's kinda hard for me to answer this questions, cuz all the ones I've have had showed, uh, empathy" (Participant 9). Participant 7 apparently feels the same way about his remedial class teachers, implying through his response that the level of empathy from his teachers had been quite high:

*Um, I guess I should just shoot from the hip, huh? As being um first generation college student, um that-that—and a—and a older student, the-the empathy I receive was um, actually, um a little more than I expected. Um, my teacher actually took time with me personally, and I um—again, with me being a older student, I-I did some things that I—I kinda felt as though that I had a unfair advantage, cuz I kinda knew what not to do, so I could sort of—bonded with the teacher a little bit more, so, I would say that they showed me a very strong um em-empathetic aspect; that I would.*

Based on participants' responses, it appears that due to their level of maturity, *in the event* that teachers lacked empathy, they did not let this interfere with their studies or academic performance. Thus, the participants tend to show autonomy in taking responsibility for their studies. Participant 6 had emphasized that being in college and being matured individuals, even if teachers become apathetic, required him to find that

inner source that allowed him to persevere in order to academically succeed. As

Participant 6 succinctly explained this:

*Well, at first I used to be afraid. Uh, sometime you would get a little angry, but you have to take under consideration we in college now. We grown men and women, so anything that's gonna be worthwhile at night is gonna be hard. It's not gonna be easy, so you have to take it upon yourself to make that extra step, and when the teacher start noticing that, the teacher change they attitude, too, believe it or not.*

Participant 9 apparently feels the same away. He believes that as adults, college students need to accomplish their educational goals, regardless of whether teachers are empathic or not. His response suggests that matured students should understand when teachers lack empathy:

*...because we are all adults here, I still must carry on and do what I'm supposed to do, because again, you never know, uh, what's going on in their life. So for me, I'm not mad. I'm just grateful to be in an institution and have professors willing to teach.*

Similarly, some participants simply take the initiative to reach out to their teachers, for the sake of their studies, regardless of whether said teachers are empathic or not. This behavior is also attributed to the maturity level that is expected to have been attained by college level students. According to Participant 4:

*I'm like this, if I have a problem with a professor I'm at the age where I go to them one on one and talk to them, okay? Because I've, uh, found over the years that's the best thing that works because, uh, I don't need the empathy. Because*

*the empathy to me is too much like sympathy and I don't need neither one of those. I mean I understand what empathy means because it's the field I want to be in. But if I have a problem or a—I think something's not going right with a professor I, I just want to meet with the professor. Talk to him one on one.*

Participant 7 seems to support this view of taking the initiative to be responsible for one's learning or educational outcomes, relative to his maturity level, whether teachers are empathic or not:

*I needed to unlock some things that I didn't know that I had locked... But then, as in again, with me being a older student and knowin' a little bit about life, which I don't know that much, I had to dig down and get a sense within myself to be like, hey, I gotta—I gotta do this stuff. Push come to shove, I gotta dig deeper and get some self-motivation goin' on. So when um—so as far as the-the lack of empathy, I could understand it, cuz I guess it's sorta like they've seen all these different faces semester after semester, and they—it may be overwhelming to them, as well.*

It is interesting to note that at this point in the study, participants' responses have contradicted some research-based beliefs, such as those pertaining to the value of remedial education and the attitudes of remedial students. As discussed earlier in this study, remedial classes have been controversial due to the fact that the rationale underpinning such education has been questioned. Supporters of remedial classes insist that it is an essential component of the educational system in light of the opportunities that it provides to students in terms of making up for academic shortcomings particularly in primary and secondary education. On the other hand, those who criticize remedial classes argue that it lowers educational standards and reduces the value of post-secondary

academic credentials (Bahr 2008). Hearing directly from the participants in this study somehow indicates that remedial classes, for students that had lagged behind their peers, provide an invaluable opportunity for catching up. This is evident from the earlier quotes from participants. And, based on the experiences of many of the participants, this opportunity is a cherished one as it represents the chance to succeed academically, thereby substantiating observations that the remedial classroom is a significant learning environment, at least for college-level learners.

In addition to the major themes that emerged from the data, several sub-themes were also discerned. These sub-themes are (a) the attitudes of students attending remedial classes; (b) being afraid of failing to demands of class; (c) decreased self-esteem; and (d)

As also mentioned earlier, students attending remedial classes commonly feel stigmatized and possess poor self-perceptions. It is not uncommon for remedial students to poorly assess themselves, as a result of feeling frustrated out of having been labeled as underachievers for years (Ouzts, 1982). Many remedial students also demonstrate discipline-related issues. Therefore, they assume various roles to cover up for these frustrations and issues as defense mechanism for feelings of inadequacy (Ouzts, 1982). However, an important finding of this study is that the majority of the participants do not seem to exhibit these attributes. For instance, going back to Theme 1, Participant 6 asserts:

*Again, I say, uh, we-we are in college, and I can only look for so much, but I've learned to realize through life you get out of it what you put in it. If I don't put nothin' into that class, and the teacher know this—so, you know, the more I put*



*into it, the more feedback I'll receive from the professor.*

Similarly, Participant 4 also reflects the same positive attributes. He is aware that challenges stand in his way, but his inner voice tells him to persevere. According to

Participant 4:

*Okay. I, I, I this gonna be road blocks and barriers and pit holes that just called life. If, if a, that professor has an issue with me it's a issue with—if I have—first of all I have the whole issue, uh, I do not have an issue with any of the professors I've dealt with so far. I mean I consider trusting my home part of my community, so if I haven't had to arrange that because like I keep saying over and over I can, I can only praise the professors. I've had all of them, so.*

Participant 1 is unique in this study because she seemed to perceive that sometimes, her teacher is empathic yet sometimes, also apathetic. During the times that she perceives apathy from her teacher, she explained:

*Well, I—it really doesn't if I can, um, her lack of empathy. If, if I can, uh, push myself forward and, uh, just press on, uh, no matter how she shows, uh, her feelings towards me.*

However, at the other end of the spectrum, there were also participants who showed attributes commonly associated with students in remedial classes. As established by some researchers, many remedial students feel stigmatized and have poor self-perceptions. Some remedial students simply wait for the opportunity to drop out of school. For instance, Participant 2 states:

*Well, I guess I kind of covered that before, I thought, but, um, it's that whole thing is that I—if if there's no empathy is—I just want to say, I don't care. I don't want*

*to do this anymore. It's just, you know, I'm spending all this time. I have to, you know, get down to the class. I have to, um, you know, spend time studying. And if, you know—if the teacher really doesn't seem all that interested in really helping you, it's just like, I want to give up.*

*I shut down. It's—you know, I shut down. I want to give up. I wonder why the hell I'm spending this time here. It's not doing me any good. Um, you know, the the teacher doesn't seem all that interested, uh, to me because, you know, it seems like it's just a pain in the ass to them.*

Usually, the population of remedial students has unique needs that vary greatly from one another. Hence, remedial teachers should be able to meet diverse remedial learner needs. Participant 3 is an example of such student that has unique needs. She stated:

*Uh, I'm angry and afraid because I believe that as, uh, educator they should express more empathy towards the students. Because students come from various backgrounds. And you don't know what a student may be dealing with or where they come from.*

*Uh, furthermore it makes me, uh, angry and afraid because now I'm fearful to move the level because I don't understand this. So I'm, I'm, I'm fearful. I'm scared to go any further, and I believe that's how most times students drop out of school.*

For students like Participant 2, it is evident that teacher empathy is of utmost importance. There were a small group of participants who believed that lack of teacher empathy was important and has negative implications on students' overall performance,

such as not meeting the demands of the class, decrease in self-esteem, and not wanting to learn anymore. These perceptions indicate that when students notice that teachers lack empathy and concern, students can feel frustration that can affect their learning.

Participant 1 stated that the impact of having the lack of teacher empathy is being mad and afraid of the teachers thus the student won't be able to meet the demands of the class:

*I think it, I think it was a mixture of being mad and being afraid. Um, uh, afraid that, uh, that I won't able to meet the demands of the class and mad that, uh, she will not take that time with me. That time to ex-, explain more to me.*

The perception of lack of teacher empathy can also lead to frustration from some students because of the lack of guidance toward progress. The frustration from the perception that teachers lack empathy can lead to students feeling discouraged to pursue their education, possibly resulting in failure to persist.

Some students also negatively perceived the lack of teacher empathy, which can lead to decreased self-esteem or shutting down from their education. There was a belief among a small group of participants that the perception that teachers lack empathy can lead to feelings of unworthiness, which possibly contributes to attrition. Participant 3 shared how the lack of empathy makes her want to quit the class and decreases her confidence: "Quitting the class, uh, going to make a referral on that professor, or even that I'm not good enough, or that I can't do this, or I'm not worthy to do it." Participant 2 shared how the perceived lack of teacher empathy makes her feel annoyed and unintelligent:

*I'll tell you, I get pissed. I get pissed. I'm mad because, you know, they just make you feel stupid because, you know, it's like, you know, they're there. That, uh,*

*maybe they're there—they don't want to be there, but it just seems like they, um—they just don't really care about you. They're just—and they don't seem to understand why you don't seem to be able to understand it right away. There has been times when I get angry with them. I start arguing with them. Um, I, you know, say, you know - you know, you make me feel stupid. And, um—uh, you know, that sometimes, you know, it feels like they're asking too much of you and not willing to give you, uh, the help that you really need.*

Overall, participant responses related to Theme 1 reveals that in spite of feeling neglected, unworthy, and angry from the perceived lack of teacher empathy, students believe that the presence or absence of empathy from teachers does not have to affect their performance in remediation classes. Frustration appears to be a common experience, but many students were proactive in initiating communication with teachers. Many students believed that attending remedial classes should elicit more proactive and independent behaviors to compensate for any kind of shortcomings from the school and the teachers.

## **Major Theme 2. Lack of Teacher Empathy Can Result in Lack of Motivation Among Students**

To answer the second research question about the possible types of conflicts that may arise between teacher and student resulting from perceived lack of teacher empathy, several themes and sub-themes emerged from the data (see Appendix C). The major theme that emerged from the data was that lack of teacher empathy can result in lack of motivation among students of remedial classes. There was a sense among participants that when teachers are noticeably lacking in empathy and do not reach out when students

experience challenges, students become less motivated. The prevailing theme that emerged from the data was that students in remediation classes tend to be more enthusiastic with their classes when teachers show empathy or concern. Participant 2 admitted that the conflict of not wanting to learn anymore emerges, as with the teacher showing no empathy, the student does not want to care about learning as well:

*If there's no empathy is—I just want to say, I don't care. I don't want to do this anymore. It's just, you know, I'm spending all this time. I have to, you know, get down to the class. I have to, um, you know, spend time studying. And if, you know—if the teacher really doesn't seem all that interested in really helping you, it's just like, I want to give up.*

When students feel that teachers do not care whether they learn or not, students sometimes feel less enthusiastic in those classes. As a result, students are less likely to exert effort to perform well in classes where teachers show no enthusiasm or concern. Participant 3 added that the lack of empathy affects her and decreases her enthusiasm in learning the subject:

*I believe it does because if the teacher does not exhibit any care once I perceive that they don't care, I get the thoughts of why should I care... Yes, it does. Absolutely, because if the teacher is not even energetic about helping me or enthusiastic, I'm not enthusiastic about learning the subject.*

When students can feel that their teachers do not have concerns for them, students are also more likely to not care to do well in their classes. There was a perception among the participants that teachers' ability to show empathy and concern can lead to improved learning. Participant 5 echoed that if the lack of empathy is present that her interest to

learn will definitely decrease:

*If I had really felt that sense of this person doesn't care about me at all and what my situation is, I definitely would have—it would have affected how I was learning. I didn't feel that, but had I felt that, it would've—yeah, I would not have been [laughter]—I would've been, like, shh, I don't wanna do this. Um, he doesn't care. Why should I care?*

There were discrepant cases who believed that lack of teacher empathy did not necessarily affect their own motivation for learning. Participant 1 added that although the lack of empathy affects her as a student, her motivation to learn is still there: “No, it doesn't, uh, affect my motivation to learn because motiva-, my motivation to learn, uh, s-, is part of what—the reason that I'm here taking this class.” Participant 4 contended that her motivation would not be affected by the lack of empathy of the teachers: “I'm 57 years old I don't need—it's not gonna stop—a teacher is not gonna stop my motiv-, motivation from learning. Like I said before, I'm here for me so I'm motivated by myself”. Participant 6 declared that students should be responsible of their own selves and should not be affected whether or not their professors show empathy for them:

*Uh, at the beginning of a semester, yes, because you don't know this professor; yes, because their way of teachin'; yes, because you've never took this or encountered this course before now. As the semester gets fuller, okay, then you can really see the professor. A lotta professors are not good teachers. Some of 'em don't know really how to come across. Uh, then some of 'em are so good they'd be too good for Tri-C. So uh [chuckles] you know, that data—that question still depends, to me, on the individual. How bad do you want this*

*education?*

Some students noted that when teachers do not show empathy, students seek help from other people who enhance their learning and studies. Participant 8 shared an example where she had to find her own way to get past the teacher's lack of empathy: "If the teacher does not give you the help, then if you really want to learn the subject that you're going through, myself, I had to go seek, uh, help elsewhere." Participant 9 shared that even if there is a lack of empathy from the teachers, her motivation even increases to work harder:

*Uh, for me, no, because I enjoy learning. I'm trying to get as much outta the information as possible, because most classes will lead to other classes. You take chemistry. You have chemistry one. Then you have chemistry two, so I try to extract as much as I can, but for other students, it probably can affect them. But for me, no. I'm trying to get as much as I can, because it's a great institution and the professors have plenty of knowledge.*

Participant 10 shared that her motivation is not affected and even shared a positive effect in terms of being more responsible to satisfy the class requirements and to learn the lessons:

*No. Uh, I mean, no. It- it- it does- it- it—at first it do—I thought it did, but you gotta do a lotta stuff on your own, so after you be around for a while the campus and you learn the teachers, you realize that most of the stuff you gotta get for yourself.*

In addition to the major themes that emerged from the data, several sub-themes also emerged regarding the possible types of conflicts that may arise between teacher and

student resulting from perceived lack of teacher empathy; several themes and sub-themes emerged from the data, such as the feeling of racism and the notion that teachers think students know the lessons already. Participant 1 shared how from the lack of empathy, she feels that sometimes racism plays a part in the treatment:

*Well, I get a little put off, and I wanna shake her. And, uh, why can't she see that I'm a little older [laughter] and it takes things a little longer to sink in. Uh, but I am trying very hard and that, uh, I am a African American. And, uh, I would not like to accuse her of racism, but sometimes I wonder if that doesn't have a part to play in it.*

Participant 3 explained the conflict of the teachers pre-determining that the students are knowledgeable of the topic already. Specifically, when teachers do not have empathy for their students, they sometimes do not recognize that their students do not understand the lessons because the level of teaching is beyond the current capabilities or knowledge of students. Remediation students sometimes feel frustrated when teachers do not make an effort to make the lessons more understandable and accessible. Participant 3 explained:

*For an example, uh, for an example a teacher just because they have their master's degree or their doctorate degree they want to teach me at a doctoral or master degree level. When I haven't even understood the basics, and they make assumptions that I should just get it or know it. Without understanding that I may be challenged in that area of learning.*

Overall, lack of motivation appears to be the most common experience of students in remediation classes whose teachers were perceived to be lacking in empathy. There



was a belief that when teachers do not show empathy or reach out to students who are noticeably experiencing difficulties, students may become less motivated to excel in those classes. Students in remediation classes tend to be more enthusiastic with their classes when teachers show empathy or concern for their success.

**Major Theme 3. The main solution to address conflicts in remedial class is for students to know their responsibilities.**

To answer the third research question about the resolution strategies that teachers may use in order to address conflicts in remedial classes, several themes and sub-themes emerged from the data (see Appendix D). The major theme that emerged from the data was that the main solution that the students believe would address the conflicts in remedial class is for students to know their responsibilities so that they do not have to rely on their teachers. This finding suggests that students see themselves as the agents to improve their lives and address conflicts in class, as opposed to their teachers. Participant 6 shared that the students should also learn how to take on their responsibilities:

*At first, in the beginning of the semester, I do, okay? But as the semester goes on, then, h-here we go again. It's-it's on the student. That teacher is gonna get a paycheck regardless if she bends over backwards, which most of 'em do. I haven't met a professor yet that once they see that you want this education, that they don't make that-that uh extra step or extra mile to make sure you get it.*

Participant 7 added the importance of knowing one's responsibilities when it comes to studying and learning, underscoring the need to be proactive in one's learning. This participant believed that when teachers appear to be not concerned about their students' learning, students need to take the initiative to improve their own learning and

education.

*It's kinda hard to really judge what another—what's on another person's mind. Um, you know, we all have things, jobs, relationships, bills, and school. Um, I have to take it up on myself to—I actually did get my situation resolved, and the—and the bottom line was actually what I just named. It was that [laughter] that the teacher taught at another facility, as well, and um they're up to 12:00 at night gradin' papers and—you know, you—ya gotta kinda make yourself stick out. So I kinda took it upon myself, as in the same premise where I thought there was a conflict, it actually wasn't a conflict. I just had to apply myself more, and be the glue in the situation, and-and kinda help that teacher to help me help myself even more. So they kinda needed a-a pull up from the bootstraps, as well.*

Many students recognized that the responsibility to be successful in remediation classes ultimately lies on their own efforts. Teachers can show empathy and extend more assistance, but students ultimately has the responsibility for their own learning.

Participant 8 also echoed that students need to learn and now how to survive without much help from the teachers:

*I think that's kinda like, uh, a catch 22 on that one because of the fact that it affects you. But you have got to be as a student above. You've got to rise above that. Not everybody's gonna have the same concern or the cares that you have, so therefore it's your effort. You got to do whatever takes necessary to get though the course.*

Students of remediation classes who do not usually encounter conflicts are those who make an effort to be more prepared with their classes. These students believe that

there is preparation, they can address conflicts in class better regardless of whether their teachers show empathy. Participant 9 shared how she has not experienced any conflicts as she has performed and done her responsibilities to show the professors her willingness to learn and excel:

*I haven't had any conflicts. Um, I try to read the syllabus and go by the rules, and that helps out a whole lot, and hopefully I don't have any inconveniences or, uh, slight little hiccups in my own personal life. And the few times that I have had, uh, issues in my personal life, I would email the professor, uh, give them a call at their office and leave a message, and, uh, if I know something is gonna happen before like a major test, I try to give them, uh, the heads up as soon as I know so that perhaps we can make adjustments, whether it be take the test early or what have you, uh, situation may arise. But I've never had any conflicts with the professors. They've – they've given me their utmost respect and like I give them, and I'm very appreciative.*

In addition to the major themes that emerged from the data, several sub-themes also emerged from the analysis. These sub-themes recognize the importance of teachers in remedial classes. The first sub-theme that followed the third major theme was the solution of proper communication with teachers. A group of participants believed that proper communication with teachers remains an important practice that can address conflicts that students experience in remediation classes. Participant 4 has not experienced any conflicts with her teachers as she knows how to communicate with them, taking the initiative to reach out to her professor in order to initiate communication. Similar to this, proper communication with teachers was perceived by Participant 5 as

important in conflict resolution in remediation classes. Students take the initiative to reach out to their teachers so that they can take advantage of their expertise and assistance. Participant 5 shared how she was able to develop good communication with her teachers:

*But I—I went to him. I told him, um, I did get my book the first week and I caught up on all the homework that, you know, we were supposed to have done. And—and, you know, I—I took advantage of him as well—you know, talking to him after class. Um, and the tutors and—and he understood that. So I felt like he—he respected me for what I was doing and my efforts.*

Participant 10 gave an example where an approachable teacher or educator would have been useful: “Not- not quite understanding some of the assignments she gives- they gave us and she didn't wanna go back on telling us, uh, if we missed an assignment what it was.” This means that for the participant, a teacher who is perceived to be emphatic, it is easier for students to approach the former because the latter know that they would at least be given the opportunity to be truly heard. The teacher would take the time to explain in greater detail even after the period is over. But if the teacher is not emphatic, the student would hesitate to even ask for clarifications for fear of being rejected or even embarrassed. Participant 10 also said that aside from approachability, having an empathic teacher facilitates conflict resolution with students because empathy “grows you confidence in the instructor, so I think yeah. If they was more helpful, it would be more empathetic.”

The second sub-theme that followed the third major theme was the solution of teachers to be more understanding. Some participants believed that conflicts in remedial

classes can be addressed more effectively if teachers make an effort to understand the challenges that students experience. There was a perception among some students that some teachers do not make an effort to empathize with their students, resulting in failure to help those who are experiencing difficulties and challenges in class. Participant 2 shared that if the teachers can show that they understand the state and situation of the students then they can feel that the willingness and concern of students:

*If the - the classroom teacher, if they - if they understand, they - they feel what you're feeling and you feel like they do and they, uh, want to truly help you, then, again, you're just more motivated to do a better job and really strive.*

Participant 7 suggested that teachers should also understand that not all students come from the same socio-economic and demographic background:

*So when I would be faced with those particular situations, I was—I was— [chuckles] yeah, I really thought that my teacher should probably um be a little bit more mindful of um—that everybody's hundred percent is not the same.*

The third sub-theme that followed the third major theme was the solution of teachers to show positivity to students. Some of the participants in the study believed that when teachers show empathy, this translates to more positive emotions and behaviors. Participant 1 stated how showing concern and positivity to students allow greater effects which then address the conflicts:

*If anybody shows more empathy to, uh, whatever type of work they're doing and to the people that they come in contact, it has a positive effect on the people that are receiving the information or hoping to receive the information from that person.*

The fourth sub-theme that followed the third major theme was the solution of teachers to be more approachable to their students. Participant 3 added that the teachers should be more approachable or friendly so that students are not afraid to learn by asking questions:

*There are other teachers that I have encountered where they did not present themselves approachable. So I did not approach them I approached maybe someone in faculty or the dean because they were so standoffish and not approachable.*

Overall, the results of the data analysis indicate that conflicts in class can be addressed by students by not relying too much on teachers but on assuming more responsibility for their own learning. Students generally see themselves as the main agents instrumental in improving their own lives regardless of whether their teachers choose to be more involved. This suggests that students of remediation classes may get frustrated when they feel that their teachers do not have empathy, but they ultimately take responsibility for their own educational progress and success.

#### **Major Theme 4. Teachers need to care more for their students in order to develop their empathy**

To answer the fourth research question about how empathy can be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms, several themes and sub-themes emerged from the data (see Appendix E). The major theme that emerged from the data was that the teachers need to care more for their students in order to develop their empathy. Students learn more in class when they feel that their teachers are able to empathize with their difficulties and challenges, underscoring the importance of teacher empathy. Participant

2 shared that empathy can be developed if teachers can care more for their students: “And even if you get down sometimes, if you got someone that—that's, you know, seems like they care, um, it's all you really need to—you know, to keep going.” Participant 3 added that empathy can be developed by seeing the teachers have more care and concern for the students:

*Yes, I do. I believe they could have been resolved because, uh, because when an educator or a teacher shows that they really care about a student being successful; it has a greater impact on the learning of the class. People want to feel safe. People want to know that, that the, the educators that they care. It means a lot to them when they know that they care. Does, however it doesn't mean however that they have to babysit the student. But a student wants to know that the teacher cares about them learning the material as opposed to getting through it.*

Teachers can develop their empathy by showing some concern for their students such as being respectful of time and encouraging students to do their best. When teachers make an effort to reach out to their students, they are more likely to empathize with the challenges that students experience in class. Participant 8 explained that if teachers were more empathetic and showed commitment, then it would have been easier for the students:

*“Yes, and because I believe had he been more empathetic there would have been more of a commitment on his behalf. And he would have been more likely to see what the problem was and try to figure out how a been encouraging or maybe guide me as to what I could do better or different. And we didn't have that. As I*

*say he was—his pattern was late, tardy, and then when he came in he was trying kinda like in light of things just play it off.”*

Based on the experiences of some participants, teachers can enhance their empathy by asking questions and giving students their time and attention. This means spending a little extra time after class to entertain additional questions or clarifications, especially when there are assignments that would seem complicated to students. When teachers take the time to be more involved with their students, the participants believed that empathy can be enhanced. Participant 9 stated that in case there were issues with the professors’ lack of empathy, they should be encouraged to show more care and understanding:

*Because I’ve had very good professors, and they all seemed empathetic, just in case that maybe a situation where to arise, oh, I believe they would, uh, be – they would help even a whole lot. And even if they weren’t maybe the greatest empathetic professor, because most professors I’ve have enjoyed me, uh, asking questions and they – I give them their full attention, I believe that if a situation was arise, I – I’m quite sure we could work something out.*

Participant 10 shared that teachers who are more helpful can help develop understanding with students as well: “Empathetic. I think it helps you. I mean, it- it grows you confidence in the instructor, so I think yeah. If they was more helpful, it would be more empathetic.” For instance, an emphatic teacher can give a student confidence to stand up in class to ask a question or answer a query. This cannot happen if the student perceives the teacher to be disinterested.

The first sub-theme that followed the fourth major theme was the employment of



proper communication to develop empathy. Some students believed that when teachers make an effort to communicate with students, they will be able to understand the concerns and challenges of students in class. When teachers make an effort to communicate more with their students, they are more likely to find out their concerns and, possibly enhancing their ability to empathize. Participant 5 emphasized the importance of a clear and good communication with the teachers: “He remembered who I was and, um, this was probably two semesters later. And, uh, when he saw me, he recognized me, um, in passing. And I think he respected that I was not, you know, messing around”. Participant 4 also shared how proper communication is the key to solving the lack of empathy of teachers:

*I haven't had none. Not one conflict with any one of my teachers. If I've had math problem or English problem, those were my so called my developmental classes that I've had to take. I would go directly to the professor and each one was more than willing to assist me. Or if they couldn't assist me, they'd pointing me in the right direction.*

The second sub-theme that followed the fourth major theme was the development of empathy if students showed more enthusiasm in learning. There was a small group of students who believed that teachers are more likely to develop empathy when they see that students are enthusiastic about learning. As a result, these students make sure that their enthusiasm for learning is apparent to their teachers. Participant 7 shared how she encouraged herself to show more willingness to learn so that the empathy of teachers would increase as well:

*It's kinda hard to really judge what another—what's on another person's mind.*

*Um, you know, we all have things, jobs, relationships, bills, and school. Um, I have to take it up on myself to—I actually did get my situation resolved, and the—and the bottom line was actually what I just named. It was that [laughter] that the teacher taught at another facility, as well, and um they're up to 12:00 at night gradin' papers and—you know, you—ya gotta kinda make yourself stick out. So I kinda took it upon myself, as in the same premise where I thought there was a conflict, it actually wasn't a conflict. I just had to apply myself more, and-and-and be the glue in the situation, and-and kinda help that teacher to help me help myself even more. So they kinda needed a-a pull up from the bootstraps, as well.*

Finally, the third sub-theme that followed the fourth major theme was being more pleasant when teaching. There was a belief in some participants that teachers may be able to enhance their capacity for empathy when they make an effort to be less angry and more pleasant despite the challenges in remediation classes. Participant 1 suggested that empathy can be developed by being more pleasant when teaching: “Instead of, uh, her being, uh, uh, so sort of hateful. Instead of, uh, she should try to be more pleasant in, getting this information out.”

Overall, the results of the data analysis generally revealed that teachers need to care more for their students in order to develop their empathy. Teachers need to be more proactive in reaching out to their students and finding out how they can be helpful so that their ability to empathize can be developed or enhanced. Developing teacher empathy is important because students learn more in class when they feel that their teachers are able to empathize and care.

### **Composite Description**

With regard to the impact of perceived lack of teacher empathy upon students in remedial classes, the results indicated that among many participants, the perceived lack of teacher empathy does not serve as barrier to their educational or learning goals. Related to this appears to be the maturity level of college remedial students, motivation to succeed academically, as well as positive attitudes towards learning and life in general. Many of the participants believed that college students should take responsibility for their own learning and should not rely on their teachers' assistance.

In terms of the possible types of conflicts that may arise between teacher and student resulting from perceived lack of teacher empathy, the data indicated that lack of teacher empathy can result in lack of motivation among students of remedial classes. There was a sense among participants that when teachers are noticeably lacking in empathy and do not reach out when students experience challenges, students become less motivated in their education.

Regarding the resolution strategies that teachers may use in order to address conflicts in remedial classes, the main solution that emerged from the data analysis is that students believe that conflicts in remedial class can be addressed by students knowing their responsibilities so that they do not have to rely on their teachers. This finding suggests that students see themselves as the agents to improve their lives and address conflicts in class, as opposed to their teachers. The prevailing perception from the participants is that students should not rely on their teachers if there is a belief that teachers do not have the initiative to help their students beyond the normal classroom instruction.

Finally, the participants believed that empathy can be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms by caring more for their students. The students believed that when teachers care for their students, they can empathize more with the challenges and problems that students experience in remedial classes. Teachers need to care more for their students so that their behaviors and practices in remedial classroom reflect a more empathetic relationship with students.

### **Summary**

The researcher presented in Chapter 4, the data analysis and findings of the study. From the thematic analysis of the interviews, the researcher discovered answers to the four research questions. From the first research question of the impacts of perceived lack of teacher empathy upon students in remedial classes, it was found that participants did not allow perceived lack of teacher empathy to deter them in the attainment of their educational goals. The second research question of the possible types of conflicts that may arise between teacher and student resulting from perceived lack of teacher empathy, it was found surprisingly that the motivation of students is not affected. The third research question, which was the conflict resolution strategies that teachers may use in order to address such conflicts, it was found that students knowing their responsibilities were the perceived strategy. Finally, students believed that empathy could be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms if teachers cared more for students. The findings of the study were analyzed with the help of NVivo10. In Chapter 5, the conclusions, recommendations, and limitations will be discussed further.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

In Chapter 5, the researcher discusses the findings from the qualitative thematic analysis of the study, looking at them in-depth and in accordance with the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Each of the themes will be presented and addressed by research question. Chapter 5 will contain the following sections: (a) Summary of Findings; (b) Interpretation of Findings; (c) Implication of Study; and (d) Future Directions of the Research. Finally, in this chapter, the researcher discusses the study's research questions:

RQ1: What are the impacts of perceived lack of teacher empathy upon students in remedial classes?

RQ2: What possible types of conflicts may arise between teacher and student resulting from perceived lack of teacher empathy?

RQ3: What conflict resolution strategies may teachers use in order to address such conflicts?

RQ4: How can empathy be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms?

### **Summary of Findings**

To address these research questions, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis on the interviews with ten students. Regarding the first research question about the impacts of perceived lack of teacher empathy upon students in remedial classes, the results indicated that the perceived lack of teacher empathy has no impact on students. The other three themes were the negative effects of perceived lack of teacher empathy: students being afraid and not meeting the demands of the class; students having lower self-esteem; and students not wanting to learn anymore.

The second research question concerned the possible types of conflicts that may arise between teacher and student resulting from perceived lack of teacher empathy. Again, through phenomenological analysis, it was found that a majority of the students indicated that motivation is a factor that can be affected when there is a perception that teachers do not have empathy for their students. Meanwhile, several participants admitted that their learning interest is affected; some even associated lack of empathy with racism. The final conflict centered on the perception that teachers believe that students already know their lessons.

The third research question focused on the conflict resolution strategies that teachers may use in order to address such conflicts. The majority of the students believed that knowing their responsibilities and not relying on their teachers was the best strategy. Several participants also pointed out the importance of proper communication with teachers and of the teachers being more understanding. Other strategies included teachers showing positivity to students and being more approachable.

Finally, regarding the fourth research question, students believed that empathy could be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms if the teachers cared more for the students. The themes that emerged for this research question were similar to the third research question and emphasized proper communication between teachers and students. Meanwhile, empathy could be developed if students showed more enthusiasm in learning and were more pleasant during teaching sessions.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Through the Heideggarian existential phenomenological analysis, a conceptual framework was developed. The responses of the participants allowed the formation of a

figure wherein given the acceptance and awareness of the responsibilities of the students within the age group of the study, there is resistance to allowing perceived lack of teacher empathy to serve as barrier to educational or learning goals. In spite of some instances of perceived lack of empathy, student motivation, attributed to inner drives, maturity level of participants, and generally positive outlook in life result in continued motivation to learn. Participants also indicated that knowing their responsibilities can solve conflicts. Finally, the students believed that empathy can be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms if the teachers showed more care and concern for the students. Figure 2 presents the overall framework discovered from the experiences shared by the participants.

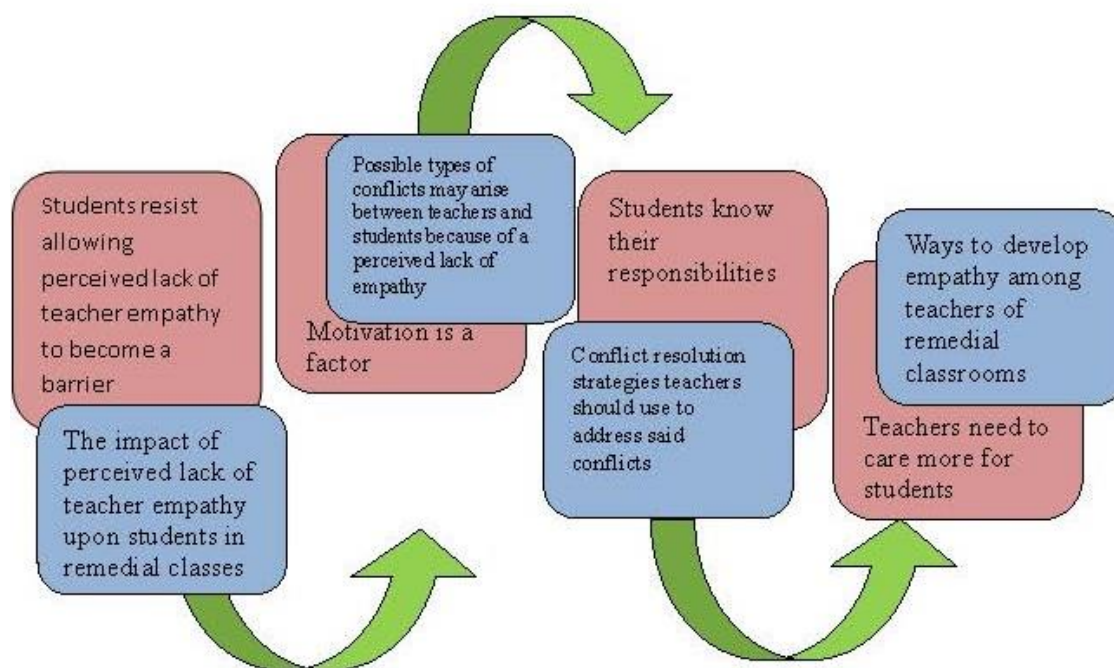


Figure 2. *Overall Framework from the Findings*

**RQ1.** What are the impacts of perceived lack of teacher empathy upon students in remedial classes? In response to this question, perceived lack of empathy does not generally lead to reduced academic performance considering that most of the participants

believed that at their maturity level or status as college students, they should take responsibility for their learning. In the event that teachers are apathetic, they simply take responsibility for their learning and perform strategies in order to achieve their educational goals, such as, taking the initiative to communicate with their teachers. Perceived lack of empathy did not necessarily impact students' academic performance because they know how to communicate with their teachers. Remedial students most often feel the following: being in remedial class is can be a source of stigma that can affect the self-confidence and self-concept of students. The labeling of remediation can result in self-doubt that can further affect the educational performance of students (Payne, 1991). The aspects presented show the negative impacts that lack of empathy can bring to students in remedial classes. However, in this study, such experiences were only indicated by less than half of the total population. These were the experiences of being afraid and thus not meeting the demands of the class; having decreased self-esteem; and not wanting to learn anymore.

The participants believed that college students should take responsibility for their own learning and should not rely on their teachers' assistance. There was a perception among the participants that students attending remedial classes should be more proactive and independent, so that it would make that much of a difference whether teachers were empathic or not. The students took note that if their teachers were not willin, to provide them with extra care and understanding to improve their educational status, then they would take it upon themselves to learn and acquire knowledge the best way possible. The responses of Participants 6, 8, and 10 were examples of how students took responsibility for their own learning, without having to rely much on their teachers'



empathy. Participant 6 explained that age is a significant factor in assuming responsibility for their education. To recall, Participant 6 had asserted that as mature men and women, college students have to take it upon themselves to self-motivate and find inner drivers of achievement.

Participant 7 also echoed how she adjusted and took responsibility for her own education, knowing that the teachers or professors lacked empathy:

*Mostly I was thinkin', wow, they um—here we are with all these people, um. I was thinkin' at one point, maybe they just here just to get a check, versus um to really help us as students, to help—um because some of us needed to get—well, I'm gonna speak about me.*

As seen in these responses, it is unique that the students interviewed did not blame their teachers for lacking empathy but took responsibility as needed. Age may be a factor in the lack of impact as the students in the current study were older and mature enough to be accountable for their own education, as well as, find their own ways when their teachers refuse or are unable to provide them their educational needs. Other possibilities such as the demographics (age, gender, level of education, race) of the students may have been the factor of the lack of impact. For instance, it is not unlikely that older individuals with higher levels of educational attainment may be less impacted by a perceived lack of empathy from their teachers. This is because these individuals have had experience with helping themselves and this can come into play when the teacher does not appear to be helpful or emphatic to students. They believed that if teachers were not willing to help them, then it was upon them to be resourceful and persevere through the challenges. This

same attitude may not be discernible among remedial students because they do not know how to navigate the educational system without assistance.

In Chapter 2, Young and Ley (2003) stated that the developmental needs of remedial students are exceptional, such that their teachers should have not only the competencies to attend to the needs of these diverse learners, they should also have the suitable emotional maturity to demonstrate care and empathy to the learners. These characteristics as described by Young and Ley (2003) seemed to target younger groups of students and their findings might not be as relevant to this dissertation. As seen in the responses of the current study, older students are much more focused and rely on their own initiative without much help and empathy from their teachers. However, there were still a few who pointed out the need for empathy from their teachers; Participants 1, 2, and 3 admitted that their confidence and interest would decrease whenever their teachers would make them feel unappreciated. Zhou, Valiente, and Eisenberg (2003) explained in Chapter 3 that empathy gives people the ability and motivation to help others through enhanced social competence and sense of connection. The authors' explanation may be the main reason why students still seek for their teachers' care and approval for motivation and an increased enthusiasm to learn.

**RQ2.** What possible types of conflicts may arise between teacher and student resulting from perceived lack of teacher empathy? The answer here is that motivation is not affected.

The major theme established in research question 2 coincided with one statement found in Chapter 2, which was shared by Barr (2008). Barr (2008) asserted that student-teacher interaction is not influenced by empathy because it requires more than mere

empathy for the efficient negotiation of the difficult relationship between instructors and students. Empathy's lack of impact is supported by findings in the second research question although the context is different from that described by Barr (2008). Notably, question 2 findings indicate that participants *did not allow* perceived lack of empathy to dampen their motivation and zeal to learn and attain a quality education. Barr's (200) assertion that empathy does not affect student-teacher interaction is decidedly different from question 2 findings showing that perceived lack of empathy did not necessarily affect motivation and zeal towards education, and this is because the participants, themselves, prevented perceived lack of empathy from making that much impact. The main reason is the same as the one presented in the first research question, wherein the students have already realized their own responsibilities without dwelling on the lack of help and empathy from their teachers. Some examples are Participants 1, 3, and 6, who explained how their age and maturity have changed their views. Participant 1 highlighted how her dedication to learn has always been her main priority, without thinking of the barriers along the way: "No, it doesn't, uh, affect my motivation to learn because motivation, my motivation to learn, uh, s-, is part of what—the reason that I'm here taking this class." Participant 4, a 57-year old student contended:

*No, cuz I'm here for me. I'm 57 years old I don't need—it's not gonna stop—a teacher is not gonna stop my motivation, motivation from learning. Like I said before, I'm here for me so I'm motivated by myself.*

Similar to the findings in research question 1, participant 6 also explained that students should be in charge of themselves and should not be affected by whether or not their professors have empathy for them. After all, some professors are not effective at

what they do; however, whether they are effective or not is less of a concern compared to a student's drive to succeed academically.

Contrary to the theme presented above--that there are no conflicts even if there is a lack of empathy; however, when there is a lack of empathy, their learning interest is affected. The main reasons for this may be the need of the students to have teachers who value (1) positive interactions with students; (2) supportive classroom environments; and (3) student-centered classrooms (McAllister & Irvine, 2002, p. 439). According to Chapter 2, these positive interactions encourage a learning environment through listening, patience, and support of students (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Other negative aspects that emerged from the lack of empathy were perceptions of racism and perceptions that teachers assumed that students already understood their lessons.

**RQ3.** What conflict resolution strategies may teachers use in order to address such conflicts? The answer here is that a key strategy is students knowing their responsibilities.

The major theme that emerged in the third research question was again connected and consistent with the results in the two research questions previously presented. The main strategy perceived by the students that would aid in addressing the conflicts that the lack of empathy causes the students was simply for the students to have initiative and assume their responsibilities. Again, the need for the students to take responsibility for their own learning occurred throughout the study. Given the age range of the participants interviewed, it was not surprising that these students were already mature enough to realize that they were the ones responsible for their own learning and success in education. The students interviewed were vocal about their desire to succeed and excel

in their fields and thus were well motivated to learn even without much help and empathy from their teachers. The verbatim texts and responses of the participants could be used as evidence of this point.

Another strategy was proper communication with teachers, where students explained the need for an open and clearer communication system with their teachers in order for misunderstandings to be avoided, thus conveying their messages in the best way possible. The students also asked for their teachers to be more understanding with their situation as another strategy for conflicts to be addressed. It is important that the participants came from different life circumstances. For instance, Participants 2 and 3 are seemingly on their absolutely last chance not only to complete their education but also perform well academically. Participant 4 is 57 years old and historically, has had learning problems in Math and English. Participant is considerably older than his classmates and has had to temporarily stop schooling because he became cancer-stricken and had to obtain medical attention. Participant 7 is a first generation immigrant as well as the first college-level member of his family. Finally, other similar and related themes were the need to show positivity to students and for the teachers to be more approachable.

**RQ4.** How can empathy be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms? The answer here is that teachers need to care more for students.

The major theme that emerged from the responses, addressing the fourth and last research question, was a direct appeal for teachers to show more care for the students, in order to bring about a more congenial learning environment. This characteristic or value can be developed by following what was contended by Berman (2004), who highlighted the importance of the genuineness of teachers. Berman explained that when a teacher is a

genuine person and enters into a relationship or forms a bond with his or her students without concealing feelings, then that teacher would most possibly be more effective. This can be connected to the next theme of the current study, the employment of proper communication. The other characteristics in Chapter 2 pertain to acceptance, trust, and prizing, which are manifested in different ways and can be connected to the themes of being more pleasant when teaching and showing more concern to the students. It was concluded in Chapter 2 that the teacher who has these qualities fully takes into account the fear of students as they address new problems, and highly prize their students' satisfaction with their current education. The third teacher quality that promotes growth within the remedial classroom is empathetic understanding (Berman, 2004; Ouzts, 1982; Payne, 1991; Sharma, 2005). The last quality is the overall and general strategy suggested by the students to develop empathy and thus improve the quality of education that remedial students are receiving.

### **Teacher Empathy**

Aside from discussing themes derived from a study, a truth that leaps out from the results pertains to teacher empathy itself. In the cases wherein there was perceived lack of teacher empathy, was this because the teacher did not have the requisite skills to be empathic, or have there been other barriers? The latter presents for important possibilities. Key discussions and concepts discussed in earlier sections need to be revisited.

**Empathy.** To recall, empathy has been characterized as the ability through which a person can identify with another's emotions, to feel and see what the other feels and see such that there is a sharing of a similar perspective (Bahr, 2008; Cherniss, 2000). When a

person is empathic, he or she has the ability to precisely understand what another person is going through. Empathy is such an important human characteristic especially for the teaching profession, and in spite of scholarly assertions that it is inherent, empirical evidence exists that it can only be developed through interactions and forming and maintaining relationships with other people (Newton et al., 2000). There are scholars who explain empathy is simply responding positively to another person's needs, problems, or circumstances. There are times when responding to others should not depend on understanding their emotions. In other words, to be empathic, one does not have to first fully understand the emotional factors that have led to the state of neediness of another; instead, one can respond to another through ways such as validation. It is the ability to gain the perspective of another, in common terms, putting oneself in the other person's shoes, that indicate whether that person has the ability to be empathic or not (Bahr, 2008; Woolfolk, 2001)

Even if one does not have to understand the emotions that have brought about the need for empathy in another person, relating to that person evocatively is an important aspect of empathy. Indeed, this is highlighted in certain definitions of empathy, such as that of Haynes and Avery (1979). According to Hanes and Avery (1979), empathy does not entail the ability to recognize another person's feelings and perceptions; instead, empathy is achieved when that person provides another with a tolerant reply. Because of these attributes of empathy, it becomes evident that it is not easily cultivated. In other words, it is a process that may take time to develop. With regards to teachers, do they really have the time to cultivate empathy for their individual students?

**Teacher Empathy.** Only a few empirical studies have been undertaken in order to determine the role of empathy in teachers' professional experiences, in spite of the fact that empathy is considered a crucial disposition among teachers because this allows them to positively and productively interact and engage with their students (Tettegah & Anderson, 2007, p. 51). Tettegah and Anderson (2007) explain that in order to be able to express concern and take a student's perspective, a teacher has to tap upon cognitive and affective resources. Again, this suggests that empathy is a process that requires cultivation. To note, in order to show empathy and understanding, a teacher has to temporarily enter into an imagined space in order to adopt the perspective of the student. This is the only way for empathy to be sincere and credible to the student. Participant 3's response highlights this, when she said: "Um, I believe it does because if the teacher does not exhibit any care once I perceive that they don't care, I get the thoughts of why should I care." Emphasized here is the need for teachers to develop empathetic attitudes and behaviors.

It cannot be overstated that teacher empathy is thus a complex process that defies easy explanation or quantification (Arghode et al., 2013). As discussed earlier in this paper, there are three categories of teacher empathy. The first is positive engagement with students, second, supportive classroom environments, and third, student-centered classrooms (McAllister & Irvine, 2002, p. 439). In order to positively engage with students, a teacher has to listen to them, be patient, and be supportive. Participant 5 compared a teacher who was empathic with a teacher who was not. She said:

*Um, I think in my second semester, um, I had a different professor. He was young. Um, and he was newer. Um, and he was adjunct. And he had a little bit more of*



*an attitude. Um, like, “I’m not gonna tol—” The—the—the older professor, he was a little more patient and tolerant than the younger professor was.*

*The younger professor was, you know—had a little bit, I think, more of a quicker temper, um, in terms of not tolerating the misbehavior in a class, um, and things.*

*And so, um, there was definitely times when there was tension in the class with the younger professor.*

Participant 8 also emphasized the need for a supportive teacher in the context of empathy. He had perceived that his teacher was not genuinely empathetic and thus was not able to convey supportiveness to the student:

*Yes, and because I believe had he been more empathetic there would have been more of a commitment on his behalf. And he would have been more likely to see what the problem was and try to figure out how a been encouraging or maybe guide me as to what I could do better or different. And we didn’t have that. As I say he was—his pattern was late, tardy, and then when he came in he was trying kinda like in light of things just play it off.*

Teachers need to make moral, mental and emotional investments in order to be empathetic (Cooper, 2004). A teacher can show genuine empathy if he or she truly cares about students. Out of this caring attitude, a teacher can create a learning environment wherein students learn more efficiently, reinforced by the knowledge that someone is rooting for their personal success. Empathetic teachers are more effective than those who are not because the exchange of information with students is on a more positive note (Cooper, 2010; Arghode, 2012). Students *feel* that their teachers are supportive of their endeavors to achieve educational success and this makes a great difference in their

motivation to succeed, and the dedication that they have to learning. Simply put, it is not unreasonable to believe that a student feels good about having an empathic teacher such that they like attending classes more, and perhaps show his or her teacher that the latter's efforts have not gone to waste because the student *had* learned.

Janke and Peterson (1999) made several important statements to call attention to the importance of teacher empathy in relation to learning. According to Janke and Peterson (1999), for many students, there is that strong desire to find even just one person who would be there for them whether times are good or bad. This person could be a parent, sibling or best friend, but in most cases, it is the supportive, listening teacher that has filled this role. (Janke & Peterson, 1999). Many researchers seem to support this view. This is why it has been noted that a truly empathetic teacher positively impacts the ability of students' to share and learn from others (Cooper, 2004). Students eventually grow to like and respect empathetic teachers so that in a sense, the teachers serve as role models.

Another concern discerned in the findings of this study is, how can teachers show sincere empathy when they, themselves, are oppressed members of the educational system? This is important because it could be related to Theme 1. If teachers are also oppressed in the educational system, do students sense the powerlessness of their teachers such that they simply "grind along" in order to finish their studies? What could be the implications about the meaningfulness of such education for these students?

These are complex questions that have a policymaking dimension. As discussed in the theoretical framework of this study, according to conflict theory, teachers are faced with too many constraints in the field of education to the point that they are limited in

showing emotions to their students. This is the concept known as emotional labor (Tsang, 2012). Because of emotional labor, teachers are compelled to separate their true feelings from the feelings that they are expected to show in their classrooms. This can be emotionally draining, and can make the teachers feel estranged from their own genuine feelings. This can be exhausting, and it is understandable when there are times that some teachers no longer have the energy or personal resources to deeply engage with their students. In a related phenomenon, due to the constraints that the system imposes upon them, teachers tend to view students as customers rather than learners. Why do teachers persist in emotional labor in spite of knowledge that this could be potentially detrimental to students? Due to existence of rules, policies or school procedures, teachers who cannot effectively manage their emotions are considered unprofessional. This is a label that is understandably something that teachers want to avoid largely because of personal goals or the livelihood that their profession provides them. Due to the fact that teacher oppression may be attributed to actions and decisions of stakeholders, including, politicians, government agencies, educational institution administrators, and, sometimes, parents, then solutions to these should involve these stakeholders as well. Recommended policy solutions are discussed in succeeding sections.

### **Implication of Findings**

The findings in the current study allow for a greater understanding and comprehension of the situations of remedial students within their respective classrooms, as well as the teachers of remedial classrooms. The results will help school administrators and faculty members realize that lack of teacher empathy, especially towards remedial students, can indeed greatly affect the students, if not given the proper

attention and resolution by the schools. In this study, the age group was higher than the normal age range of students in the United States, and thus the researcher received more mature and established responses. With the higher age group, the responses were then focused on their own responsibilities as students. The current study then encourages schools and universities in the United States to train their faculty members on deeply engaging with students as well as proactively interacting with their students. This is important for the remedial teacher because remedial students may have their special needs as compared to the normal students in the classrooms. The theoretical framework of critical peace education can then be applied wherein the active call for “social transformation through consciousness raising, vision and transformative action” should be considered by the schools, requiring their educators and administrators to reflect on their teaching methods, relationships, and treatments to the students (Sumida Huaman, 2011, p. 244). By doing so, the findings will encourage teacher practices that promote listening, communication, and concern for students who have more needs than others such as those attending remediation classes.

**Training.** Empathy has two dimensions: affective and cognitive (Herrera Torres, Buitrago Bonilla & Avila Moreno, 2016). The affective component pertains to the possibility of living another person’s emotional experiences such that when developed, warmth, sympathy and concern about others are achieved. On the other hand, the cognitive component integrates the understanding of these life experiences. In other words, the cognitive component entails the “ability to interpret situations from our own perspective as well as from that of others” (Herrera Torres, 2016, p. 32). Notably, empathy is also considerably associated with prosocial behavior, affectively and

cognitively. The difference between affective and cognitive empathy is such that with the former, there is an implication of a sensation derived from other people's feelings or thoughts, whereas the cognitive component entails understanding other people's thoughts and feelings. These two perspectives are closely intertwined but they require different skills both functionally and neurologically (Herrera Torres, et al., 2016). Both can be developed.

An example of a training program seeking to develop empathy is described by Boyer (2010). This program, called the Learning Process project, is an opportunity for trainees to share with the class the process of learning: how it feels, the frustrations one feels when things go wrong, the joy of being totally immersed, and for a lucky few, what it feels like when a skill or a bit of knowledge really becomes part of oneself (Boyer, 2010). The trainees are first asked to write about learning experiences that have been new to them. They are then asked to respond to 10 questions:

- What was your experience and what did you learn?
- How did it feel to learn this? How do these new thoughts make you feel?
- How did frustrations feel when things were not going according to plan?
- What joys did you feel out of the experience?
- How has this learning experience make you more sensitive to the learning process?
- How can your learning help you with children with special needs, cultural diversity, linguistic diversity, and gender differences?

- Consider children who may have been challenged with your newly-acquired skill. How would they feel? How could you help them to feel secure and safe in their learning and failing?
- Has the learning become part of who you are and how you conduct yourself as a teacher/ teacher candidate? How?
- How will this learning help you and the students you teach?
- What would you personally like to learn or explore next?

These reflective writings provide trainees with two essential takeaways: the first is the time to think, write, and re-write their thoughts, and second, immediate ability to respond to the activity (Boyer, 2010).

During the discussion of the activity, the trainee highlights empathy from teachers' perspectives and in the context of the challenges of learning. Through this training program, empathy may be developed through a process which begins with the initial recognition that teachers need to feel empathy toward others (Boyer, 2010). This is followed by emotion identification to support self-understanding, which is in turn, followed by the acknowledgement of professional demands in the context of empathy. proactive discussions of how to meet these professional demands through active engagement in a holistic learning process for themselves and their future students.

In this training program, the context for their typically come “from their past experiences as learners culminating in their teaching philosophies, their present learning experiences, and the hope for their teaching future” (Boyer, 2010, p. 320). Through this process, they develop a teaching persona that can potentially move from a “general and broad conception of their need for empathy and caring to the more specific

and applied conception of empathy in action” (Boyer, 2010, p. 320). Due to this experiential learning approach in the program, the trainees can potentially develop across five categories. It must be noted that the experiential learning approach has been measured many times in the past. An instrument that measures experiential learning is Bloom’s Taxonomy, which was developed for the purpose of creating a uniform terminology as they discuss learning and assessment methods (Murphy, 2007). Bloom’s Taxonomy continues to be widely used today.

The first pertains to globalized or a general response that emphasizes the recognition that other people have feelings such that they have to be sensitive, and the challenges of being empathic. The second involves idiosyncratic projection that highlights properties of an ego focus and idealized professional focus. The third refers to a “vicarious ideation initially involved thinking” about students and others from a distance, then developmentally moving toward actually walking in the shoes” of students and “feeling the metaphorical pebbles in their lives” (Boyer, 2010, p. 320). The fourth pertains to a “confluent constructivism or a merging of influences in a person’s life” encompassing dimensions such as context, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and action or symbiotic reciprocity, that lead to the fifth category. This category is a diversified vision that is appreciative for the big picture, including, issues such as gender, equity, self-regulation, emotion regulation, purposeful living and lifelong learning (Boyer, 2010).

**Resilience.** Through the accounts of participants, it is evident that, perhaps due to their maturity level as well as individual challenges in schooling, many of them have developed resilience. Consequently, even in the face of perceived lack of teacher empathy, the participants remained motivated to perform well academically. Resilience is

the ability to overcome challenges (Rojas Flórez, 2015). Resilience becomes evident when people face difficult experiences and know how to deal with or adapt to them. According to Rojas Flórez (2015), resilience is a dynamic process through which people demonstrate their adaptive responses when faced with adversities in life. Here, adversity is defined as “environmental conditions that interfere with or threaten the accomplishment of age-appropriate developmental tasks” (Rojas Flórez, 2015, p. 66).

In relation to the aforementioned, resilience is an ability through which a person surpasses challenges in life such that they become competent or skilled in overcoming such challenges and adversity (Rojas Flórez, 2015). In order to be adaptive, cultural, academic, affective, and physical contexts are at play. A person adapts according to these different contexts in order to function optimally. Here, it is important to note that resilience does not only depend on a person’s environment, but also on individual development (Rojas Flórez, 2015). It is important to note that the relation between environment and individual development leads to a heightened probability that an undesirable outcome arises, the occurrence which is called “risk.” From the viewpoint of resilience, there are certain risk factors, or “measurable characteristics in a group of individuals or their situations that predict negative outcomes” (Rojas Flórez, 2015, p. 66).

At the opposite end of risk factors are protective factors that pertain to an individual’s personal attributes, contexts or interactions that can lead to improved results, particularly in risky circumstances. Protective factors can positively impact the ability of a person to adapt to situations in spite of adversity. Therefore, it may be said that two protective factors that help individuals become more resilient are (a) individual personal attributes; and (b) occurrences in a person’s environment that impact his or her



experiences in life (Rojas Flórez, 2015). For these reasons, it is essential that a person overcomes adversities in life and develop the skills that enable them to surpass them. Through the development of resilience, people can enhance lifelong skills, including, communication and problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to make realistic plans as well as the capabilities that allow them to accomplish these plans.

Meanwhile, academic or educational resilience has been defined as the increased likelihood that an individual will succeed in academic endeavors, in spite of the existence of challenges and adversities coming from previous experiences in life or present attributes or circumstances (Ricketts, Engelhard & Chang, 2015). This academic success as well as success in educational pursuits in spite of adversities was observed in this study's participants. It is important to note that early studies of academic resilience typically use an outcome-based approach to identify resilience. Indeed, historically, scholars have assessed resilience in students through the use of two criteria: measuring risks and measuring academic achievement (Ricketts, et al., 2015). Notably, risk factors associated with academic resilience include coming from a low socioeconomic background, membership in a minority group, and, having a history of poor academic performance. In this regard, risk factors for this study's participants include being in remediation classes and having apathetic teachers. According to Ricketts et al. (2015), the ability of students to overcome their risks become greater when they understand their risks. This is because resilience is clearly a term that is externally applied "by observers of a series of actions and outcomes. But central to the concept is a set of subjectively defined goals, aspirations and barriers" (Ricketts et al., 2015, p. 1).

**Teacher Oppression.** Laws are comprised of intention (spirit) and words (letter) (Bevel & Altrogge, 2010). Congress and legislators enact laws and write regulations. On the other hand, State Departments of Education, Boards of Education, and superintendents interpret the law and craft their policies and procedures. Usually, school districts or program directors that will comply with the law according to their interpretations, thereby grounding their perceived fiduciary reality (Bevel & Altrogge, 2010). Meanwhile, parents expect the school to fully comply with the law. However, school leaders are not required to be experts in the special needs of their students, or understand their students' families, or be empathic towards their students. Nevertheless, one of the most crucial qualities an education candidate, teacher or administrator, is to develop the abilities to deeply understand and be sensitive to the feelings and needs of others, as well as, the commitment to serve and provide for the specific needs of each student. Teachers and administrators should also have the courage and dedication to transform this sensitivity and commitment to action for the overarching goal of alleviating others' pain and suffering.

There have been varied cases to which teacher oppression has been attributed. However, a primary example of teacher oppression is related to the paradigm shift being urged by many, from a teacher-centered approach to student-centered learning (SCL). Throughout the history of education in the United States, there have been shifts in models that practitioners use as general guide. In relation to these, one of the most recent developments in pedagogy has been the emergence of student-centered pedagogy. Under this approach, teachers are asked to step back from their usual role, and assume the role of facilitator instead. According to SCL rationale, teachers should no longer devote time

to teach students what they should think because it is better to teach them how to think (Woo & Laxman, 2013). A dilemma that has arisen is that while the SCL empowers students have their own voice, its proponents have essentially silenced teachers. It cannot be emphasized enough that teachers, by virtue of their education, training and expertise, are conferred with a position of authority in the classroom (Seng, 2014). For many who are familiar with the dedication that teachers typically have for their vocation, the authority that teachers have in the classroom is just but commensurate considering the entirety of their lived experience as well as expertise that has secured them esteemed positions in the academic institution (Seng, 2014). Here, the more important question is whether students can truly learn through SCL as much as they could have learned from their teachers.

Supporters of SCL disparagingly label teachers as the “sage on the stage” (Gibson, 1996) and “oracle” of teaching and learning (Woo & Laxman, 2013, p.51). On the other hand, the bulk of research on pedagogies show that “minimal guidance in student-centered learning pedagogies do not work” (Woo & Laxman, 2013, p. 51). Moreover, “so far as there is any evidence from controlled studies, it almost uniformly supports direct, strong instructional guidance rather than constructivist-based (Woo & Laxman, 2013, p. 52). p. 83).

Clearly, those pushing for SCL are oppressive to teachers. In order to secure justice for the said teachers, having policies addressing tensions pertaining to matters such as pedagogy would be helpful. This is where the concept of teacher agency comes in. Over the years, the concept of human agency has been discussed and debated among, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, and anthropologists

(Campbell, 2012). To note, agency allows individuals, and to certain degrees, collectives, to make free or independent choices, to be autonomous, and to exercise judgment in the interests of others and oneself (Campbell, 2012). Agency is also used to describe those who have the capacity to act on the behalf of others.

Educational scholarship often situates the exploration of agency from the perspective of the teacher's role (Campbell, 2012). Indeed, the capacity of teachers to use professional discretion in their pedagogical and curricular practices exists, not always easily, alongside their accountability to the state," which generally maintains the overall authority for educational policy (Campbell, 2012). It is important to note that teachers are seen as agents of socialization as well as change agents, whose decisions and activities "reflect the implementation, interpretation, adaptation, alteration, substitution, subversion, and/or creation of the curriculum contexts in which they work" (Campbell, 2012, p. 184). Some of these expressions of agency contradict one another. However, these tensions highlight the value of contemplating the question: Agency for what?

In considering the aims, purposes and ends does, and indeed should, teacher agency serve, there are also those who question whether agency is "uniformly positive and beneficial" while others also ask whether agency is "best expressed through its support of or challenge to normative educational discourses and expectations" (Campbell, 2012, p. 184). Answers to these questions will be divergent, changeable, and context-specific, most likely reflective of values and assumptions of a political, social, and philosophical nature.

Teacher agency has also been defined according to moral terms. For instance, it has been noted "teaching is fundamentally a moral activity, that classrooms are sites of

moral interaction, and that teachers are moral agents” (Campbell, 2012, p. 185). In relation to these, moral agency is a fairly generalized state wherein “a person considers the interests of others, does not make discriminations on irrelevant grounds, and has a clear set of principles or virtues in which he or she believes and on which he or she acts” (Campbell, 2012, p. 185). Moreover, “double-pronged state that entails a dual commitment on the part of the teacher” (Campbell, 2012, p. 185). The first state pertains to the high and exacting ethical standards the teacher as a moral person and a moral professional adheres to, while the second pertains to the teacher as a “moral educator, model, and exemplar” so that through their actions, words, and attitudes, may be seen to be living by the same principles that they hope their students will emulate (Campbell, 2012, p. 182).

This dual perspective can be adapted more broadly to position teacher agency in terms of, firstly, a teacher’s commitment to governing his or her professional practice according to deeply held values, convictions, and beliefs about teaching, learning, and epistemology. Moreover, the teacher’s capacity to engage students in curricular experiences that are compatible with these values is an excellent measure of potential for agency. Relevant here is the observation that “teaching is an activity involving a deep awareness of the significance of one’s choices and how those choices influence the development and well-being of others” (Campbell, 2012, p. 182). Apart from these, as an extension of their own agency, teachers have to respect the agency of their students as autonomous human beings. In contemplating about what they are trying to achieve in their classroom interactions, teachers also need to consider this from the point of view of cultivating and fostering student agency. And, to return to the core

question previously introduced, they have to ponder upon both of these perspectives in terms of the question,

“Agency for what?” Through this question, teachers can strive for a solution to their oppression so that they similarly aim to facilitate their students’ ongoing development of agency and learning.

Therefore, empathy and dispositions need to be developed and deepened over time by means of engaging in activities that expand one’s experiences and horizons. In this regard, as leaders, teachers and school leaders such as deans need to undergo personal and professional development in order to achieve these effectively. Notably, the roles of school leaders and teachers have become highly complex, further complicated by the passage of laws such as No Child Left Behind and the revised IDEA (Bevel & Altrogge, 2010). School administrators should be able to be real instructional leaders for each and every teacher in the academic institution especially since teachers directly influence the future of the students. Hence, it is essential that there is open collaboration between the school administrators, teachers, and parents.

School administrators and teachers need to exercise beliefs and values based on a strong sense of ethics and care: the needs of students are first and foremost (Bevel & Altrogge, 2010). Hence, in spite of the laws constraining emotions in the teachers, in the case of empathy, the principles of ethics and care alone merit the demonstration of empathy to students. Because of these, school administrators need to endeavor to do what is best for students, including empathic approaches for teachers. However, such leaders in the field of education, particularly, need to make sure that teachers are provided with the

appropriate resources that will allow them to be empathic, including, professional development.

Wherein the theory of social identity indicates that individuals tend to identify themselves based on the group they belong in; however this thought must be modified considering that students are unique and different from one another. As Tapper (2013) suggests, student needs and situations should not be treated in general or universally. By modifying this perception, teachers as educators shall then realize that students have highly individualized needs and their treatment and methods shall be flexible enough to accommodate such needs. The current study can then serve as awareness or consciousness for the schools to take the subject of lack of empathy seriously as the issue negatively influences some students and affects their initiative, willingness, and motivation to learn.

**Diverse Remedial Learning Needs.** Just as importantly, remedial teachers should be able to meet diverse learning needs. The concept of diverse learning needs emerged out of transforming social structures and demographics, as well as the pursuit of inclusive classrooms populated learners who each had differing paces at which they learned (Suh, 2010). Therefore, in today's classrooms, it is not surprising to find an English as Second Language learner, sitting alongside a special education learner who struggles with the metacognitive facet of problem-solving (2010). Remedial teachers should be able to meet such diverse remedial learner needs, using methods that they deem appropriate. The following subsections discuss some approaches that teachers may tap into.

***Application of Learning Portfolios.*** A learning portfolio is a compilation of all the assignments, reports and other pertinent documents that the relevant student had

accomplished during the past school year or semester (Jong, Chen, Chan, Hsia & Lin, T. (2012). In other words, the learning portfolio documents can provide snapshots about the learning journey that students have taken. Through these documents and records, teachers can evaluate students' learning status as well as learning attributes (Jong et al., 2012).

***Giving Feedback.*** Historically, feedback has been considered as an integral part of the educational process in the form of grades, verbal and written comments from the instructor. The importance of feedback has been increasingly recognized, with considerable attention given to type and timing of feedback. Some scholars assert that in classroom settings involving classmates, the most effective feedback approach is one that is given promptly as opposed to delayed feedbacks. Indeed, according to researchers, if the goal is to improve student performance, then the most effective feedback approach is to promptly give the feedback to the intended person (Jong et al., 2012). Moreover, feedbacks that are more elaborate, such as feedbacks explaining why a student's answer was correct or incorrect, help students perform better in examinations.

***Use of Technology.*** Especially for subjects such as mathematics and science, and especially when teaching diverse learners, teachers should have knowledge regarding technological tools so that they can design tasks that amplify the said subjects (Suh, 2010). According to Suh (2010), technological tools impact learning in subjects such as mathematics and science due to the ability of these technologies to off-load routine tasks, including, computations, to compact information and provide greater efficiency in learning. The following are the abilities of technological tools when used in mathematics. First, such technologies can demonstrate linked representations so that learners can visualize connections between images and numbers. Technological tools can also



provide immediate feedback so that students can check their understanding throughout the learning process, thereby preventing misconceptions. Technologies also enable teachers to teach and represent mathematical ideas in non-conventional ways.

***Response to Intervention.*** Response to intervention (RTI) is a method educators use in order to help students who are struggling with a skill or lesson (Skinner, Mcclary, Skolits, Poncy & Cates, 2013). Typically, teachers use interventions to help every student succeed academically. In the case of struggling students, the teacher may use test scores or alternative measures of progress in order to decide upon an intervention evidenced to be effective in addressing such students' learning issues. In the event that the student does not respond positively to the initial interventions, the teacher uses more focused interventions so that the student can master the skill or lesson. To note, RTI strategies may target both learning and behavior.

RTI was introduced as part of the 2004 reauthorization of the IDEA, as a method for helping students with particular learning disabilities (Skinner et al., 2013). Essentially, legislators and the Office of Special Programs (OSEP) asked school districts not to depend on the discrepancy model in determining learning disabilities but instead, to consider using interventions tried within RTI. In broad terms, RTI occurs in six stages. First, students are provided with "generally effective" instruction by their classroom teacher (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003, p. 159). Second, their progress is monitored and third, those who do not respond get something else, or something more, from their teacher or someone else. Fourth, their progress is then again monitored and fifth, those who still do not respond either qualify for special education or for special education evaluation (Fuchs et al., 2013).

To note, a school's RTI team will try increasingly intense interventions and even work to identify a specific learning disability (SLD) in the event that the student does not show progress. For instance, a student who does not perform well on a test requiring reading goes through the RTI process. The teacher attempts to read questions to the student to find out if the latter knows the answer but merely struggles with reading. Through this process, RTI helps screening the student for a possible SLD or perhaps the student simply needs further testing.

The RTI framework is like a pyramid divided into three tiers: base, middle and top. Movement between tiers is determined by a student's response to certain interventions. Notably, roughly 80% of students and the most widely-used teaching strategies and interventions are found in the base section of the pyramid, Tier 1. Tier 1 is the primary level of prevention (of failure). On the other hand, Tier 2 or the secondary level of prevention is in the middle section of the pyramid. Tier 2 interventions become more intensive because the students are considered to be at a greater risk. About 15% of students are found in this section at any given time (Fuchs et al., 2013). Meanwhile, only 5% of students are in Tier 3, or the tertiary level of prevention, at the top of the pyramid. At Tier 3, students receive the most intense and consistent interventions. In spite of the fact that Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and special education are both associated with Tier 3, not all children in this tier are in a special education program.

***Diversity of Instructional Grouping.*** In any school, effective instruction depends on a school-wide commitment to instructional grouping based on skill level (Kauffman, Landrum, Mock, Sayeski & Sayeski, 2005). Therefore, all students, regardless of any identified disability, receive instruction that is for them neither frustrating nor boring.

With no consideration for the appropriate placement of students, a learner's experience could be instructionally patronizing. It must be emphasized that schools should place students with learning deficiencies in groups where their potential for learning is greatest. For general education students, this ideal should also be the default practice. Grouping students according to need and skill and providing effective instruction to those groups lead to the appropriate placement of all students. However, the direct consequence of this approach is that not all students will be included in all instructional groups. It cannot be overstated that one of the keys to effective instruction of all students is grouping them for success. There are four criteria for appropriate grouping:

1. The student's performance should be 70% first-time correct on material that is being taught.
2. The student should be at least 90% first-time correct on material that had been taught earlier and is assumed to have been mastered.
3. The student should be able to go through a "lesson" in the anticipated amount of time and should not require great amounts of additional practice.
4. At the end of each lesson, the student should be practically 100% firm on everything present in the lesson.

The proper grouping for instruction is one of the hallmarks of Direct Instruction, considered by some as the most effective approach to instruction (Kauffman et al., 2005). According to Kauffman et al. (2005), if children are to be taught at all, then they should be grouped homogeneously according to principles of effective instruction, rather than group them heterogeneously as is the popular grouping currently used today. Refusal to develop or maintain a diversity of placements and instructional options for students in

relatively homogeneous groups is, tantamount to a refusal to recognize and accommodate the diversity of students' instructional needs (Kauffman et al., 2005).

### **Trustworthiness of the Results**

To enhance the trustworthiness of the results, member checking was also utilized to verify that the interpretation was accurate. A summary of the individual results of the analysis was sent to the corresponding participant with the aim of assessing the accuracy of the data. All of the participants did not give any feedback at indicated that the analysis was incorrect or inaccurate.

### **Limitations of Study**

The researcher tried to maximize all available resources to achieve and create the best possible output with findings that would be of great help to schools, faculty members, and remedial students. However, inadequacies on the responses of the participants, target population groups, and type of methodology employed could still be improved for future studies. The limitations of the study follow.

1. The researcher believes that the students could have controlled their responses as they were afraid that their identities might be exposed or revealed to their schools or teachers. This was probable as their responses needed to address the negative effects and experiences that they experienced from their teachers' lack of empathy. To address the limitation, the researcher constantly reminded the students that their identities would be kept confidential throughout and even after the study. The informed consent forms signed before the interviews formally started were also honored, and thus all

interview tapes, data, and transcripts were kept in a vault and will be secured for five years, as required by most universities in the United States.

2. Another inadequacy was the homogenous target sample, which limited the gathering of perceptions and experiences to the students alone. The inclusion of the teachers, staff members, and administration could have added depth to the study as they also have knowledge on the situation of the remedial classes in their schools. In addition, the perceptions gathered from them would have allowed the validation of the responses of the interviewed students and thus provided the study with a stronger findings section.
3. Finally, the use of multiple sources of data may have provided a more diverse perspective on the topic as opposed to relying only in participant interviews. Moreover, multiple sources of data could have made the process of triangulation possible to enhanced trustworthiness of the study. However, despite the lack of resources, the researcher was still able to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the study by engaging in the transcendental phenomenological process (go on here about that). As just mentioned, member checks were also key to ensuring the study's quality.

### **Future Directions of Research/ Field**

Future directions of the research study shall involve the development of the limitations presented in the previous section. Based on the limitations, as well as the findings of the study, the researcher suggests for the future research projects to consider several suggestions

In terms of methodological design, future researchers should employ a greater target population, which would include the perceptions and experiences of other individuals who also have knowledge of the lack of empathy of teachers but would be different from the responses of the students. This shall provide a more extensive view on the topic. Employment of methodology with a wider range of resources is also recommended in order to allow a better understanding of the topic.

Future scholars can conduct a similar study but with the focus on the effects of the demographics such as age, gender, and ethnicities of the participants. By doing so, greater narratives as well as themes shall then emerge. With greater themes, literature on the perceived lack of teacher empathy and remedial classroom conflicts shall be enriched.

For the future directions of the concerned stakeholders, the findings will increase awareness among school leaders that access this document. The responses of the students will give them a closer look at what and how these students experience and feel whenever they interact with their teachers in a remedial classroom especially for the educators and the administrators. The themes pertaining to the negative impacts of the lack of empathy shall also serve as a lesson and open the eyes of the school administrators to focus and target the improvement of the state of remedial classes in their schools by developing clearer and fair policies for the students in a remedial classroom.

One of the issues that emerged from the results of the analysis is that remediation students demonstrated resilience and proactive motivation to address their own problems despite the perceived lack of empathy from teachers. Future researchers can further examine this finding by focusing on the experience of students who are able to perform well in school despite encountering many challenges in school, including the perception

that they do not receive help from their teachers. This future research can illuminate the role of personal factors in the success of students enrolled in remediation classes.

The results of the study highlighted the importance of teacher empathy in facilitating a more effective classroom experience for students in remediation classes. The future of the students in a remedial classroom might improve if teachers exert more effort to be more empathetic to their students by listening, observing, and communicating with their students beyond classroom instruction. The school leaders, teachers, and administrators shall develop better understanding and empathy for the needs of their students and thus, will be able to help students solve their challenges the best way possible.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

- Question 1: How does your remedial class teacher show empathy to you?
- Question 2: How do you feel when you perceive that a remedial class teacher is not emphatic to you? Are you angry, glad, mad, or afraid?
- Question 3: What are the thoughts that run in your mind when you sense that your remedial class teacher is not empathic to you?
- Question 4: Do you think a lack of empathy from your teacher affects your depth of learning? Why, or why not?
- Question 5: Do you think a lack of empathy from your teacher affects your motivation to learn? Why, or why not?
- Question 6: In your past experiences, what kinds of conflicts have arisen between you and your remedial class teacher?
- Question 7: Do you think these conflicts would have been resolved if the remedial class teacher was more emphatic? Why, or why not?

## Appendix B

## Coding Process and Themes Formed for RQ 1

Table 5. *Coding Process and Themes Formed for RQ 1*

Research Question	Thematic Label	Themes Formed	Examples of Codes used in Coding
RQ1: What are the impacts of a perceived lack of teacher empathy upon students in remedial classes?	The impacts of a perceived lack of teacher empathy upon students in remedial classes	Major Theme 1: Lack of teacher empathy has no impact on students in remedial classes	- "We are in college, and I can only look for so much, but I've learned to realize through life you get out of it what you put in it." - "I needed to unlock some things that I didn't know that I had locked." - "You feel like, uh, you don't matter enough to a teacher to take the time out and, and really see what the problem is." - "But when they don't, because we are all adults here, I still must carry on and do what I'm supposed to do."  - "I don't get angry, I don't try to mad, and I'm definitely not afraid. I'm like this, if I have a problem with a professor I'm at the age where I go to them one on one and talk to them." - "I thought he taught—he told us what to do. You should've listened." - "Sometimes I think they don't care and sometime I think they just- they just like doing the job."  Sub-theme 1: Being afraid thus not meeting the demands of the class  Sub-theme 2: Decreases the self-esteem of students  Sub-theme 3: Students do not want to learn anymore

## Appendix C

## Coding Process and Themes Formed for RQ 2

Table 6. *Coding Process and Themes Formed for RQ 2*

Research Question	Thematic Label	Themes Formed	Examples of Codes used in Coding
Research Question 2: What possible types of conflicts may arise between teachers and students because of a perceived lack of teacher empathy?	The possible types of conflicts that may arise between teachers and students because of a perceived lack of teacher empathy	Major Theme 2: Lack of teacher empathy can result in lack of motivation among students  Sub-theme 1: Feeling of racism emerges Sub-theme 2: Notion of the teachers that students know the lesson already	- “No, it doesn’t, uh, affect my motivation to learn.” - “That question still depends, to me, on the individual. How bad do you want this education? “But for me, no. I’m trying to get as much as I can, because it’s a great institution and the professors have plenty of knowledge.” -“... You learn the teachers, you realize that most of the stuff you gotta get for yourself.” -“ And if, you know—if the teacher really doesn't seem all that interested in really helping you, it's just like, I want to give up.” -“ I believe it does because if the teacher does not exhibit any care once I perceive that they don’t care, I get the thoughts of why should I care.” -“ I don’t wanna do this. Um, he doesn’t care. Why should I care?” - “ Wow, they um—here we are with all these people, um.” -“ I would not like to accuse her of racism, but sometimes I wonder if that doesn’t have a part to play in it.” -“And they make assumptions that I should just get it or know it.”

## Appendix D

## Coding Process and Themes Formed for RQ 3

Table 7. *Coding Process and Themes Formed for RQ 3*

Research Question	Thematic Label	Themes Formed	Examples of Codes used in Coding
RQ3: What conflict resolution strategies should teachers use in order to address such conflicts?	The conflict resolution strategies should teachers use in order to address such conflicts	Major Theme 3: Students knowing their responsibilities	-“ It’s-it’s on the student. That teacher is gonna get a paycheck regardless if she bends over backwards, which most of ‘em do.” -“ Um, I have to take it up on myself to...” -“ Not everybody’s gonna have the same concern or the cares that you have, so therefore it’s your effort.” -“ Um, I try to read the syllabus and go by the rules, and that helps out a whole lot, and hopefully I don’t have any inconveniences or, uh, slight little hiccups in my own personal life.”
		Sub-theme 1: Proper communication with teachers	-“ I would go directly to the professor and each one was more than willing to assist me. Or if they couldn’t assist me, they’d pointing me in the right direction.” -“Talking to him after class.”
		Sub-theme 2: Teachers to be more understanding	-“ If the - the classroom teacher, if they - if they understand, they - they feel what you’re feeling and you feel like they do and they, uh, want to truly help you.” -“I really thought that my teacher should probably um be a little bit more mindful of um—that everybody’s hundred percent is not the same.”
		Sub-theme 3: Show positivity to students	-“ Whatever type of work they’re doing and to the people that they come in contact, it has a positive effect on the people”
		Sub-theme 4: Teachers to be more approachable	-“ I have encountered where they did not present themselves approachable. So I did not approach them I approached maybe someone in faculty or the dean because they were so standoffish and not approachable.”

## Appendix E

## Coding Process and Themes Formed for RQ 4

Table 8. *Coding Process and Themes Formed for RQ 4*

Research Question	Thematic Label	Themes Formed	Examples of Codes used in Coding
RQ4: How can empathy be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms?	How empathy can be best developed among teachers in remedial classrooms	Major Theme 4: Teachers need to care more for their students in order to develop their empathy	-“If you got someone that—that's, you know, seems like they care, um, it's all you really need to—you know, to keep going.” -“ A teacher shows that they really care about a student being successful; it has a greater impact on the learning of the class.” -“ Yes, and because I believe had he been more empathetic there would have been more of a commitment on his behalf.” -“ Because I’ve had very good professors, and they all seemed empathetic.” -“ Empathetic. I think it helps you. I mean, it- it grows you confidence in the instructor.”
		Sub-theme 1: Employing proper communication	-“ I would go directly to the professor and each one was more than willing to assist me.” -“ And he remembered who I was and, um, this was probably two semesters later. And, uh, when he saw me, he recognized me, um, in passing. And I think he respected that I was not, you know, messing around.”
		Sub-theme 2: If students showed more enthusiasm in learning	-“ So I kinda took it upon myself, as in the same premise where I thought there was a conflict, it actually wasn’t a conflict.”
		Sub-theme 3: Being more pleasant when teaching	-“ Instead of, uh, she should try to be more pleasant in, getting this information out.”