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# Recognizing, Empathizing, And Strategizing Tools For Teachers And Schools To Increase Academic Success For Homeless Highly Mobile (HHM) Students

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Recognizing, Empathizing, and Strategizing Tools for Teachers and Schools to Increase

Academic Success for Homeless Highly Mobile (HHM) Students

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the

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**CHAPTER ONE**

**Introduction**

In the following chapter, I will discuss my personal relations and how I became passionate about working with homeless and highly mobile (HHM) students. This transitions into additional background information about our current HHM population rates and some of the injustices that the students face on a regular basis. Furthermore, my investigation is to answer the question of, *How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly mobile (HHM) students?*

According to the website for the National Center for Homeless Education, children who are considered to be homeless or highly mobile means that they lack a regular, fixed, or stable residence. Homeless highly mobile (HHM) youth may be living in the following situations: shelters, hotels or weekly rate housing, abandoned buildings, cars, doubled up with friends or relatives, public spaces, or transitional housing.

**Rationale**

Growing up, I was raised by a single mother, along with my younger brother. My mother was always working, so we were required to attend both before and after school programs; we were considered low-income and were provided free lunches at school through the "Free or Reduced Lunch" program. During these elementary years, I was exposed to classmates who lived in shelters and were also known as "couch surfers"; This means that which the HHM children live with families or friends for a temporary time, until they find another place to move on to; this population is known as "highly mobile. " Because of this, my mom wanted my brother and I to learn a valuable life

lesson, so she had exposed us to the issue of homelessness at an extremely young age. When I was around eight years old, my mother brought my brother and I to the Salvation Army on Thanksgiving. This is a memory that I still remember vividly to this day, as we saw a side of homelessness that I had never seen before. Since we were working with the Salvation Army, my family and I were asked to scoop the food to be served to the homeless people in need. There, we saw homeless people making themselves vomit, so that they could receive another plate of food, as well as many other scarring observations. From an early age, I had a very grateful perspective and knew I wanted to make an impact to help provide homeless people the chance to strive in our society.

Throughout my adolescent and early adulthood, I have always been intrigued by homelessness and how it is still such a major issue that our society faces. During my junior year of college, I taught financial education classes through Lutheran Social Services at various locations, including a local homeless shelter named, "People Serving People" (PSP). At PSP, I heard some of the most heart-wrenching stories from the families, as to how they became homeless and the hardships that they continually face. One thing that really struck me at PSP is that most of the people staying there are under the age of 18. Furthermore, by gaining additional insight from homeless people firsthand, I became even more curious to continue working with the HHM population and created a goal to work with them in schools.

During my senior year of undergraduate studies, I was motivated to make a difference with HHM students, as a school social worker intern at Loring Elementary (a Minneapolis Public School). This is where I was responsible for monitoring school-wide

attendance, hosting weekly social skills groups, meeting with students individually as events/issues arise, and the list goes on. It was there, where I realized quickly that HHM students basic needs were not being met, they lacked appropriate clothing, and face additional hardships, yet they were still held to the same academic expectations as all of the other students. Furthermore, it was during this internship where my eyes were really opened to HHM injustices. Before the school year started, my supervisor and I created an educational event to inform the school staff and administration about HHM students and the hardships they face. Not only that, but we collected data on the students and their families to compile a list of shelters that were used most often. With that, we created a "shelter tour" and took all of the school's staff to view the shelters that many of our students and families stayed at. I had never heard so many people tell me that they had never been in a shelter, realized how difficult a living situation would be in a shelter, and the list goes on. This experience was one of the most eye-opening for not only myself, but also the entire staff of the elementary. They all thanked my supervisor and I, as it had opened their eyes as to what the HHM students have to deal with on a regular basis, which helps them to better understand the student within the classroom as well. This allowed for the staff to reflect, and then create more positive approaches to work better with their HHM students. Furthermore, this simple, yet daunting, shelter tour created a foundation for the school and how they would begin to shift their approach working with HHM students in a more positive, understanding way.

In addition, on my way to my internship at Loring, I observed an eye-opening event on many occasions. Before getting to the school, I would stop at a gas station

nearby to grab coffee and breakfast. In the parking lot, I witnessed a cargo van full with an entire family in it. Inside of the van, the family members were throwing clothes to each other and getting ready for the school day; I observed this family getting ready in their van regularly throughout the weeks of my internship. This was extremely eye-opening, as I would imagine that this family morning routine consisted of getting ready in their van to go to school; they most likely lived in the van. With this invaluable experience, it made me quickly realize the important lesson of, "never judge a book by its cover."

Fast-forward to present-day, I have been a substitute teacher for the past two years in Minneapolis Public Schools, and have also subbed for Osseo and Mounds View for about a year. Throughout all of my subbing experiences, I have worked with HHM students no matter where I worked. This is when I began to realize that HHM students are everywhere and it does not matter how well recognized a school or district is for their academic achievements or success. I quickly realized that some schools are more aware of the issue and how some brush the injustice under the rug. This is where my heart began to fill with passion again, so that these HHM students could have an opportunity with academic success no matter what school or district that they attend. I have personally ran "Jackets, Boots, Hats & Mittens" drives to ensure that HHM students have appropriate attire to be able to play outside with their classmates during the winter months. Also, I have worked with administration to create "Back-to-School Backpacks" that are filled with school supplies, so that the students have all of the necessary tools for learning. Furthermore, I have done little things that have made a positive impact for

HHM students, but I want to conduct more research on how to create an

all-encompassing program to streamline the academic success for all HHM students.

**Content and Background Information**

"In 1985, the Minnesota Department of Economic Security reported 290 dependent children with families in shelters statewide on a single night…[In] 1995, this number had risen more than 500% to 1,532 children. By 2005, it was 2,477" (Masten et al., 2008, p. 3). Please be aware that these numbers do not include the children and families who are known as "sofa surfers," which means that they live with families or friends for a temporary time, until they find another place to move on to; this population is known as "highly mobile."

As an elementary teacher, as well as a previous school social work intern in Minneapolis Public Schools, I have worked with HHM students on a regular basis. I have seen and heard about their hardships firsthand. For example, most of these students can only count on their meal at school and will be focused on where their next meal will come from and when it will be. Also, these students face various levels of trauma since they are uprooted regularly from where they are staying since there are typically limits on stay in shelters, as well as at their family's or friend's home. Not only are the children traumatized, but they also struggle to keep their clothes clean and personal hygiene up to society's standards. There are many other negative effects that HHM students face, but when it comes to academics, there is a correlation between academic success and being HHM.

Because of these reasons, plus many more, I have decided to focus on how schools can streamline academic success for HHM students. My intentions and hopes are that this will educate people on the bigger issue that the HHM population is facing, as well as awareness in the possibilities of academic success that these students have once their basic needs are met. Personally, I hope to learn more about what districts, cities, and Minnesota, as a whole, are doing to work together to fight this injustice for the HHM population. With the gathered information, my goal is to create a program that could be implemented in any school, anywhere to help streamline the academic success of their HHM students.

**Summary**

This first chapter introduces and sets the tone for the remaining chapters of my thesis project. My personal journey being exposed to homelessness, then also working with the HHM population within schools has provided me with a passion to continue working towards a solution. The ultimate goal of this research is to answer the question of, *How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly mobile (HHM) students?*

**Chapter Two Preview**

The following chapter will dig deeper using the strategy of a literature review to gain more information and become one step closer to a solution to such an important issue that HHM students face. This literature review will provide the reader with extensive pieces of information that is synthesized from many studies and research projects that have been conducted. With that, there will be a solid foundation of education

and awareness about the HHM population, the implications and obstacles that they face,

as well as how being HHM impacts academic performance in school.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**Literature Review**

**Introduction**

Homelessness has been a major social injustice issue that America has faced for decades. Nowadays, it is estimated that 1.17 million children are homeless or highly mobile, which is an increase of 24% over the past few years (Sparks, 2014, p. 31). The average age of becoming homeless is found to be 7.6 years old (Grant et al., 2013, p. 4).

The research question, *How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly mobile (HHM) students?*, requires a thorough baseline understanding of the HHM population, as well as the injustices and implications that they face. Furthermore, this literature review will focus on five main components that are fundamental to the research question: homeless highly mobile population, impacts of being HHM, resilience, school performance, and actions in place. In doing so, it will provide additional background information as to what the HHM population is comprised of and the effects of living an unstable life; it also debunks the misconception of HHM people being categorized as the same as people who live in poverty. In addition, there will be a focus on how these negative life experiences and stressors impact the children's personal lives, as well as their academic performance in school. Furthermore, examination of these themes will highlight the issues that the HHM population endures, but also will provide resources as to how schools can close the achievement gaps for HHM students.

**Homeless Highly Mobile Population**

Twenty-three percent of the total homeless population in America today is comprised of children under the age of 18 years old (Coker et al., 2009, p. 1446). African Americans comprise of less than 14% of the American population, but are found to be 39% of the total homeless population (Abdul Rahman et al., 2015, p. 696). With that, majority of the homeless population is comprised of minority people at a disproportionate rate. Majority of the homeless children face many health problems, mental disorders, abuse, and other long-lasting negative effects due to their unstable living situation. Overall, this section will provide information to the differences between living in poverty and those who are HHM, as well as the main reasons for why families face homelessness.

**Differences between being HHM and living in poverty.** There is a misconception that the HHM population is the same as people who live in poverty, however, there are some major differences. Although both populations face many life stressors, a study has found that HHM families are severely isolated, lack a support system and endure trust issues with others. Although studies have found that families who live in poverty may face homelessness one or more times over a period of time, they generally have a stable residence, whereas HHM youth may face housing instability for their whole childhood (Coker et al., 2009, p. 1446). Another thing to be aware of is the lack of healthcare and insurance between the two populations. A study in a major city found that HHM children were rated "fair" or "poor" in health, compared with housed poor children who were found to be healthier. They found that families who are HHM

have a tough time obtaining insurance due to the lack of a stable address of residence.

Also, the same study also found that the HHM children encountered more nutritional,

behavioral and developmental problems than housed children who live in poverty (Grant

et. al, 2013, p. 4). Because of the simultaneous stressors that the HHM population faces,

it is found to be more devastating than living in poverty (Ziesemer, 1994, p. 659).

Overall, both population groups face many negative life stressors and experiences, but

people who are HHM endure more adverse effects than those who live in poverty.

**Reasons for homelessness.** There can be many reasons for why someone

becomes homeless, but this section is going to provide insight into the most common

factors that cause this vulnerable population to face such instability. The Fragile Families

and Child Wellbeing Study found that by 2009, there was an increase for family

homeless shelter needs of 20% in Minneapolis, 40% in New York and 32% in

Massachusetts (Grant et al., 2013, p. 3). This is a growing issue within our society that

has many contributing factors as to why people become either homeless or highly mobile.

This section will provide insight into some of the reasons for facing homelessness on the

structural, as well as individual level.

One study researched the effects of welfare and found that even those recipients

move regularly and can face housing instability. A similar study found that welfare

recipients have high rates of doubling up and living with others, which is categorized as

highly mobile. There is also a connection found that the welfare reform that occurred

during the 1990's, which restructured the entire system for families in need of public

assistance, that causes homelessness (Blank, 2002). This is so, because there are many

reasons for recipients to lose their welfare benefits, such as working and generating a living wage that no longer falls within the threshold to qualify for the program. This loss of benefits can lead to eviction, as people have been found to pay up to 30% of their wages on living expenses. Because of this vicious cycle, it could ultimately cause such families to become homeless or highly mobile; this was the case for 3% of welfare recipients in Michigan and 12% in Wisconsin (Nichols & Gault, 2003). Also, there is a connection between welfare recipients experiencing domestic violence, which leaves a major decision to occur of leaving the situation and risking homelessness; the domestic violence may continue to occur, if the situation is not left. There are many reasons for why this occurs, such as an increase in stress levels due to the cost of living increasing, but there are long-term effects that are caused by domestic violence, so leaving the situation is typically a reasonable risk to take.

As stated earlier, another reason many families face homelessness is because of escaping domestic violence situations (Nichols & Gault, 2003; Obradovíc et al., 2009; Sparks, 2014). There was a study conducted across ten different states, which comprised of 777 homeless parents (mainly women). The researchers discovered that 22% of those parents left their previous residence due to domestic violence (Gault, 2003). On the other hand, some studies have found that families in shelters have left domestic violence situations at a rate of 47% (Criminal Justice – IresearchNet, 2015). Although there are varying rates of domestic violence that occurs and causes for families to become homeless, this is an important factor to take into consideration when working with the

HHM population, as such trauma can lead to long-lasting negative effects for the children and family.

With all of the rising costs of living, social service cuts, and the housing crisis of 2008, there is a multitude of reasons as to how the economy has played a crucial role in the spiked rates of homelessness (Duffield, 2001). It is found that about 77% of all homeless people live in large cities, which is where the cost of living can be double compared to suburbs and smaller towns nearby (Abdul Rahman et al., 2015, p. 696). This can easily lead to a sliding effect of not being able to pay rent and bills on time, which can cause eviction. Since social services are being cut, there are limited subsidies that would help to alleviate the stresses for families who may need assistance in paying their rent or other living expenses; this relates to the welfare issue discussed earlier. Lastly, after the housing crisis of 2008, there was found to be an increase of 25% of homeless students accounted for in 459 school districts (Duffield & Lovell, 2008, p. 2). Furthermore, there are many socioeconomic correlations with the rate increase of the homeless population in America. With that, it is important for awareness and education to be created on these issues and social injustices, so that there is an increase of mindfulness and empathy when working with the HHM population.

**Connection to the research.** Knowing the staggering statistics of homelessness that children may face is extremely important to be aware of. As educators and staff within schools, there needs to be an educational foundation of knowledge formed about how children become HHM, as well as the differences between those who are housed, but live in poverty; they have different needs and risks, so this is important to understand the

differentiation between the two student groups (HHM & housed, but in poverty). All of these components are necessary to be aware and educated in, as they need to be highly considered when working with the vulnerable HHM students. This will allow for staff and teachers to become more mindful in their practices and approaches with these vulnerable students, which can result in positive relationships and trust to be built. Overall, by being aware of the HHM population and where they are coming from, this will allow for a clearer understanding as to what the HHM student is going through, which can be taken more into consideration when working with them.

**Impacts of Being HHM**

There are a vast amount of social injustices that HHM youth face on a regular basis. Not only is their health affected, but they can also be susceptible to harmful and dangerous situations. This section will dive deeper into the effects of being HHM, such as meeting basic needs for living, health implications, as well as the risk of sexual abuse and domestic violence. All of these components are concluded with the importance of being educated in these areas when working with HHM youth.

**Basic needs.** HHM students face many hardships, but a major component to consider is their basic needs. Maslow (1954), a psychological researcher, set out to find what motivates people unrelated to their unconscious desires or any extrinsic rewards. From there, a hierarchy of needs was created and consisted of five levels: (1) biological and physiological needs, (2) safety needs, (3) love and belongingness needs, (4) esteem needs, and (5) self-actualization needs. In order for people to reach self-actualization, Maslow argued that everyone needs to meet all of the levels of needs in order to do so;

They also could not move up a level, until each need was met, starting with biological and physiological needs (as cited in McLeod, 2007, p. 2). According to this theory, the HHM population would not be able to reach past the second level (sometimes not even the first level), as they do not have a consistent, safe place to live (or consistent meals). With Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in mind, this would ultimately cause these HHM children to be focused on achieving their biological, physiological (both from the first level), as well as safety needs (second level) before any other considerations can be taken in. In result, this can cause for distractedness and behavior problems in the classroom, as most HHM students suffer from developmental and emotional delays in relation to their basic needs not being met (Coker, 2009, p. 1446).

      **Health implications.** Due to many components of being HHM, studies have found there are many linkages to negative health implications that these children endure. Many HHM youth face speech problems, asthma, stomach issues, ear infections, as well as other physical implications at a rate of twice as often as peers their age (Coker, 2009, p. 1446; Duffield, 2001, p. 326; Herbers et al., 2012, p. 366). These health issues have been linked to the HHM children have also been found to be twice as likely to have high amounts of lead found in their blood, increased amounts of hospital admissions, as well as delayed immunization schedules, compared to poor permanently housed peers. All of these health problems can be found in relation to the HHM population having a lack of access to adequate healthcare (Fantuzzo & Perlman, 2006, p. 942; Rafferty & Rollins, 1989, p. 13; Rouse et al., 2011, p. 284; Ziesemer et al., 1994, p. 665). A study of 401 pregnant women in a major city found that 40% of them received no prenatal health care,

which in result led to over 15% of those children to be born with significantly low birth weights (Rafferty & Rollins, 1989, p. 13). Most of these health issues that the HHM population can be prevented or treated, however, with the lack of healthcare and resources, the children face many negative health effects.

HHM children who experienced stressful life experiences have been found to exhibit higher levels of cortisol. According to the Endocrine Society, cortisol is a hormone that is released by a person's adrenal glands in cases where they display high stress levels. This suggests that those who experience multiple, intense life stressors can have negative impacts on the individual's well being. Also, such high levels of stress in early childhood may affect how children respond to future obstacles both behaviorally and physiologically. Also, HHM individuals who exhibit high levels of cortisol have been found to lack stress regulation and adequate cognitive performance (Masten, 2008, p. 10).

The many impacts of homelessness can lead to a manifestation of psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, and other behavioral disorders. Studies have found that homeless students are twenty times more likely to be depressed, as well as be 1.5 times more likely to have behavior problems compared with poor housed peers (Larson & Meehan, 2009, p. 7). Another study has found that 30% of HHM children ages 1-19 were diagnosed with psychiatric or developmental disorders; Children under 36 months in age were diagnosed with the same disorders at a rate of 19% (Grant et al., 2013, p. 4). With such high rates of disorders, these unstable students are often found to lack focus and misbehave in environments, such as the classroom.

Due to all of the health implications and disorders, 43% of homeless youth have attempted to commit suicide, 33% of them also show effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and majority of these vulnerable children face a range of behavioral and emotional dysfunction (Abdul Rahman et al., 2015, p. 698). Because of this, it is important for teachers and schools to be educated on this bigger issue, so that they can take their mental state into consideration when creating action plans of how to create a more stable, positive learning environment for these HHM students. This will help to alleviate any additional stressors for the students, as well as create a solid understanding for the teacher as to the student's well being.

**Sexual abuse & domestic violence.** Homeless highly mobile children lack safety and shelter, which can cause them to be vulnerable to dangerous situations. In addition, these children may face the lack of adequate parental supervision due to reasons such as their parents needing to work long hours and/or overnight shifts. Because of this, the HHM youth can be left in vulnerable situations, which can result in them facing exhausting rates of abuse.

HHM youth are found to be two to three times more likely to get assaulted or raped and, "…[these children] make up 66% of all sex offence victims and 25% of all U.S. crime victims" (Abdul Rahman et al., 2015, p. 698). Another study found that 17% of homeless children were forced into unwanted sexual engagement by either a family or household member (Duffield, 2001, p. 326). In addition, because of the lack of resources, shelter and appropriate parental supervision, 33% of homeless youth have been found to exchange sexual favors for food (Abdul Rahman et al., 2015, p. 698). No matter the

circumstances, sexual abuse is traumatizing and can have long-lasting emotional and cognitive effects that can hinder the child's life. It is important to be aware of such occurrences, as these vulnerable children can face trust and other relationship issues as a result of being taken advantage of by adults in their life.

Another major danger that HHM children face is the increase of being exposed and/or becoming victims of domestic abuse. There was a 10-city study conducted with 777 homeless parents (whom majority were women), which found that 22% of the participants left their last residence due to domestic violence. Another similar study done in a urban transitional housing shelter discovered that 45% of its residents were victims or witnessed domestic violence at some point during their life (Nichols, 2003, p. 115).

**Connection to the research.** When working with HHM youth, it is important to be educated, as well as mindful, to the injustices they face regularly. With the trauma experienced from sexual, domestic or both types of abuse, the HHM population faces higher, compounding rates of mental illness, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and anxiety (Grant et al., 2013, p. 2). A study of 159 homeless youth conducted in Minneapolis found that they have, "…experienced significantly more negative life events, had lower perceived self-worth and academic performance, were less likely to report having a close friend, and exhibited more behavior problems than their low-income peers" (Larson & Meehan, 2009, p. 7). All of this is related to the compounding issues of the HHM children not being able to have their basic needs met, different abuses that they are faced with, as well as the disproportionate rate of health implications. Because of this, schools have to be considerate and take in all factors when

working with HHM children, as they have unmet needs, which can lead to negative long-lasting results in school and other aspects of their life.

**Resilience**

Although it is undeniable that HHM students face many hardships and injustices, some of these vulnerable children show their strengths through resilience. According to the online version of Merriam-Webster dictionary, resilience means to, "[have] an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change." There are many reasons as to why some HHM students are more resilient than others, but there is no argument to have when their test scores are at or above average for certain areas in academics. However, overall, HHM students underperform disproportionately in school, as they face many issues that deter them from success. Furthermore, it is important to look at all aspects when conducting research, so this section is going to provide information about academic achievement findings, as well as other factors for resilience, which allow for some HHM students to find success in academics.

**Academic achievement findings.** Some HHM students are resilient to their adverse situations and are able to succeed in some areas of academics. Although studies overwhelmingly show how HHM students score extremely lower than housed peers (even those who live in poverty), there have been some studies on reading and math achievements that show learning improvements for HHM children. Researchers blatantly state that there are not specific reasons to pinpoint as to why the reading and math scores improve, but there are some factors for the resilience that assists in the HHM students' academic achievements (Cutuli et al., 2013).

From 2005 until 2010, there was a study conducted within an urban school district, which analyzed the risk status of students and their reading and math levels. This study found that, although the HHM students still performed significantly lower than all other groups of students (housed students who live in poverty were a close comparison), their reading and math achievements showed a steady improvement from third grade until eighth. They concluded that gaining an early start and exposure to reading is a positive indicator as to HHM students' success in reading. In regards to math, there weren't any specific indicators as to why there was a steady increase in abilities, however, Masten mentioned multiple curriculums that they found to be effective when teaching HHM students (Masten et al., 2008; Masten et al., 2014). Other studies found positive results in math and reading achievements as well, which they attributed to multiple factors. For instance, having access to educational resources, protective parents, lower cumulative risk, and having the ability to build new skills off of existing ones are additional reasons as to why some HHM students were found to increase their math and reading skills over the course of time (Herbers et al., 2012, pp. 366-367). Moreover, studies have found some HHM students have success with reading and math, however, there is still a major gap between their academic achievements and the rest of the student population.

**Other considerations.** For the HHM youth to be resilient, there is not one specific thing that can be attributed to their academic success, but rather a combination of things working in their favor. For instance, the skills of coping, adapting, and self-control have been found as additional reasons to how some HHM students are resilient to their

living situation and succeed in school (Abdul Rahman et al., 2015, p. 700; Masten et al., 2014, p. 205). This can be done through building a strong network within the community, so that they can rely on members for support through difficult times; positive role models within school environments play a major part to provide the HHM students with supportive relationships.

Another contributing factor to some HHM students being resilient is related to their parents' skills in raising their children (Masten, 2008, p. 5). Things that researchers look for in parents to determine the level of skill in their parenting are the structure, involvement and "warmth" towards their children. With the combination of all those factors, the HHM students are able to face higher rates of academic success, as well as more positive relationships with their teachers and classmates (Masten, 2008, p. 9; Masten et al., 2014, p. 204).

Although there is no way to pinpoint the exact reasons as for why some HHM students are more resilient than others, it provides the families with hope for successes in life. By building strong relationships, creating structure, and learning life skills, such as coping, it is apparent that all of this helps to create resilience. This is crucial for HHM students, as their resilience can break the adverse effects of being homeless and can lead to academic success, as well as other aspects of their lives.

**Connection to the research.** Knowing the importance of resilience is crucial for school staff and educators to be aware of when working with HHM students. This will allow for an opportunity to provide the HHM students with positive role models, build stronger bonds with their parents, as well as build structure and consistency in school.

With the education built upon the factors that contribute to resilience and why some

students strive in their academic performance, this will allow for the staff and educators

to work harder to try and ensure that all of their HHM students can learn the skill of

resilience. Ultimately, by the combination of all that was listed in the above sections of,

"resilience," this information provides schools with knowledge and additional

opportunity to be mindful about building relationships, structure, providing strategies to

cope positively, and so forth, this will help to provide HHM students with the skills of

resilience to keep working towards academic success.

**School Performance**

Due to many factors, HHM students face many implications that cause them to

underperform academically at a disproportionate rate compared to housed peers.

Between the abuses that they may face, as well as the mental disorders and health issues,

these vulnerable children have many distractions that keep them from being able to fully

focus on academics. These are major issues to be aware of, as national estimations

indicate that 75% of homeless youth drop out before graduating from high school (Abdul

Rahman et al., 2015, p. 701). Furthermore, this section of school performance provides

information as to developmental delays, academic correlations, as well as school

instability, which is all found to impact HHM students and their academic achievements.

**Developmental delay.** Research has found a correlation between brain

development and early experiences with how HHM students perform academically

(Masten, 2008, p. 11). Also, HHM children have been found to be four times as likely to

encountered delayed development (Duffield, 2001, p. 326). Additional studies have found

that half of all homeless preschoolers manifest a developmental delay compared to 16%

of preschoolers who are housed, but live in poverty (Rafferty & Rollins, 1989). These

developmental delays can be contributed to the children being born with low birth

weights, malnutrition, lack of exposure to educational resources, as well as enduring high

amounts of stress from an early age (Fantuzzo & Perlman, 2006; Masten et. al, 2008;

Rafferty & Rollins, 1989; Rouse et al., 2011; Ziesemer et al., 1994). Overall, these health

effects, as well as lack of resources, contribute to detrimental delays to the HHM

children's brains and development that later impacts other aspects of their life, such as

academics.

  **Executive functions & risk factors.** There are many components to consider

when analyzing student data, but when working with the HHM population, there are

some additional things to look into. For instance, the HHM student population is

comprised with a wide variety of abilities, level of resilience, access to resources, and so

forth. Because of this, Masten and her team of researchers conducted a study where they

focused on executive functions and academic achievements. This set of cognitive

self-regulation skills, also known as executive functions, are found to be correlated with

stress and the ability to advance brain development; These executive function skills are

used by students to control behaviors and increase attention. Through five years of

research, their findings supported their thesis of having a positive correlation between

reading and math achievements with HHM students that possessed executive function

skills (Masten et al., 2008, p. 5). In addition to examining the positive effects of executive

functions, the study looked at the effect of having multiple life risks and how that impacts

the academic achievements for HHM students. They considered life risks such as one-parent households, parents with little education and/or parents who had children before they were 18 years old. Their hypothesis was also supported again for this focus, as they found the lower amount of risks there were for the HHM students, there would be an increase to their math and reading scores (Cutuli, 2013; Masten, 2008, p. 8). On the other hand, if the HHM student lacked the executive functions, as well as faced high amounts of risks, there was not a positive growth for their scores in math or reading. Although there was positive growth for HHM students that had low risks and showed signs of executive functions, the overall trend for HHM students was still significantly lower than all students, even those who are house and live in poverty (Fantuzzo & Perlman, 2006; Obradovíc et al., 2009; Masten, 2008). This is important to be aware of, as there are cases of reading and math success, but the overall HHM population still faces major achievement gaps that need to be addressed.

**School instability.** Not only do HHM students face instability as to where they live, but also where they attend school. In one year, 76% of HHM students changed the schools they attended in comparison with 36% of housed youth; In the Midwest, 64% of the HHM students changed schools in their lifetime. Over the course of time, there is an average of 4.2 schools that HHM students change to over time (Larson & Meehan, 2009, p. 8). It is known that, the more a child moves schools, the lower their reading and math achievements will be for math and reading throughout grades 1-12. Also, if a child faces transitions to three or more schools within a year, they are 60% times more likely to need to repeat a grade, face suspension, or even expulsion (Cutuli, 2013). Between poor

academic performance, as well as negative behaviors that result in suspension or expulsion, it is important to understand that school instability and the amount of transitions negatively impacts the HHM students experience in school.

**Connection to the research.** In order for schools to continue working towards closing the achievement gap for HHM students, they have to be aware and educated on the components of why they are found to disproportionately have difficulty in school performance. Between the school instability and developmental delays alone, the HHM student population faces many obstacles to attend school, as well as perform at the same rate of their grade-level peers. Because of this, it is important for educators to understand these obstacles, then make appropriate accommodations or modifications to meet the learning needs of the HHM students. This requires reflective practice to occur for the teachers, as they have to take in special consideration as to what will help the HHM students succeed. With that, the teacher can meet the child where they are at, then differentiate the lessons, so that they can build off their current knowledge and skills. On the other hand, if a HHM student misbehaves or acts out during class, the teacher can be mindful as to the other outside factors that may be contributing to the negative actions of the child. With all of this knowledge, not only can teacher be more mindful and empathetic towards their HHM student, but they can better meet their needs academically since they will understand that these vulnerable students most likely need special attention to succeed academically.

**Actions in Place**

HHM students face adverse situations that negatively impact almost every aspect in their lives. Since HHM students tend to perform lower academically at disproportionate rates, as well as face instability that leads to even more negative outcomes, it is important for schools to take action. By alleviating any additional stressors for the HHM family and their students, every mindful action could contribute to a more successful academic experience. Overall, this section is going to inform the reader of current laws in place, programs, curricula, as well as strategies that are working to close the achievement gaps for HHM students.

**McKinney-Vento law.** During the 1980's, the rate of homelessness was rising and families struggled to find transportation for their students to attend school. Because of this issue, in 1987, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was created to provide resources and support to homeless youth in regards to their education. In 2001, the McKinney-Vento was reenacted into the No Child Left Behind Act and was renamed, "McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act" (Masten et al., 2008, p. 4). Ultimately, the McKinney-Vento is aimed to provide students with rights to equal education and break down school barriers that may have hindered attendance or enrollment rates. This allows for HHM students to stay in their "home" school, provides them with appropriate transportation to and from, as well as other school services that they may need to be more successful in their learning environment (Duffield, 2001, pp. 327-328). In all, such government acts provide the homeless highly mobile students with the rights and opportunity, however, it is still up to the parents to be involved and

proactive in order for it to work effectively. The McKinney-Vento act ultimately provides the HHM student with an opportunity to avoid an additional stressor of changing schools, which could ultimately help lead HHM youth to some stability or improvements in their academics.

**Local shelter programs.** Since HHM children are more likely to change schools, it is important to provide efforts to promote early achievement. In doing so, it is crucial that this is done across all of the systems that the HHM child is incorporated with. For instance, there could be shelter-shelter and shelter-school collaborations, which would ultimately help to reduce any discontinuities that the HHM child may typically face between transitions. This could also lead to positive collaborations between Child Study Teams at schools, which could create more relevant Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) to ensure that the HHM student's needs are being met academically; Accommodations and modifications within school are also a portion of IEPs. In addition, by having multiple levels of relationships and collaborations, this would allow for the school to create a clearer educational program for the HHM student. In result, this would help to create more positive parent-child interactions, facilitate in enrollment for HHM children in early childhood education programs, as well as reduce the overall levels of stress for the family (Herbers et al., 2012; Masten, 2008).

In regards to these efforts, People Serving People (PSP), a local shelter in downtown Minneapolis has partnered with Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) to create an educational program. The "Children's Center" is an onsite program at PSP that serves homeless families with supportive services and educational training to enhance positive

social and emotional development for the children. They do so by having a nature-centered, sensory approach, as well as incorporating mindfulness and self-regulation strategies. They have also teamed up with the University of Minnesota to continue growing the program, but also to gather ongoing research to continue strengthening the child development center. This program ultimately provides HHM children with an opportunity for early learning exposure, healthy development, and classes for their parents to become more involved and supportive in their education (Masten et al., 2008, p. 9).

In addition to the efforts at PSP, Mary's Place, one of the largest shelters in Minneapolis, has implemented multiple efforts to streamline academia for HHM students. Mary's Place is comprised of 92 family apartments, which is found to house on average of 500 children and their families each night. The facility has two, full classrooms where HHM students can receive one-on-one tutoring with volunteers each evening after attending school. During the summer months, the HHM students are enrolled in a reading program. The HHM students are asked to read to the volunteers, discuss the story and engage in strategies with the volunteer to read tricky or unknown words (Masten et al., 2008, p. 12). Furthermore, Mary's Place provides many resources to the HHM students during school to enhance their skills, as well as during the summer, so that they continue to build and not lose skills over the break from school. Overall, such programs will help HHM students gain skills of resilience and perform better academically, bridge school and the shelter in which they reside, and assist in enhancing skills for the student as was discussed in the resilience section of this chapter.

**Teaching mindfulness.** As learned in the earlier section of executive functions, it is important for HHM students to learn skills to deal with the adverse situations they are challenged with. Studies have found that an effective skill to teach HHM students is mindfulness (Viafora, Mathiesen, & Unsworth, 2015). This means that the children learn to become aware, curious, and pay attention as to what is happening both inside and outside of their self at that present time. By becoming skilled in mindfulness, HHM children have the ability to become more aware of certain situations in which they face anger or fear. They are then able to recognize those feelings, evaluate their feelings, and then they can create a plan as to how they will overcome the obstacle using a positive, healthy approach (Viafora, Mathiesen & Unsworth, 2015, p. 1180). Mindfulness activities and lessons include: mindful listening, mindful eating, mindful pauses, guided mindful breathing exercises, pleasant activities, as well as testing and home activity practice. All of these lessons provide the students with tools to become more aware and in control as to their feelings, as well as actions to follow (Viafora, Mathiesen & Unsworth, 2015, p. 1183). Furthermore, teaching mindfulness through a variety of lessons and activities may lead to positive results for HHM students not only in school, but their personal life as well.

Since HHM students face many adversities in their life, it is crucial that they gain life skills to overcome such obstacles. In teaching mindfulness strategies, teachers can easily implement it into the classroom, however, they have to be educated on the effects of homelessness and what their HHM students may be enduring. For instance, if they are going to discuss overcoming negative feelings, they have to be intentional that some

HHM students have PTSD or other psychological disorders, which may be triggered by discussing certain negative life events; This can be avoided by the teacher redirecting the HHM student's thoughts, so that they can regain their focus on the mindfulness lesson and outside environment rather than the negative, inner experience (Viafora, Mathiesen & Unsworth, 2015, p. 1181). Ultimately, by being educated, intentional and responsive, teachers can effectively work with HHM students to gain the necessary skills to overcome future obstacles and negative feelings that they may face.

Teaching mindfulness not only has positive effects for the HHM students, but also the facilitator. This is so, because the teacher can implement mindfulness strategies in their own life, which allows for them to provide students with personal, relevant stories. These teachers are also more apt to be excited and passionate about mindfulness techniques, as they personally engage in such practices themselves. In addition, not only do these mindfulness strategies help with coping mechanisms, but also studies have found that they can alleviate a variety of mental health issues, as well as enhance psychological functioning. Also, there have been findings of reductions in stress levels and anxiety. On the other hand, there have been correlations to mindfulness and quality of sleep, self-esteem, and the ability to solve social problems (Viafora, Mathiesen & Unsworth, 2015, p. 1181). Overall, there are a vast amount of reasons as to why all teachers should implement mindfulness lessons and activities within their classroom, but it is especially useful when HHM students are a part of the learning community.

**Connection to the research.** With schools, staff and teachers understanding the laws and rights of HHM students, this allows for the school system and other societal

systems in place begin to work more seamlessly together. With the knowledge of

educational programs within the local shelters in which the HHM families stay, this will

allow for educational services to continue once the child leaves from school each day.

In addition, by teachers being educated and aware of the importance and benefits of

teaching mindfulness not only for their students, but for the benefits to themselves as

well, this will allow for a strong classroom community to be built. Not only that, but this

will provide the HHM students with an opportunity to learn new skills of how to cope

and regulate their emotions, which will essentially assist with them being able to

overcome obstacles or problems in the future. Furthermore, bridging the gap between

school and wherever the HHM student is staying will help to bring awareness, provide

resources, as well as overcome any additional obstacles faced in the future with more

positive, mindful approaches; all of this will also help to alleviate any additional stressors

for the HHM student, which will help to increase their productivity and engagement in

class, then potentially increase their academic achievement overall.

**Summary**

HHM children face a disproportionate amount of adversities that most people

would never endure throughout their entire lives. When working with HHM students, it is

important to be aware of the increase of health implications, abuse, risks, and

developmental delays that they may endure; this will allow for a better understanding as

to the disproportionately low academic performance of HHM students. Through all of

their hardships, some HHM students are more resilient and can meet academic standards.

With educational programs and laws in place, there is an opportunity for that success to

occur, but many other factors need to be in place in addition for that positive performance in school to occur. With such instability, it is important for teachers to consider teaching mindfulness techniques within the classroom, as it will help with self-regulation and self-esteem; This will help to create a more positive, beneficial learning environment for the HHM student. Furthermore, this literature review broke down all of the major components of themes for answering the question of, *How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly mobile (HHM) students?*

**Chapter Three Preview**

Chapter two provided the background information necessary for the reader to fully understand the reasoning for the project to be discussed further in chapter 3. In the next chapter, there will be further discussions on the research synthesized from chapter 2, as well as a thorough breakdown to the project to create a presentation on the HHM population, what obstacles they face, resilience factors, and how schools can help increase their academic success. This project is going to be created for school districts, individual schools, community members, as well as families who are impacted by being HHM. The hope is to bring awareness and education to the issue, so that there is more empathy and support to the vulnerable HHM students, as they deserve the same rights and opportunities to succeed as any other child.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**Project Description**

**Introduction**

The literature review in Chapter Two provided the necessary background information about homeless or highly mobile (HHM) population, the injustices and obstacles that they endure, as well as current policies and school practices in place by some schools to work more effectively with HHM students. This chapter will provide additional information as to the project I will complete regarding my thesis question of focus. The aim of my project is to focus on, *How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly mobile (HHM) students?* This will be done through creating a professional development workshop in which details will be provided in further sections of this chapter.

Chapter three will provide the reader with all of the necessary information to understand my project for completion. This chapter will describe the importance of each component that is comprised for the project portion. Ultimately, by providing additional background information for the project portion of the capstone, it allows for the reader to build a deeper understanding to the importance of my question of focus.

**Research Paradigm**

The reason why I chose to focus on schools working towards streamlining academic success for HHM students is due to many reasons. I have personally been exposed to working with the homeless population from an early age; my mom made it a point to be involved with the community and to help those in need. In addition, I was a

school social worker intern in Minneapolis Public Schools where I experienced working with homeless youth on a regular basis. It was there, where I educated the staff on HHM information and statistics, as well as facilitated shelter tours. Not only that, but I have witnessed families who are HHM getting ready for school during the morning in their van (parked in a gas station lot). Beyond those examples, now as a teacher, I have helped homeless students get winter clothing by throwing "jackets, hats, & mittens drives," and so forth. Because I have experienced working with homeless and highly mobile people throughout (almost) my entire life, it is a passion that I wanted to research more about. It seems as if the population has not only continued to grow, but education and resources around the injustice issues have been cut. Furthermore, my hope is to bring awareness and education around the issue of the HHM population, injustices that they face, as well as provide resources and strategies to help when working with them (specifically in an academic setting).

Because of these experiences, plus many more, there is a strong passion to bring awareness and knowledge to other educators and key players in school about the HHM population. By providing insight and education through a professional development workshop, this will allow for schools to become more effective when working with the vulnerable HHM population. Furthermore, by providing such background information, as well as strategies to use in school, the ultimate goal is to begin to close another academic achievement gap in which the HHM student population faces at a highly disproportionate rate compared to housed peers in poverty, as well as the rest of the student population too.

The next portion is going to provide insight into the method for choosing the approach. The research paradigm is important to be aware of, as it brings a personal component to the rest of my work in the project to be completed. This will allow for a more relatable context for people to begin to recognize experiences that they may have gone through or witnessed; by bringing personal experiences within the project, it will provide a sense of connectedness, as well as community.

**Professional Development Sessions**

It is important for vulnerable populations to have a strong voice advocating for their rights against injustices that they face within society; I am one of those voices. Because of this, I have chosen to create a series of three professional development sessions, which would allow for me to present facts, facilitate discussion and lead into teaching strategies to work more effectively with HHM students.

From various experiences, such as teaching financial education for Lutheran Social Services to teaching full time, I have gained effective communication and public speaking skills. With that, I am going to use the skills to relay professional development workshop material in a very engaging, interactive way. By having people share personal experiences or stories, it will begin to break down barriers of silence and provide necessary trust foundations among the audience. This will allow for everyone to feel comfortable and open with each other to begin collaborating on tough issues, such as working with HHM youth.

The choice of method also relates to the following section, "Setting & Audience," as it is required for teachers to regularly attend professional development workshops.

This would allow for the audience to gain valuable knowledge about working with HHM students, while also gaining necessary credit for retaining their teaching license. Because of this, the choice of method and the next section go hand-in-hand with each other and it is necessary to understand the connections among the components of the project.

**Setting & Audience**

The setting of the professional development sessions for my project would be held at Minnesota Excellence in Learning Academy in Maple Grove, Minnesota. The professional development sessions can be held in a classroom or the cafeteria, as long as the appropriate technology is equipped (computer and microphone access is crucial for a successful session). By having the professional development sessions in a comfortable environment, this will allow for a minimal level of anxieties for the people attending. With that, the level of concentration and engagement should increase due to a certain level of comfort and familiarity for the attendees.

The audience would consist of a wide variety of school staff. This workshop would be important for anyone who works directly or indirectly with the HHM students within the school. For instance, teachers, administrators, social workers, the school nurse, as well as special education teams are all necessary audience members for this professional development workshop. This is so, because the HHM students need positive role models within their lives, in which school personnel can positively impact that portion of their life experience. Also, by educating everyone within the school who works with HHM students, it allows for them to build a better understanding of the obstacles

and injustices that the children face, so that the staff can be more mindful in their practices and approach. This will result in positive interactions, relationships, lessons and results in academic performance for HHM students. Furthermore, the next section will provide in-depth descriptions to the project and the major components that will be incorporated within the professional development workshop.

**Project Description**

For the project, my intention is to create a series of three professional development sessions to provide the school strategies and resources to work effectively with HHM students; the professional development series would be dependent on financial components, which will be discussed further in the upcoming portion.

If the school had enough budget to get enough buses or transportation for the entire staff for a day, then there would be a homeless shelter tour added to the professional development workshop. The first day would consist of a presentation providing the audience with necessary background information to understand key components and factors as to certain behaviors and outcomes that are in result of being HHM. This portion would also include ice-breakers, personal stories, as well as discussion to create a stronger community within the staff and begin conversation for them on the sensitive topic. The second day would consist of shelter tours; this would include 2-3 of the most commonly used shelters that families in which attend the school live at. The shelter tours would allow for a hands-on, personal experience going to the shelters in which the students stay at with their families. This would essentially provide a thought-provoking and inspiring experience, which would allow for the staff to relate and

understand their HHM students more effectively; the staff would be able to picture the settings and become more understanding and empathetic to certain situations that may occur within the classroom environment. By providing such experiences, it allows for a better understanding and more personal approach for the school staff to become engaged with. Furthermore, the final session would allow for open discussion about the experiences and effects that the shelter tours had for the staff; this would allow for more stories to be shared, as well as connections that may have been made to the material learned during the first workshop. Lastly, effective strategies, such as teaching mindfulness within the classroom, will be taught so that school staff can gain more skills that will help to meet individual needs of HHM students and positively impact their academic performance (Viafora et al., 2015).

If the school has a low budget to conduct professional development sessions, the course would be consolidated into one setting. This workshop would consist of providing the school staff with necessary information about the HHM population, obstacles and injustices that they face, provide opportunities for personal stories and discussion, as well as provide the staff with resources to work more effectively with their HHM students. The same materials would be used as the other option describes such as ice-breakers, sharing personal experiences or stories, creating visual charts of learning, and so forth. This would also include providing the staff with a snapshot of the shelter tours through a variety of experiences, photos and information, which would also be shared through discussion and supplemented with technology integration.

**Timeline**

The project's completion date is aimed to be for October 2017, as my anticipated graduation is in December. The project's course will begin in September, however, my plan is to continue building my project throughout the rest of the summer leading up to the next semester. With the next few weeks to continue creating the professional development workshop to educate the school staff in strategies to work more effectively with HHM students.

If this project were to be replicated, it would take a few months to plan and integrate all of the pieces. For instance, there would need to be a meeting to discuss budgetary components. This would be needed in order to ensure that the school has enough money to provide bus transportation for all of the staff to experience the shelter tours. After the budget was addressed, then someone would need to find a bus company and schedule the shelter tours; Typically, bus companies need a couple of months notice about such events for them to incorporate it into their schedule. From there, the professional development sessions would have to be communicated to all of the parties who would be participating. In addition, there would be one to two hours worth of prep time to prepare all of the materials for handouts and what not. Also, there would be some time spent at the store in order to purchase snacks for all three of the sessions. In all, the planning process would be about three months in duration, however, it would be a shorter amount of time, if there is not enough budget for the school to participate in the shelter tours.

**Conclusion & Chapter Four Preview**

How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly mobile (HHM) students? The answer, as well as design of this project, looks at many components that teachers can implement within their classroom; schools can also gain necessary information and strategies to implement school-wide for the HHM students as well.

The professional development (PD) sessions for school staff will include three major components that will be examined each meeting. These three components are: Recognize, Empathize, & Strategize. Each component will be the main focus, which the supplemented activities and discussions will provide deeper understandings, connections and strategies for working with HHM students.

These three sessions are all built on the foundation of the "Adult Learning Theory," which Malcolm Shepherd Knowles created in 1984; Knowles pedagogy and approaches are still relevant and used widespread in many various areas of education today. The professional development sessions allow for adults to become a part of the solution, as well as partake in the evaluation process. Through these sessions, the school staff are involved in many discussions, activities, and even a shelter tour, which provide the foundation of the learning and all of which apply to their jobs within the school directly. Also, the PD sessions will be problem-centered, which has been found to be an effective approach, rather than content-oriented (Kearsley, 2010). With the combination of effective adult learning strategies compiled to create the PD sessions, the staff will be more engaged in the learning, will take ownership in their work, and will develop an

overall knowledge, as well as strategies, to streamline the academic success of their

HHM students.

Furthermore, chapter three provides the reader with the necessary pieces of

information to fully comprehend the rationale and research paradigm for focusing on my

research question. By creating professional development sessions, this allows for

awareness and education to be learned through presenting the information gathered from

the literature review discussed in chapter two. Furthermore, this project aims to answer

the question of, *How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly

mobile (HHM) students?* Participating in the workshops created in the next, final chapter

will provide teachers and other school staff with the necessary knowledge and resources

to begin closing the achievement gaps for their HHM students.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**Conclusions**

**Introduction**

In the previous three chapters, the exploration of, "*How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly mobile (HHM) students?"* has been thoroughly explored. In chapter one, a narrative description as to my personal experiences and reasoning for focusing on this topic to set the tone for the remaining chapters of the capstone; the many personal experiences, as well as professional encounters working with HHM students, was a major rationale for creating my capstone. From there, chapter two consists of a literature review, which allows for research and studies to provide additional information on the topic of focus. Specifically, chapter two describes the HHM population, implications that they face, how academic performance is affected, actions in place, as well as suggested strategies for teachers and schools to implement to ensure that HHM students have the academic support that they need. With the information discussed in chapter two, this led to an overview and description of the project component completed for the capstone. In chapter three, this section describes the overview and plan of the project, the setting and audience, as well as the timeline for completion. Then, the project was completed and consisted of three professional development (PD) sessions named, "Recognize! Empathize! Strategize!," which aims to educate teachers and staff in schools to more effectively work with HHM students. The professional development series supports the questions of *How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly mobile (HHM) students?* With the PD series, schools become one step

closer to enhancing the academic experience for HHM students, which will in result increase their academic performance.

In this final chapter, I will provide insight into the learnings throughout the capstone process, the literature review from chapter two will be revisited, limitations of the project completed will be discussed, recommendations to future research on related topics will be provided, as well as a description of how the project will be communicated and how it will be a benefit to the profession.

**The Viewpoint of Researcher, Learner and Writer**

Throughout the capstone journey, taking on the roles of researcher, learner and writer naturally became connected. With the countless hours researching various studies, laws, statistics, strategies, and background information to provide for the literature review in chapter two, I became indulged in the information. With the vast amount of information gathered, it was important to begin strategizing how to organize, record, synthesize the findings into a way that would be easily accessible and clearly represented. Through countless trial and errors to figure out a strategy that would work while gathering such vast amounts of information, I began to write the literature review and create a "running" document for the references. From there, I was able to create outlines as to where I wanted to the research to be headed, as well as utilize what I had gathered to drive the remaining research. With that, I was able to successfully create a literature review that provided information, insight, and strategies for schools and educators to implement when working with HHM students. On the other hand, while researching and writing, I was learning immensely. I was able to gather studies that have recently been

done and could implement the strategies suggested within my own classroom immediately. This learning allowed for many reflections, which resulted in my growth professionally, personally and academically. Furthermore, with the combination of researching, writing and learning, the invaluable experience assisted me to create a project and capstone that I desire to become a resource utilized by schools to help close the achievement gap for HHM students.

**Major Learnings**

After indulging in the capstone process over the past few months, there have been many learnings that I have encountered throughout the journey. While conducting my literature review, I have found that most of the studies were done by the same researchers, otherwise they were outdated from decades ago. With that, it made it difficult to gain a variety of perspectives to synthesize. In addition, when it came time to come up with resources for teachers and schools to implement, this area specifically lacked in supported research, which ultimately made it challenging to create a project with resources for schools; I was able to pull the major findings for students to gain focus and increase academics, which I included for resources to use in schools. On the other hand, when it came time to create the project portion of the capstone, it was very neat learning about the different formats and styles that each professional development can be. After figuring out a balance between professional development ideas and my vision, it allowed for a smooth process for my project goals to become a reality. I aimed for versatility and usability by creating a table format that scripted out and described exactly what is supposed to be said or done, as well as the estimated times for each discussion or

activity; my intentions were to create a professional development series that could be picked up and implemented by anyone in schools that work with HHM students. Lastly, another major learning of the capstone process was how to effectively manage time, as I work full-time, attend graduate school full-time, as well as run a small business part-time. With juggling all of the components within my life, it was important for me to be diligent and creative in order to have adequate amounts of time to dedicate in order to complete my capstone and project in a timely manner. Overall, the list of major learnings could go on, but those are the biggest ones that I wanted to highlight from my capstone project experience. Furthermore, the learning experience was amazing and such a journey to complete; the end product is worth it though.

**Reflection of the Literature Review**

During the literature review process, I was influenced by many current researchers that conduct studies regarding the HHM population and how it affects academic achievement. After each piece of research, I was linked with another related study, which then allowed for me to continually build my research and findings easily. I quickly noticed many connections with the information gathered, as many of the researchers worked collaboratively across various studies regarding the same topic, but they had slight variations for the specific focus. With that, it allowed for me to synthesize ideas, strategies and findings to create common themes among what researchers have found and suggested; themes included how to recognize HHM students, how to empathize, and strategies to implement within schools and classroom, such as mindfulness techniques (Grant et al., 2013, Masten et al., 2008, Masten et al., 2014,

Viafora et al., 2015). From there, I was able to create the major components of the research I had gathered for the literature review, which compiled all of my findings into one, readable document that stated many facts. With the researchers and studies stating very similar findings across the literature, it confirmed that what I compiled within my study was accurate and up-to-date. Because of the confirmation within the literature and my study, there were not many contradictions from the findings, however, I hope that researchers continue to work on the topic of HHM students, as it would really help to strengthen my project with more effective resources to utilize. Furthermore, the literature review and findings greatly supported my capstone project throughout its entirety.

By far, the literature review was the most challenging and time-consuming component of the capstone process. However, the literature review is the backbone of the capstone process, as all of the remaining components rely on that section to create a research-based project and reference throughout the written chapters. Overall, the key findings allowed for me to successfully understand important information regarding the HHM population, insight into implications that the population faces, as well as effective strategies to utilize within schools and classrooms to increase academic performance. In all, I am grateful for all of the research and studies conducted on this topic, as it allowed for me to create a project and paper that I anticipate will open the eyes of the education system and will help to close the academic achievement gaps for HHM students.

**Project Implications**

While creating my project, I tried to be mindful of any implications that may be faced with the PD series. The goal was that any school could read, then implement the

PD sessions with their faculty to help facilitate discussions, awareness and strategies to

implement when working with HHM students. After my professor and colleagues from

Hamline University provided feedback, I quickly realized that the second day of the

series was based on the Minneapolis metro area. This session of the series provides the

staff of the school to participate in shelter tours; in the project, there are two descriptions

of local shelters in the Minneapolis area. Because of that, I added a note within the

materials section that the facilitator would have to research the two most common

shelters for their own area, then create brief introductions or background information for

the staff. With that, the professional development sessions could be replicated and

completed with schools anywhere necessary. In addition to that implication, I resigned

from my third grade teaching position at a charter school, which is where I planned to

pilot the PD sessions. Because of this, I aim to bring my capstone and project to the

attention of my next school that I teach at, so that I could potentially implement it within

the new school environment. From my teaching experiences over the past couple of

years, as well as social work practice, homelessness, as well as being highly mobile, is an

issue that every area faces. Because of this, I have high hopes that even with the two

limitations faced, that this project and capstone can be replicated and produced wherever

it is taken.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

After conducting my literature review and creating the project, I quickly realized

that there are areas in which more research can be done. For example, one of my main

focuses was on strategies for schools and staff to implement, so that the achievement gap

for HHM students can begin to close. With that, the amount of research and studies conducted to figure out what strategies are effective lack. There are some studies, such as Viafora and their colleagues who find that teaching mindfulness allows for students to begin to recognize their feelings (Viafora et al., 2015). This allows for the students to gain the skill of recognizing not only their emotions, but also ways to cope, and successfully regain focus on academics or whatever is being asked of them. In addition, other studies have found that resilience within the students is a major factor in which they can attribute their academic success to. However, this component is not thoroughly researched yet and they cannot quite pinpoint as to what makes HHM students more resilient than others. Some researchers, such as Masten and their colleagues, believe that parents play a major role in whether their HHM student is resilient or not (Masten et al., 2014). Furthermore, those were the two major reasons for why some HHM students are more successful than others based on strategies or values that were incorporated into their life somehow. Because of this, I strongly believe that additional research should be conducted for strategies that schools and parents can implement with HHM students, so that they can be successful in school.

**How the Project will be Communicated**

This capstone and project will be communicated through a couple of avenues. First, it will be uploaded digitally to Hamline's Digital Commons. This is where anyone interested in reading or implementing the capstone project can access the information and do so. From there, they would have all of the materials gathered to successfully facilitate the PD sessions or read through the chapters. Secondly, the project will be communicated

with the community of schools through word of mouth. As an educator, we are regularly participating in PD sessions, so this capstone project would be an additional resource for schools to use when discussing strategies to incorporate when working with HHM students or also to learn about their background. With that, I am to share my accomplishments with other colleagues that I have met, so that they could potentially replicated the PD sessions at their school; I already have a colleague who wants to share my capstone project with her former school in Hawaii, which is an extraordinary honor. In all, between the digital upload at Hamline University and the project being spread through word of mouth, it will be communicated with anyone who is willing to listen or read it. I am so excited to share all of my hard work and passion with everyone!

**Benefits to the Profession**

The PD series, "Recognize! Empathize! Strategize!," provides schools and their staff with a foundational level of  background information for the HHM population, strategies to utilize within the classrooms, as well as insight into experiences that HHM students may face, so that teachers can show empathy having experienced touring shelters. Ultimately, the professional development series supports the questions of *How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly mobile (HHM) students?* In all, this capstone project will benefit the teaching profession, so that the educators can more effectively work with HHM students, as well as implement effective strategies with their students, so that the achievement gap can begin to close. Furthermore, this capstone project not only benefits the profession by providing resources and information, but ultimately will benefit the HHM student population and their academic performance.

**Summary**

*How can schools streamline academic success for homeless highly mobile (HHM) students?* will be answered with the three professional development sessions created for my capstone project. Through all of the research, learning, writing and implementing, this final chapter is one step further to making my capstone project a reality. I anticipate that the PD series, "Recognize! Empathize! Strategize!," will provide schools and their staff with the necessary information and tools to successfully begin closing academic achievement gaps for their HHM students. Most importantly, I am eager for all of the HHM students who will have positive outcomes in their academic achievements, as they deserve to be successful and held to high expectations as anyone else attending school.

Overall, this capstone journey has been a wild ride! It took many long nights, weekends and dedication to complete. I started off completing my capstone on my own, but finished it with a strong team of collaborators, which included my content reviewer, peer reviewer, advisor, and other colleagues from Hamline University. I am so thankful for the process, as the impact this capstone project can make will be immense and powerful for generations to come.

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