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## Teaching Middle School Children Affected by Homelessness: An Interpretive Phenomenological Investigation of Teachers' Lived Experiences

Timothy B. Smart  
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4-2018

# Teaching Middle School Children Affected by Homelessness: An Interpretive Phenomenological Investigation of Teachers' Lived Experiences

Timothy B. Smart  
*Concordia University - Portland*

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Concordia University (Portland)

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Teaching Middle School Children Affected by Homelessness:  
An Interpretive Phenomenological Investigation of Teachers' Lived Experiences

Timothy B. Smart  
Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

Marty A. Bullis, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Concordia University–Portland

2018

## **Abstract**

The human experience occupies the central role in phenomenological research. In this interpretive phenomenological study, the researcher recruited and interviewed secondary school teachers from three public urban schools in the Pacific Northwest in order to have them describe their lived experiences that relate to instructing students affected by homelessness. The researcher used two semi-structured, conversational interviews with six participants who reflected on how their classroom experiences influenced their teaching, engagement strategies, emotional states, and student relationships. The conceptual framework for this study included: Homelessness in America, public school setting, impact of homelessness, and teacher perspective. In this study, the researcher identified gaps in pre-service teacher programs with regard to support the marginalized population of students affected by the homeless experience. The essence of the lived experience of the participants' in this study is centered around a teachers' drive to seek introspective reflection and gain knowledge, along with building positive relationships with their students, which leads to increasing engagement strategies with all students, including those affected with homelessness. Based on discovering the essence of the lived experience of educators who work with homeless adolescents in a public school, the researcher has begun to fill in the missing gap of literature and potentially assist educators to be more effective in supporting this marginalized population of students.

*Keywords:* homelessness, phenomenology, teacher perception, student relationships, trust, empathy

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the classroom teacher. I admire their empathy, patience and devotion to meeting the needs of all students in the classroom. The following research is intended to foster trust and build positive relationships with all students to inspire and enrich their dreams.

## **Acknowledgements**

The educational journey of completing my terminal degree is a humbling process. I am grateful for the guidance and constant support of Dr. Marty Bullis. Your servant leadership attitude inspired me to excel at the most critical times. Thank you to Dr. Jerry McGuire and Dr. Monica Nagy for serving as committee members. Your feedback and patience provided the needed support to cross the finish line. I also appreciate the support received by Concordia University-Portland staff. The encouragement and positive learning environment provided by the staff on campus enabled me to grow in my educational knowledge.

I want to acknowledge the unconditional love of my wife, Cynthia R. Smart, who provided endless days and nights of encouragement, time, and patience with this endeavor. We are blessed with three beautiful children who inspire us everyday with their creativity, intelligence, and perseverance to make the world a better place. Finally, thank you to our Heavenly Father for his compassion and enduring love for all of us.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

During the past two decades, the number of students affected by homelessness in the United States has risen at a troubling rate. One important marker of this increase is the number of students classified by their school district and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as homeless. “In school year 2013–14 there were 1.4 million students who were homeless at the beginning of the year. . . . this is more than twice as many as in school year 2004–05 (590,000)” (Child Trends, 2015, p. 3). In the 2-year period between 2012–2013 school year and the 2014–2015 school year, state educational agencies (SEAs) reported that the number of children experiencing homelessness increased from 1,219,818 to 1,263,323 children—an increase of 43,505 homeless students (National Center for Homeless Education, 2016, p. 8). While this number represents only a 3.5% increase nationally, the following differences were noted in individual state reporting. Twenty-one states reported 10% or more growth during this period, and only five states reported 10% or greater reduction of youth experiencing homelessness. The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) also reported:

The majority of students experiencing homelessness, 76%, share housing with others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. Shelters are the next most commonly used type of housing, as 14% of homeless students resided in shelters. Seven percent had a primary nighttime residence of hotels or motels and 3% were identified as unsheltered. (NCHE, 2016, p. iv)

Furthermore, there was a 21% increase of students who were unaccompanied from 2012 to 2015, which represents 95,032 children who were not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (NCHE, 2016, p. 17).

Children who experience homelessness experience significant challenges to learning at school. Part of the dilemma for students who are homeless is the inconsistency between home and school environments, and the behaviors and habits that are required of them in each context. A student in crisis through homelessness is often marginalized and viewed as dysfunctional by society. In 2016 the State of Washington published a report in December, which outlined a number of family issues that can lead to child homelessness. These include “abuse, neglect, a parent’s drug or alcohol abuse or mental health issues, domestic violence, as well as rejection due to sexual orientation or gender identity” (p. 8). The report noted that, “Family dysfunction, rejection, and conflict are common experiences that drive youth from their home before they reach adulthood” (State of Washington Department of Commerce, 2016, p. 8).

Adolescents who experience homelessness are impacted on several developmental levels including social, emotional, physical and academic domains. The National Center on Family Homeless (NCFH) (2014) report,

The impact of homelessness on the children, especially young children, is devastating and may lead to changes in brain architecture that can interfere with learning, emotional self-regulation, cognitive skills, and social relationships. The unrelenting stress experienced by the parents, most of whom are women parenting alone, may contribute to residential instability, unemployment, ineffective parenting, and poor health. (p. 9)

According to the Harvard Family Research Project (Wolos et. al., 2007), adolescents need trusting and caring relationships to be successful in school and in life (p. 1). This research is confirmed by a number of other researchers (Erikson, 1980; Noddings, 1992; Schwartz-Henderson, 2013; Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008). Wolos et al. (2007) research brief supports

the thought students need adult role modeling can increase the likelihood of students who are homeless graduating high school and becoming a productive member of society. Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) emphasize the need for teachers to understand the perceptions of their students experiencing homelessness through service-learning projects, which help connect them to their community and develop relationships with the families and students affected with homelessness. The researchers noted the significant role and responsibility that teachers have:

Although there are some simple steps that teachers can take to provide continuity and stability in the lives of HHM students, teachers should understand their responsibility to identify and readjust their own misperceptions about students and families experiencing housing instability. (NCHE, 2013, p. 4)

These developmental challenges can result in school behavioral and academic issues for homeless students. These issues can negatively impact teacher perceptions of the students, limit teacher engagement with these students, and thereby affect the teacher's capacities for role-modeling and support of the student's academic success and personal development.

This research was designed to support understanding of teacher perception of the issue and student-teacher relationships that are affected by the issue of homelessness, in order to understand how to improve teacher perception, classroom practice, and outcomes for homeless students. This could affect the positive impact towards the growth of an adolescent and diminishes possible role models with school staff.

### **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

This chapter presents an introduction associated with the phenomenon of the educator experiences of instructing children affected by homelessness. Specific attention is given to how educators develop expertise and understanding of this population of students in the K–12 public

school environment. National regulation is summarized with a focus placed on the impact of the legislation for school age children. The McKinney-Vento Act addresses three main goals: (a) increased student access to school; (b) student success in school; and (c) student attendance at school. The Act is a United States federal law, which mandates a school that has an enrolled student who has been identified as homeless must remove barriers like providing transportation and allow attendance to a school that is outside the catchment area to ensure that a student receives an education. Beyond the McKinney-Vento Act, most of the material that is available about homelessness reflects statistical data or instructional strategies developed to help engage the student in the classroom setting. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2015) indicated, “Lower income households often pay large portions of their income towards housing” (p. 36). In response to this, many families are forced to prioritize their limited income and reduce their expenditures by living with relatives or friends. The McKinney-Vento Act has a category that directly relates to this condition. When a family begins living with a relative or friend, it is called “doubling up.” The literature concludes with a review of research literature that focuses on the classroom teacher’s perspectives in relation to students’ homeless experiences.

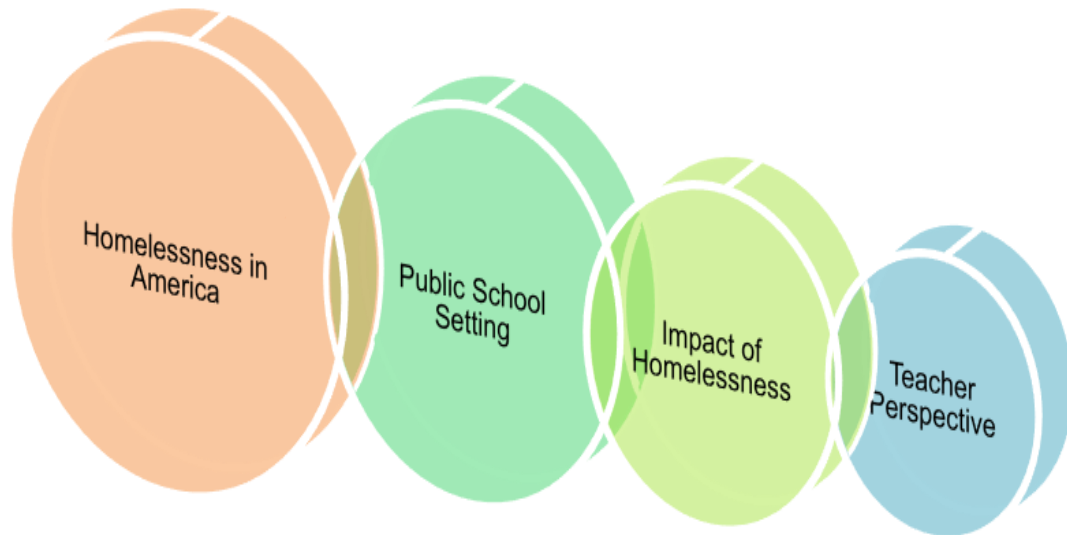
**Motivation for the study.** In 20 years of teaching and supporting the individual needs of students in schools, the researcher found few resources on the educators’ perspectives of teaching students who were impacted by homelessness. While teaching in a low socioeconomic urban middle school, the researcher found that many of the unique adaptations and classroom instructional refinements pertaining to supporting students who were homeless came through professional learning communities and peer collaborations. In the researcher’s post-secondary teaching practice with undergraduate and graduate teacher preparatory programs, he found scant

information provided, either through course objectives, instructional materials, or textbook resources, which would prepare student teachers for understanding how the issue of homelessness can affect their future classrooms and students. Teacher preparatory materials that the researcher had seen in use focused on at-risk youth experiences and engagement strategies designed to fit the majority of student needs; however, these materials did not address Adverse Childhood Experiences or the specific traumas associated with homelessness. Through reflective in-class discussions with pre-service teachers, the researcher found that pre-service teachers possess insightful perspectives concerning how their practicums and student teaching experiences were different in classrooms where students affected by homelessness were enrolled. In places where the researcher had the latitude to introduce additional instruction for student teachers, he found that the issue of homelessness elicited insightful perspectives from pre-service teachers and led to meaningful conversations regarding how their student teaching experiences were different in classrooms where the homelessness experience was occurring. Both examples of teacher collaboration—professional learning communities and classroom reflection with student teachers—reflect a teacher’s perspective.

**Conceptual framework.** The conceptual framework for this study presented four frames that are a narrowing set of narrow lenses. The first frame was a wide-lens of the federal legislation around the homelessness experience with regard to children in the United States. The second frame focused on multitude of changes in public schools during the past two decades. Specifically, the second frame reviewed how public schools have changed in student diversity and enrollment, along with of staffing levels of teachers. The third frame narrowed the focus to the impact of homeless experience on the student. The final frame placed a focal point on the



teacher's point of view on the phenomenon of a student's homeless experience as it related to the educator's professional practice.



*Figure 1.* A visual presentation of the dissertation's conceptual framework.

### **Statement of the Problem**

If educators do not possess a clear understanding of how homelessness affects some students, they may not be able to support the learning process for this group, and in turn affect the overall student achievement in the classroom. If the educator's point of view and lived experience with students in homelessness crisis can be better understood, then schools, districts, teachers, and administrators of teacher preparation programs might better understand what preparation and professional learning is needed for educators to be effective in assisting this marginalized population of students to become productive members of society.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to discover the essence of the teachers' lived experience with students affected by homelessness in their classroom. By essence the researcher means the phenomenological interpretative analysis to understand the 'what' and 'how' of the phenomena.

## **Research Questions**

It is necessary to understand the educator's point of view and lived experience with students in homelessness crisis so that schools, districts, teachers, and administrators of teacher preparation programs might better understand what preparation is needed for educators to be effective in assisting this vulnerable population of students to become productive members of society. This research study was designed to answer the following research question:

**Research question.** What is the lived experience of a selected group of educators who work with homeless adolescents in the public middle school settings in the Pacific Northwest?

**Sub-question 1.** How do study participants describe their lived experiences prior to working with an adolescent affected by homelessness?

**Sub-question 2.** How do study participants describe their lived experiences while working with an adolescent affected by homelessness?

**Sub-question 3.** How do study participants describe the impact on their teaching methods after working with a student affected by homelessness?

## **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

If educators lack a clear understanding of adolescents who are homeless, they may impede the learning process for this group of students, thereby limiting student achievement in the classroom. An expansion in the research on the educator's perspective with students who are in crisis due to homelessness, could help educators better appreciate how to reach all students and help them toward a goal of becoming productive members of society. Educators reflected on how their classroom experiences affected their teaching, engagement strategies, emotional state, and student relationships.

## Definition of Terms

*Absolute poverty:* Poverty focused on sustenance and the bare essentials for living with no extra resources for social and cultural expenditures (Cuthrell et al., 2010, p. 105).

*Bracketing:* A reflective summary of the researchers lived experience of a phenomena being studied. LeVasseur (2003) defined *bracketing as*, “suspending briefly in a reflective move that cultivates persistent curiosity and allows us to make progress toward the things themselves” (p. 418).

*Couch surfing:* Designates the housing situation for most students affected by homelessness. Also known as *Doubling Up* when a family begins living with a relative or friend (M-V:725(2)(B)(i–iv), 2015).

*Double hermeneutic:* An analytical process in Interpretive Phenemological Analysis (IPA) to describe participants make meaning of their world first and then the researcher tries to decode that meaning (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

*Doubling up:* When a family begins living with a relative or friend. Also referred to as “couch surfing,” designates the housing situation for most students affected by homelessness (M-V:725(2)(B)(i–iv), 2015).

*Epoche:* Setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence (Moustakas, 1994).

*Field notes:* A secondary data source method in qualitative research. Field notes assist the researcher to record or note contextual factors that are not part of recorded interview and assist in gathering data (Lofland & Lofland, 1999 as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 15).

*Generational poverty.* Poverty described as having its own culture, with hidden rules and belief systems (Cuthrell et al., 2010, p. 105).

*Hermeneutic Method:* A qualitative methodology that accepts lived experiences and a thematic pattern may emerge so that the researcher can develop and interpret authentic meaning and the essence of the phenomena through the combined lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

*Hermeneutic circle:* A data analysis procedure when the researcher begin to formulate meaning that the part is interpreted in relation to the whole and the whole is interpreted in relation to the part (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, pg. 12).

*Homelessness:* Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (M-V:725(2)(A), 2015).

*Homeless Person's Survival Act:* Enacted in 1986 to address challenges faced by homeless persons, including access to shelter, food, mobile health care, and housing that were resulting from increased levels of homelessness in the United States. In 1987, it was renamed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act.

*Local attendance area school:* Any public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.

*Local Educational Agency (LEA):* An LEA, or school district, is defined as a public board of education or other public authority that exists to provide administrative control, direction, or services for public schools.

*Member checking:* A data analysis procedure where the Participant reviews data, usually interview transcripts to cross-check the information gathered for accuracy (Creswell, 2013).

*Open coding:* A data analysis procedure where the researcher codes the data for its major categories of information (Creswell, 2013, p. 86).

*Reduction:* Describing just what you see, external and internal, the relationship between phenomenon and self (Moustakas, 1994).

*School of origin:* The school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled.

*Situational poverty:* Poverty caused by specific circumstances, such as illness or loss of employment, and generally lasts for a shorter period of time (Cuthrell et al., 2010, p. 105).

*Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act:* Also known as, The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act; addresses challenges faced by homeless persons, including access to shelter, food, mobile health care, and housing that were resulting from increased levels of homelessness in the United States and enacted in 1987. Originally named Homeless Person's Survival Act.

*Theme:* A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent [patterned] experience and its variant manifestations (DeSantis and Ugarriza, 2000 as cited by Saldaña, 2015, 175–176).

*Theming the data:* A data analysis procedure where the researcher codes a theme to capture the basis of the experience into a meaningful whole (DeSantis and Ugarriza, 2000 as cited by Saldaña, 2015, 175–176).

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

This interpretive qualitative study was based on an educator's lived experience with students affected by homelessness in their classroom. The study interviewed six participants, which may delimit the possible research findings but phenomenological methodology is not designed to generalize to a large population. Additionally, when employing a phenomenological study, the researcher's bias is difficult to exclude so bracketing techniques will be applied to help

control bias. The validity of this study will not evolve from the interpreted themes itself, but from the judgments that are formed by those who take the time to understand the essence of this research study.

### **Expected Findings**

The conceptual framework lays the foundation for the expected findings of this study. The goal of this study includes identifying gaps in pre-service teacher programs with regard to support the marginalized population of students affected by the homeless experience. Additionally, there was an expectation the study would find educators have increased empathy, improved engagement strategies, and more positive relationships with their students after teaching this marginalized population. These findings will ultimately lead to enhanced student achievement in the classroom.

### **Chapter 1 Summary**

There is a gap in the research around the educator's point of view when instructing marginalized populations like students affected by homelessness. The homeless experience is increasing across the nation. Furthermore, there is a need to examine how educators can develop a more refined understanding of the homeless experience in the K-12 public school environment. Beyond the McKinney-Vento Act, material about homelessness reflects more statistical data than understanding the educator's point of view and needs further investigation. The study discovered the essence of the educator's point of view to derive a deeper understanding of the homeless experience and increase student achievement through improved engagement and instructional strategies. This research will extend conversations around professional learning with the homeless experience and increase the available resources of both current classroom and pre-service teacher.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

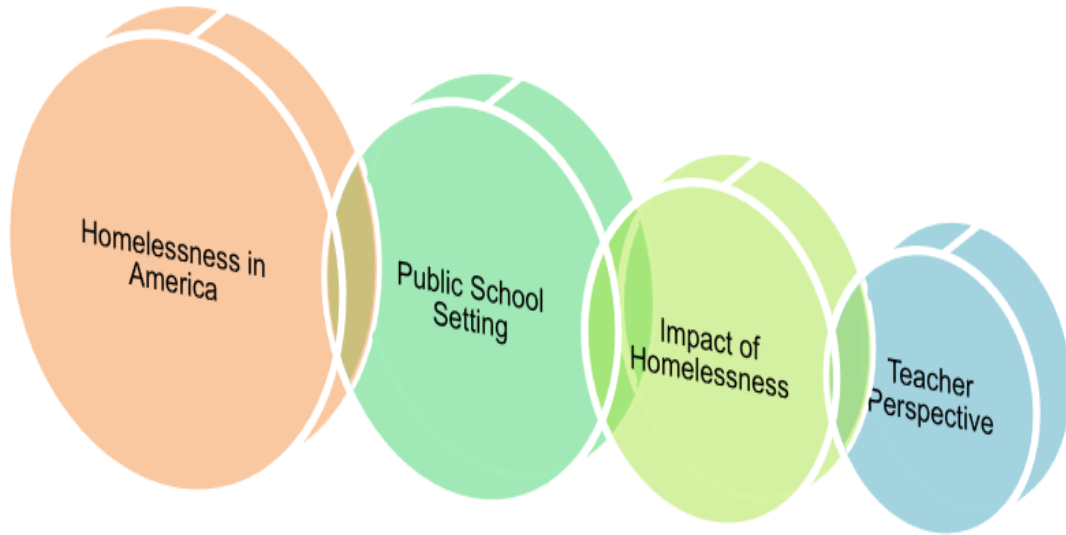
This chapter presents a review of the literature associated with the phenomenon of the educator experiences of instructing children affected by homelessness. Specific attention is given to literature that examines how educators develop expertise and understanding of this population of students in the K–12 public school environment. National regulation is summarized with a focus placed on the impact of the legislation for school age children. The McKinney-Vento Act addresses three main goals: (a) increased student access to school; (b) student success in school; and (c) student attendance at school. The Act is a United States federal law, which mandates a school that has an enrolled student who has been identified as homeless must remove barriers like providing transportation and allow attendance to a school that is outside the catchment area to ensure that a student receives an education. Beyond the McKinney-Vento Act, most of the material that is available about homelessness reflects statistical data or instructional strategies developed to help engage the student in the classroom setting. The literature reviewed for this study provided the background information and history of legislation impacting students affected by homelessness and their access to educational supports. Additional research examined as part of this literature review focused on understanding the link between poverty and homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2015) indicated, “Lower income households often pay large portions of their income towards housing” (p. 36). In response to this, many families are forced to prioritize their limited income and reduce their expenditures by living with relatives or friends. The McKinney-Vento Act has a category that directly relates to this condition. When a family begins living with a relative or friend, it is called “doubling up.” The literature concludes with a review of research literature that focuses on the classroom teacher’s perspectives in relation to students’ homeless

experiences. An extensive review of literature, which included multiple sources of empirical research, governmental publications, and non-profit agencies that examined the teachers' perspective in relation to their student's homelessness experience, which is limited and needs further investigation into the phenomena of educators who experience teaching students affected by homelessness.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for the present study presents four frames that are presented as a narrowing set of narrowing lenses. The first frame is a wide-lens overview of the federal legislation and associated federal mandates about homeless students in the United States. The next frame focuses on changes in the public school setting during the past two decades with regard to student population, teacher staffing, and the diversity of the student body. The third frame narrows the focus to the impact of homelessness on the child and highlights the need for further research to support this population of students. The last narrow-lens frame places a focal point on the teacher's perspective on the phenomenon of student homelessness as it relates to their professional practice. In the literature review, the researcher examined research that related to the educator's perspectives towards homelessness in current public school settings, with a goal of discovering whether additional research is warranted on this focus area. In pursuing this line of investigation of the literature, the researcher demonstrated that further research on understanding educators' perspectives of homelessness is necessary within the field of educational research, thereby providing a solid justification for the present line of empirical study. An expansion in the research on the educator's perspective with students who are in crisis due to homelessness, could help educators better appreciate how to reach all students and help them toward a goal of becoming productive members of society.





*Figure 2.* A visual presentation of the dissertation’s conceptual framework.

### **Review of Research Literature**

The review of research literature is associated with the phenomenon of the educators’ experiences of instructing children affected by homelessness in public schools. The first body of research focused on national regulation and the impact of the legislation for school age children. The McKinney-Vento Act as currently enacted addresses three main goals: (a) increased student access to school; (b) student success in school; and (c) student attendance at school. The review of research literature uncovered dynamic changes in public schools and the how diverse the student population is changing along with increased homeless student numbers. The literature also focused on the link between poverty and homelessness. The extensive review of the literature examined the teachers’ perspective in relation to their student’s homelessness experience, which is limited and needs further investigation.

### **Construct One: Homelessness in America**

Homelessness in America is on the rise and congress has implemented national regulation to support those affected by the homeless experience. The review of the literature also included

clarification of the federal mandates of the McKinney-Veto Act for school districts, individual families, and state agencies through legal challenges and judicial rulings.

**Legislation.** Congress introduced the Homeless Person’s Survival Act in 1986 to address challenges faced by homeless persons, including access to shelter, food, mobile health care, and housing that were resulting from increased levels of homelessness in the United States. Prior to the Act, the federal government struggled in meeting the needs of the homeless across the nation. In 1987, the Act passed and was renamed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. One of the major reasons the Act passed so quickly was due to the rapid increase in documented cases of homeless children within the public educational system and the impact on students’ learning that was linked to their homeless experiences.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act defined *homelessness* as individuals who “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (M-V:725(2)(A), 2015). Homeless individuals have experienced economic hardships and housing loss. They may live in motels, campgrounds, emergency shelters, transition housing, or be persons who are “doubling up,” which means they are living with family or friends. At times, people affected by homelessness may sleep in cars, abandoned houses, parks, and even alcoves under highways. Homeless persons can be migratory students, unaccompanied youth or those who have been affected by disaster (M-V:725(2)(B)(i–iv), 2015).

The McKinney-Vento Act addresses three main goals associated with school-age children: increase access; success; and attendance at school. The school system in which a documented homeless child is enrolled must remove barriers, which prevent homeless children from receiving an education. The Act addresses access through two options: the child may attend a school in the local attendance zone to where he or she is currently staying; or the child

may attend their school of origin. The *local attendance area school* is defined as “any public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend” (M-V: 722(g)(3)(A)(ii), 2015). The McKinney-Vento Act describes *school of origin* as, “the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled” (M-V:722(g)(3)(G), 2015). Parents or guardians are allowed to request that their child “stay in a school of origin for the entire time they are homeless. When they find permanent housing, they can remain in the school of origin until the end of the school year” (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2011, p. 13).

**Statistics.** The following statistical numbers provide how many children are affected by homelessness in the United States of America and associated federal funding to support the growing need at the school district level. In 2015, Congress amended the McKinney-Vento Act due to the pending change on national legislation from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The power of national legislation helps create statistical data over multiple years in order to establish trends and analyze information over time. The complexity of the McKinney-Vento Act helps reach students affected with homelessness through funds to the local educational agency (LEA). An LEA, or school district, is defined as a public board of education or other public authority that exists to provide administrative control, direction, or services for public schools (20 U.S.C. § 1401(19), 2001).

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) collects annual data on critical facts to support opportunities and outcomes for children affected by homelessness. As of the 2014–15 school year, state educational agencies (SEAs) report 1,263,323 children experiencing homelessness, compared to 1,219,818 during the 2012–2013 school year (National Center for

Homeless Education, 2016, p. 8). In response to the 3.5% increase in the number of homeless children reported by SEAs, the federal government increased an additional \$3,000,000 of the 63,200,000 funded allocations in fiscal year 2015 to state educational agencies (National Center for Homeless Education, 2016, p. 8). Additionally, each SEA is required by the McKinney-Vento Act to award a minimum of 75% of their McKinney-Vento federal funding to LEAs through sub-grants. The National Center for Homeless Education (2016) reported that, “during the 2014–15 School Year, 17,395 public school districts operated and enrolled students. Of those districts, 91% reported data on students experiencing homelessness” (p. 4).

The increase of 3.5% in the number of students reported as homeless by SEAs over a three-year period was not equally distributed across states. Twenty-one states reported 10% or higher growth during this three-year period, while five states reported 10% or higher reduction of youth experiencing homelessness. The homelessness category of “doubling up,” also referred to in the McKinney-Veto Act as “couch surfing,” designates the housing situation for most students affected by homelessness.

The majority of students experiencing homelessness, 76%, share housing with others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. Shelters are the next most commonly used type of housing, as 14% of homeless students resided in shelters. Seven percent had a primary nighttime residence of hotels or motels and 3% were identified as unsheltered. (NCHE, 2016, p. iv)

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP) provides the national overview of statistics about poverty and the homelessness experience. In 2016, the NLCHP stated some major challenges to implementing the federal legislation enacted to address homelessness issues:

Capacity to fulfill McKinney-Vento obligations remains a challenge. Over 90% of district-level liaisons report that they work in another official capacity and 89% say they spend just half of their time or less on their responsibilities as liaisons. At the state level, 58% of state coordinators spend most of their time on the McKinney-Vento program, while 42% of state coordinators spend less than 60% of their time on being a state coordinator. (NLCHP, 2016, p. 1)

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP) information provides a perspective of state and district liaisons who are assigned responsibility for administration of supporting the needs of homeless youth but is not their only employment duties.

The challenges of implementing the McKinney-Vento Act are compounded by the dramatic increases in student homelessness. Child Trends (2015) reported that, “in school year 2013–14 there were 1.4 million students who were homeless at the beginning of the year. . . . this is more than twice as many as in school year 2004–05 (590,000)” (p. 3). The present study will be conducted in the Pacific Northwest. The student homeless population in Oregon increased from 19,189 to 22,637 between 2012 and 2015, while the student population in the State of Washington increased from 30,609 to 35,511 between the same years (National Center for Homeless Education, 2016, p. 13). The reported numbers indicated an increase in the student homeless population over the past several years, which could lead to a more likely chance classroom teachers may see them in their classroom.

**Legal challenges.** Due the federal mandates in the McKinney-Veto Act, school districts, individual families, and even state agencies needed clarification of the law, which was provided through legal challenges to the McKinney-Vento Act and judicial rulings. Many of the legal challenges between school districts and individual families ensued around the definition of

*school of origin*. There are a number of court cases related to challenging the following aspects of the act: denial of school of origin; residency; or refusal of enrollment. This section will briefly review a few selected cases in order of these three aspects. *Richards v. Board of Education of Union Free School District Number 4* (1985), *Delgado v. Freeport Public Schools* (1988), and *Mason v. Board of Education, Freeport Union School District* (1987). Schumack (1987) noted Congressional policy that “homeless children have access to a free, appropriate public education on an equal basis with non-homeless children, and that the state residency laws not be used as a tool to bar homeless youngsters from school” (p. 3). The district must remove barriers, which prevent children affected by homelessness from receiving an education. This includes providing transportation to the student’s school of origin even if their current family living situation is outside the school’s catchment/attendance area.

*Richards v. Board of Education of Union Free School District Number 4* [No. 11490, N.Y. Department of Education (1985)] was a case in which a family was removed from their apartment when “Westchester County Department of Social Services decided that the apartment in which they lived was too hazardous, and relocated them” (Schumack, 1987, p. 5). The Union Free School District denied the enrollment of the children because the family no longer met the residency requirements of the school district. The Richards Family had not established another permanent residence and fulfilled the definition of homeless. The New York Commissioner of Education found on behalf of the Richards Family because the existing law stated: “a residence is not lost until another residence is established through both intent and action expressing such intent” (Schumack, 1987, p. 5). Union Free School District was required to enroll the children and accommodate transportation for the students.

Delgado v. Freeport Public School District [499 N.Y.S.2d 606 (1988)] was a unique legal case because it addressed both the school of origin and refusal of enrollment categories. The Delgado family originally lived in Freeport and was forced into temporary housing in the nearby community of Roosevelt. Roosevelt argued, “the family had established no permanent residence within its jurisdiction and Freeport asserting that the children had lost their residence status when they lost their home” (Schumack, 1987, p. 6). Two ends of the homeless experience were addressed because Freeport Public School District would not provide the children an education since the family lived in Roosevelt, which was outside of the district boundaries. School administrators in Roosevelt would not enroll the children in their school district because family did not establish permanent housing in their community. In this peculiar case, it was ruled that the Delgado family failed to establish permanent residency to Freeport and were ordered to attend school in Roosevelt.

A second case, *Mason v. Board of Education, Freeport Union School District* [No. 2865/87. N.Y. Sup. Ct. Mem. Op. (April 22, 1987)] was encountered a similar situation with a family’s residency. The family originally lived in Freeport and in 1986 and then became homeless. The family moved eight times into five different school districts and finally landed in Long Beach, New York. Again, the court found in favor of the Freeport Union School District by indicating the family established residency in Long Beach even though they were intent on returning to Freeport. The McKinney-Vento Act addressed three main goals: (a) increased student access to school; (b) student success in school; and (c) student attendance at school. The legal challenges to the McKinney-Vento Act and judicial rulings helped reinforce federal mandates supporting the negative impacts of homeless experience and remove barriers like

providing transportation and allow attendance to a school that is outside the catchment area to ensure that a student receives an education.

**Possible policy supports.** Recent empirical research recommends adjustments to the federal legislative mandates at the school district level. Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) investigated teacher perceptions of homeless students who were in an early intervention program. These researchers sought to identify important perceptions of homeless students through the point of view of the classroom teacher to highlight implications and recommendations for successful school policy frameworks that would support students affected by homelessness. Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) compiled a comprehensive list of recommendations that were derived through an analysis of three concurrent case studies that each sought to provide evidence to support an understanding on how to enhance a teacher's view of students affected by homelessness (p. 211). A summary of the recommendations of the Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) case study research included: (a) enhancing the school environment by encouraging school; (b) community awareness of the homeless experience; (c) guiding student support in the classroom through teachers developing positive relationships; and (d) involve the community advocacy along families supports outside of the school (Anooshian, 2000; Milenkiewicz, 2005; Nunez, 1996; Swick 2000; 2005).

These 10 policy recommendations could improve the overall support of students affected by homelessness and support districts in meeting the intended goal of the McKinney-Vento Act, i.e., lowering the number of homeless individuals and support youth in school affected with homelessness. The power of national legislation exemplified by the McKinney-Veto Act helps support the homeless populations in America and judicial rulings clarified those federal mandates. This section of the review of literature has provided a review of selected literature



related to the first conceptual framework construct, *Homelessness in America*. The reviewed literature demonstrates how the federal government is meeting the three goals associated with The McKinney-Vento Act: (a) increase access; (b) success in school, and (c) attendance at school for school-age children. The next section of the literature review introduces the reader to the literature that undergirds the second conceptual framework construct, which is the public school setting in which the homeless experience connects to the classroom teacher.

### **Construct Two: The Public School Setting**

In recent years, the cultural, social, and political climate in the United States has been directly impacting contemporary public school classrooms across the nation. The first construct, *Homelessness in America*, provided an overview regarding the increase in the number of students affected by the homeless experience in public schools. The increase is affecting many local classrooms, which presents teachers with unique challenges and opportunities for instructional engagement. In addition to the increase in the number of students affected by homelessness, the overall student population in public schools is increasing. The *Digest of Education Statistics* (2015) reports that, “public school enrollment rose 28 percent, from 39.4 million to 50.3 million, between 1985 and 2015” (p. 5). Public school enrollment is projected to reach record levels, rising from 50.3 million public education students in 2015 to 51.4 million by 2025 (NCES, 2015, p. 5). Looking to an earlier period, between 1985 and 2015, student enrollment increased and the teacher staffing level decreased, which meant fewer full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers were teaching in the classroom at the end of this 30 year period. Future student enrollment projections are on the rise, which could affect more classroom teachers and might be more likely to support a student affected by homelessness in their classroom. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) reported that,

Public school enrollment was two percent higher in 2015 than in 2005, while the number of public school teachers was less than one percent lower. In fall 2015, the number of public school pupils per teacher was 16.1, which was higher than the ratio of 15.6 in 2005. (NCES, 2015, p. 6)

To address the increase and need for improving instructional strategies due to class size, public schools began using paraprofessionals and instruction coaches/coordinators. NCES (2015) reported that,

between 1980 and 2013: The number of instructional aides rose 127 percent, and the number of instruction coordinators rose 255 percent. Taken together, the percentage of staff with direct instructional responsibilities (teachers and instructional aides) increased from 60 to 62 percent between 1980 and 2013. In 2013, there were 8 pupils per staff member (total staff) at public schools, compared with 10 pupils per staff member in 1980. (NCES, 2015, p. 72)

Compounding the situation of increased class sizes, the overall levels of teacher experience, measured by years of service, has been declining over the past 25 years. In 1987, teachers with fewer than three years of experience represented 2.1% of the teaching population compared to 2012 in which this same group represented 8.4% of the overall teacher population (NCES, 2015, p. 153). Though it may seem logical to combat larger class size with adding paraprofessionals and instructional coaches, this may not improve student achievement due to limited pre-service training with paraprofessionals. With higher levels of inexperienced teachers working and with larger class sizes becoming the norm, marginalized students, such as those affected by homelessness, may not receive the support necessary to achieve in school.

Today's classroom presents teachers with a diverse and growing student population with a wide array of racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. National poverty rates are increasing as well. In 1990, 17% of the children between five and 17 years old in the United States were classified as living in poverty as compared to 20.3% in 2014. Poverty rates for this population of children also increased in the Pacific Northwest states of Oregon and Washington. In the 1990s Oregon's child (5–17) poverty rate was 13.4% and Washington State's poverty rate was 12.8%; by 2014 Oregon's rate had increased to 15.6% and Washington's rate had increased to 17.7% (NCES, 2015, p. 28). Additionally, one indicator of identifying high poverty schools is student eligibility for free or reduced meals. In 2000, 38.3% of students in the U.S. were eligible for free or reduced meals; by 2013 51.3% of students in the U.S. were eligible for free or reduced meals. In the Pacific Northwest, Oregon's free or reduced rate was 34.8% and Washington State was 32.5% in 2000, but by 2013 this rate had risen to 53.7% in Oregon and 45.2% in Washington state (NCES, 2015, table 204.10).

There has also been a major shift in ethnic demographics in public schools, which has implications for the classroom teacher. Howard (2003) projected how diverse the student population will change the classroom:

While students of color currently comprise approximately one third of the U.S. school population, the U.S. Department of Commerce (1996) projects that by the year 2050 African American, Asian American, and Latino students will constitute close to 57% of all U.S. students. (p. 196)

Moreover, "from Fall 2003 through Fall 2013, the number of White students enrolled in public schools decreased from 28.4 million to 25.2 million, and the percentage of students who were White decreased from 59 to 50 percent" (NCES, 2016, p. 1). This is in contrast to, "the number

of Hispanic students enrolled during this period, which increased from 9.0 million to 12.5 million, and the percentage who were Hispanic increased from 19% to 25%” (NCES, 2016, p. 1). The change in classroom diversity and cultural climate affects the instructional approach and teachers’ inherent points of view (Gay, 2013). In reviewing culturally relevant teaching strategies, critical reflection about race and cultural background of teachers and students are imperative to support the academic growth and achievement for all students (Howard, 2003, p. 195). Furthermore, NCES (2014) data indicated that, “About 82 percent of all public school teachers were non-Hispanic White, 7 percent were non-Hispanic Black, and 8 percent were Hispanic” (p. 2). The NCES data evidences that the student population has a rich diversity of Hispanic ethnicity, while the teaching staff does not represent the same diversity found in the public school setting. This may designate a possible need to support some professional development around culturally responsive instruction and understanding the perspectives of the homeless.

### **Construct Three: Impact of Homelessness**

The third construct of the conceptual framework is the *impact of homelessness*, through which I begin to connect poverty and effects of homelessness to a focal point on the student’s classroom experience. Initially, the literature review began to frame the overall situation of homelessness in America, which indicated how the problem of homelessness is increasing, both in the number of persons affected by it and in the resulting issues this creates, notably in public school instruction. The second construct provided a crucial lens in the literature through which to view the many changes occurring in schools: increasing numbers of homeless students; more diverse student bodies; less experienced teachers; and fewer classroom teachers. This lens

focused the reader's attention on the effects of homelessness on children in relation to their school environment.

Children affected by homelessness are impacted in multiple ways and begins with low family socioeconomics, poverty. Poverty and the homeless experience are linked. The leading organization to end homelessness in the United States is The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH). The Alliance synthesizes national policies and develops solutions that are cost effective. The NAEH (2015) summarized the impact of homeless families who ultimately become homeless, have strained financial resources and are challenged with the high cost of housing (p. 36). Families in poverty who cannot afford housing, most likely will end up living with family or friends. The 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment report to Congress indicated that 74.7% of people who had housing prior to accessing a shelter were living in the home of a family or friend (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2015, p. 36). The data from the 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment report to Congress seemed to imply a relationship between families with a low socioeconomic status and children who are beginning to feel the effects of homelessness.

The Children's Defense Fund is a non-profit child advocacy organization that works to ensure all children are reaching their full potential. In 2015, The Children's Defense Fund (2016) reported, "over 14.5 million children lived in poverty" (p. 1). Additionally, The Children Defense Fund (2016) using income as a measure, provided the following definitions: "Poverty is defined as an annual income below \$24,257 for an average family of four, extreme poverty [is even more severe with the same family of four category] only earning \$12,129 per year" (Children Defense Fund, 2015, p. 1). Additionally, research on promising practices for teachers working with students in poverty, Kristen Cuthrell (2010) defined three separate types of poverty

based on how its underlying causes. The first category, *situational poverty*, is “caused by specific circumstances, such as illness or loss of employment, and generally lasts for a shorter period of time” (Cuthrell et al., 2010, p. 105). Even though situational poverty is short lived, it can affect the focus and engagement of the student. The second category is more pervasive because it extends across generations of family members. “*Generational poverty* [emphasis added] is described as having its own culture, with hidden rules and belief systems” (Cuthrell et al., 2010, p. 105). In this category students may take on unique roles outside of their normal developmental age. Cuthrell (2010) implied it is important for teachers to work within the comfort zone of children affected in generational poverty by relating to them in a more adult manner. The last category, *absolute poverty*, is defined as “a focus on sustenance and the bare essentials for living with no extra resources for social and cultural expenditures” (Cuthrell et al., 2010, p. 105). In this final category, Cuthrell et al. emphasize Ruby Payne’s extensive longitudinal research on poverty. Poverty is much more than just a lack of money and it affects the whole child in many ways.

Cuthrell (2010) summarized the eight resources that Payne identified, whose presence or absence determines the effect of poverty, according to Payne. These resources were identified by the following terms: *financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships and role models, and knowledge of hidden rules* (p. 105). The burden of poverty increases as a family has fewer of these resources. If an individual has limited financial resources but strong emotional, spiritual, and physical support, the burden of poverty may be lessened. Although teachers may not be able to change financial resources, they can affect some of the other areas like emotional and mental fortitude along with building relationships with adults in a positive manner (Cuthrell et al., 2010, p. 105).

Teachers may not be able to change the limited financial resources of families in poverty but they may be able to support students through inter-connected relationships and having empathy towards their student's situation. Van der Jagt and Madison (2006) indicated support within family structure could improve if children experienced a positive relationship with school personnel. These researchers also affirmed that children experiencing poverty need to develop the ability to think using abstract concepts in addition concrete concepts, in order to have advanced reasoning abilities needed to move into the middle class (p. 317). At times, the modeling of these abstract skills falls on classroom teachers to emphasize these skills to their students. Van der Jagt and Madison (2006) listed these abstract terms saying, "middle class characteristics include talking to children about going to college, having children going to extra-curricular activities, and helping children with their homework" (p. 317). Knowing the different abstract terms within socioeconomic classes could help a student transition upward to the next socioeconomic status, which could increase the likelihood they would not be homeless. Van der Jagt and Madison (2006) implied that a student's academic achievement and higher employment status are dependent on their ability to demonstrate these forward thinking, abstract terms (p. 318). Based on this research, it seems essential that teachers understand the differences between socioeconomic classes because they are on the front lines with students impacted with homelessness and poverty. Van der Jagt and Madison (2006) continue to relate up the social class abstract concepts with:

As a member of the wealthy class there is an emphasis on detail, one is required to be perfect, have verbal skills to disseminate important information, has to have skills or expertise, and social exclusion is the method of rejection. (p. 318)

In contrast, children in poverty and/or affected by homelessness have a completely different set of expectations. These researchers noted, “Adults and children from poverty receive information non-verbally, need to be personally strong, have the ability to entertain, generate high noise levels, and have a wider range of behaviors that are acceptable” (Van der Jagt & Madison, 2006, p. 318). Based on this research, it seems the teacher’s ability to assist students in understanding the unique differences between class characteristics may improve their ability to move up into a new socioeconomic class. This outcome is not guaranteed, however. For if a teacher does not assist their students or connect with them it is likely that the classroom environment could be affected negatively and this would in turn make the task of engaging and teaching children more difficult. It stands to reason, that if a teacher desires to effectively engage all their students, then the teacher will need to be aware of various socioeconomic structures and instructional strategies that are effective with children whose primary concepts come from these different structures, if they are to engage all of their students (Van der Jagt & Madison, 2006).

Other research indicates that students affected by poverty have less time in the classroom, which can have lasting effects, including diminished income earning ability, fewer working hours, and poor health. Schwartz-Henderson (2013) claimed that, “poverty is linked to a number of negative outcomes for children, including completing fewer years of schooling, working fewer hours and earning lower wages as adults, and a greater likelihood of reporting poor health” (p. 49). Additionally, Schwartz-Henderson (2013) cited The Children’s Defense Fund (2012) report, which noted that children who are homeless are, “twice as likely as other children to repeat a grade in school, be expelled or suspended, or drop out of high school” (CDF, 2012, pg. 18). The nonprofit organization of The Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) ensures all children reach their full potential through maintaining the national focus on every child have a healthy,



fair, and safe start in life. The CDF helps collect and publish national data on the needs of poor and minority children to help focus efforts to increase the likelihood of success in adulthood (CDF, 2012, pg. ii).

**Effects of homelessness on children.** Categorizing individuals affected by homelessness into different groups helps advocates and scholarly researchers to delineate unique qualities with each subset of the homeless, so that they can better understand the impact and find possible solutions to the phenomenon. Murphy and Tobin (2011) divided the homeless population into adults and young persons, and noted that “the young persons category is also divided into two groups: accompanied ‘children’ (from birth to age 18) with their family, or part therefore, and unaccompanied ‘youth’ out on their own” (p. 33). Murphy and Tobin (2011) provided further refinements to their categorization and separated unaccompanied youth into three types: runaway; throwaway; and system homeless.

Those in the first group leave home of their own volition; those in the middle group have been asked to leave and are actively prevented from returning; the final group includes youngsters who have been in and out of government programs. (p. 33)

The effects of homelessness on learning for children is significant because children’s daily lives are bound by the circumstances of limited financial means, which they are not able to control. Martha Burt’s (2001) research on helping America’s homeless provides clear support for understanding that, “Of all homeless people, homeless children are the most vulnerable” (p. 137). The state of vulnerability seems to occur because of a child’s limited power and control over their circumstances.

Children in a state of homelessness are burdened with the weight of their personal lives, which could bring down potential success in the classroom. Cuthrell et al. (2010) indicated,

“Impoverished students are far more likely to enter school as linguistically disadvantaged because they have not had experiences that promote literacy and reading readiness” (p. 105). Additionally, researcher Schwartz-Henderson (2013) found that, “47% of children who are homeless are anxious or depressed, 20% of preschoolers have emotional problems requiring treatment by age eight, and 33% have at least one major mental disorder” (p. 49). This research indicated students affected by homelessness enter the classroom with a reduced vocabulary and limited expressive or receptive language skills along with a higher probability of emotional or mental disorders than same age peers not affected by homelessness.

Homeless children experience hunger, insecurity, and stress that make it difficult to engage in learning at a similar rate as non-impacted peers who possess similar academic skill levels. The National Center on Family Homeless (NCFH) (2014) reported,

The impact of homelessness on the children, especially young children, is devastating and may lead to changes in brain architecture that can interfere with learning, emotional self-regulation, cognitive skills, and social relationships. The unrelenting stress experienced by the parents, most of whom are women parenting alone, may contribute to residential instability, unemployment, ineffective parenting, and poor health (p. 9)

Based on this research, access to school and teachers trained in trauma informed care seemed critical in supporting children affected by the homeless experience.

The NCFH (2014) summarized a meta-analysis on the literature to date:

10% to 26% of homeless preschool children had mental health problems requiring clinical evaluation. This increased to 24% to 40% among homeless school age children—two to four times the rate of poor children in a similar age range (Bassuk, Richard, & Tsertsvadze, 2014 in review). (p. 10).

Homelessness puts children in situations that may that interfere with maintaining a consistent educational experience.

The research literature revealed a similarity of factors homeless children face: constant moving; overcrowded living conditions; limited access to basic resources; and, a multitude of negative impacting characteristics (Dupper & Halter, 1994; Lineham, 1992). Moreover, the research literature provides evidence that these factors cause issues for schools like: access to student records, contact with parents, parental involvement, student inattentiveness, and poor attendance records. Families experiencing the crisis of homelessness use schools to help establish an anchor in their community and to help support their children. Chittooran and Chittooran (2013) stated, “For those homeless students who do attend school, it is important to remember that school may be the only source of stability in their lives” (p. 2).

Additional qualitative research conducted by Tierney and Hallett (2009) supports the finding that youth affected by homelessness tend to be invisible and vulnerable, especially when faced with the overwhelming feat of negotiating social services (pp. 22–23). Tierney and Hallett (2009) concluded there is a social service dilemma created by the struggles that homeless youth experience in maintaining their identity, their voice, and their abilities to trust others (p. 26). William Tierney and Ronn Hallett are attempting to change national policy through their research and stimulate federal government to address the potential economic resources of supporting youth who are homeless. Tierney and Hallett (2015) implied, if we alter the paths of homeless youth so that they do not become homeless adults, they would be able to gain employment, earn an income, and pay more taxes, which will stimulate the economy along with reducing the burdens on social services if they were homeless. Tierney (2015) noted the following outcomes of not supporting homeless youth is, “We know that of 100 homeless

children in ninth grade, only three will ultimately get a four-year college degree. The probability that they will be homeless as adults is well over 50%” (p. 757). Tierney (2015) noted that, “Improving the lives of homeless youth raises the potential of the country. Individuals who are at risk could instead be taxpayers contributing to the civic and economic welfare of the country” (p. 757). The summary of this qualitative research indicated that supporting students affected by homelessness allows them to move toward productivity as a citizen and the ability to contribute, even financially, to the well-being of society.

Alesina and Glaeser’s (2004) research on effective ways to fight poverty and how the homeless experience is garnished have similar outcomes of Tierney and Hallett’s (2009) research, which indicated some people have personal responsibility, family background, and the impact of their environment behind their homeless situation. Alesina and Glaeser (2004) and Tierney and Hallett (2009) both indicated a common threat among individuals who are not impacted with homelessness is homeless people should, ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps.’ Both studies indicated that more research is needed to explore the multitude of challenges faced by the youth who are homeless. Furthermore, how can we can better influence possible educational opportunities of those homeless youth who do not even own boots or know how to find their bootstraps (Alesina & Glaeser 2004; Tierney & Hallett 2009).

In the past, research indicated public schools have attempted to combat the negative impact of the homeless experiences on students by providing supplemental supports, such as after school programs focused on academics (Holm, 2008). Additionally, the review of literature indicated a quality after school program positively impacts a student’s academics, social skill, and emotional development (Davey et al., 2000; Posner & Vandell, 1994). In a quantitative quasi-experimental research study of 54 extracurricular and after school programs studied, The

Harvard Family Research Project found that the participants in the reviewed programs had decreased disciplinary actions along with improved test scores, attendance, and grades (Little & Harris, 2003).

Teachers play a critical role in supporting the needs of students who are homeless. Through his research on educational reform to support homelessness, Stronge (1993, 1997) came to the conclusion that reform has occurred in the ways that homeless students are supported by schools. Supports include mainstreaming of homeless students, providing them with transitional schools, and offering them supplemental supports such as after school remedial academics. These educational reforms help the teachers to experience the challenges of the homeless youth by providing more direct contact with the youth because they are at school more often. Deborah Woolridge (1993) indicated the importance of teachers needing to develop a working knowledge about the unique environment of homelessness (p. 34). Furthermore, Woolridge (1993) affirmed that pre-service teacher programs needed to address strategies for managing stress, poverty, abuse and neglect, and dysfunctional family situations (p. 34). Woolridge (1993) used Bloom's taxonomy to frame her discussion on how to support curriculum for pre-service teachers, saying:

Several strategies are suggested here to enhance the educational experiences of pre-professionals and to empower them to work effectively with children at risk such as the homeless. These strategies should encourage a holistic approach to learning and should be based on Bloom's taxonomy for the cognitive domain. (p. 34)

The literature seems to indicate that the homeless student experience could be a serious problem with a possible solution, which may entail educating our future teachers to help break the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

The review of literature within the construct, *Impact of Homelessness*, led to resiliency and how children rise to the challenges of poverty and homelessness. In the research of Suniya Luthar et. al. (2000) resilience referred to, “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (p. 543). The conditions of dynamic and significant adversity in Luthar et al.’s (2000) research on resiliency relate directly with homelessness; being homeless is an ever-changing environment due to the fact that homeless students do not know where they may sleep each day. This lack of stability in place of sleep poses significant environmental and physical challenges that can affect a student’s development. Previous resiliency research by Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) also indicated the conditions of the environment are even for homeless students and this can affect a child’s development (p. 426). Additionally, Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) helped frame the concept of resiliency as, “the capacity, processes, or outcomes of successful adaptation in the context of significant threats to function or development” (p. 426). Kimchi and Schaffner’s (1990) research on resiliency indicated, resilient children rely on friendly teachers and these children will enjoy school more if they are able to gain social support (p. 491). Furthermore, “In the Kauai Longitudinal Study (Werner & Smith, 1983; 1989), school-age ‘vulnerable but invincible’ children were reported by their teachers as being highly sociable” (p. 491). The same research found at least one positive adult relationship helped in supporting the resilient outcome. Werner (2012) supported her current writings around resilience and reaffirmed, resilience is not a set brief accounts, resilience is a process that takes time (p. 18). Werner’s (2012) longitudinal study of resilience supports the finding that connection to children who show signs of resiliency can be successful in school (p. 20). The research seems to support that children who are impacted by homelessness could show

signs of resiliency but it does not imply that these same children are impervious to the stress and other aspects of living with homelessness.

#### **Construct Four: Teacher Perspective**

Teachers are on the frontlines in the classroom, combating the problems of homelessness and supporting the increasing number of students affected by this issue each day. In addition to the increase in the number of students affected by homelessness, the overall student population in public schools is increasing. The *Digest of Education Statistics* (2015) reports that, “public school enrollment rose 28 percent, from 39.4 million to 50.3 million, between 1985 and 2015” (p. 5). At the same time student enrollment has increased, teacher staffing level have decreased, which means fewer full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers are teaching in the classroom. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) report,

Public school enrollment was two percent higher in 2015 than in 2005, while the number of public school teachers was less than one percent lower. In fall 2015, the number of public school pupils per teacher was 16.1, which was higher than the ratio of 15.6 in 2005. (NCES, 2015, p. 6)

Student-teacher relationships highly affect student development. The research of Davis (2003) indicated that the role and interrelationship between students and their teacher affects the students’ self-worth, confidence, and desire to learn more. With the classroom teacher at the forefront of learning in the classroom, it is important to understand the lens a teacher may view their students. In the research of Love and Kruger (2005) who conducted a qualitative study measuring a teacher’s cultural relevant beliefs and ascertained which items correlate with higher student achievement. Love and Kruger (2005) found:

Teachers in 6 urban schools serving African American children endorsed beliefs regarding a communal learning environment, success of all students, teaching as giving back to the community, and the importance of students' ethnicity. In contrast to prior studies, teachers who taught students with high academic achievement viewed their role as disseminators of knowledge and believed in drill and practice. (p. 87)

Furthermore, in support of Love and Kruger (2005) connection to a teachers' belief and student achievement, Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) linked the transformation of a teacher's perceptions about homeless children when they conduct service learning into a teacher preparatory program (p. 210). Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) emphasized the need for teachers to understand the perceptions of their students who are experiencing homelessness, by means of service-learning projects, which help connect the teachers to their community and helps them develop relationships with the families and students affected by homelessness. The case studies conducted by Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) reinforced the importance of the presence of teachers and empowered them to be more responsive to the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Based on this research it seems reasonable to think that when a teacher understands the perception of their homeless students and possible resilient mannerisms, teachers may impact student achievement through a sense of invested social capital.

There is research evidence that supports some classroom teachers hold misperceptions about the homeless experience. Jonathan Kozol's homelessness research (Kozol, 1988) cited by Powers-Costello and Swick (2008) indicated, "teacher perceptions of children and families who are homeless are especially difficult because our culture tends to see homelessness as a reflection of individual weakness and defect rather than symbolic of social injustice" (p. 241). Supporting teachers in developing an accurate understanding of homelessness and student perceptions may



support improved instruction that helps students adjust their personal mindset from helpless to empowerment. Swick (2008) stated,

teachers of young children can empower themselves to be more responsive to the needs of homeless children and families through well planned activities that help them to see their strengths and needs. Teachers who continually learn about the children and families they teach are more powerful in their relations with them. And they can thus have a more positive and supportive influence on these children and families. (p. 245)

This research seems to indicate there is an impact of student achievement when the teacher has a richer perception of the student's homelessness, which relates to a stronger relationship with both the student and family.

**Instructional practices.** With the increase of students in the classroom affected with homelessness, teachers will at some point instruct students who are highly mobile or homeless (NCHE, 2016). A strong foundation in classroom strategies and effective instructional practices will help encourage success for students already experiencing difficulty external to the school environment.

**Effective instruction.** The literature reviewed on effective instruction noted the importance of the following techniques: (a) individualized and higher order thinking; (b) peer and teaching staff collaboration; (c) extended class time during the day; (d) dynamic instruction; (e) growth mindset presented to students; and (f) parental involvement promoting academics (Kennedy, 2010; McDaniel, 2012; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Tomlinson, 2015; Van der Jagt and Madison, 2006). There is research that supports the idea that implementing effective instruction to students affected with the homelessness experience could increase the likelihood of academic success for them (Kennedy, 2010; McDaniel, 2012; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Murphy and Tobin

(2011) provided two instructional techniques to support students experiencing homelessness: (a) individualized instruction and (b) cooperative learning platforms (p. 35). Cooperative learning platforms allow students to master academic content along with developing social skills as they interact with same age peers. Murphy and Tobin's (2011) research recommended teachers break their lessons into smaller chunks of information and complete lessons in one day. Additionally, Murphy and Tobin (2011) suggest, "schools should be willing to restructure schedules, social organization, and functions in order to best meet the needs of students who have no idea of place" (p. 35).

Kennedy (2010) conducted research about unique characteristics of teachers exhibiting effective instruction in literacy achievement for schools experiencing high levels of poverty.

Kennedy (2010) indicated:

These teachers often have excellent classroom management skills, implement a balanced literacy framework, take a metacognitive approach to instruction, emphasize higher order thinking skills, teach basic skills in meaningful contexts, and use a range of formative assessment tools. (p. 384)

This study highlights six areas to improve literacy when a school is impacted with poverty: (a) customize professional development for staff; (b) honor teacher creativity; (c) introduce change gradually; (d) provide a systematic, coherent, integrated, and cognitively challenging curriculum; (e) collaborative approach for teaching uninterrupted 90-minutes of daily literacy instruction; and (f) parental involvement through promoting reading and writing at home (p. 386). This supporting research evidence in effective literacy instruction for students in poverty could translate into classroom teachers meeting the needs of students affected by homelessness more readily if teacher creativity and customized professional development time was honored along

with systematic and integrated challenging curriculum was provided over a longer class time during the day. Tomlinson (2015) provided three benchmarks for classrooms where all students can succeed.

First, those classrooms should be heterogeneous in nature—microcosms of the world in which today’s students live and will live. Second, they should be characterized by dynamic, contemporary, compelling curriculum and instruction that commends learning as a supremely gratifying human endeavor and prepares all learners for life in a complex and rapidly changing world. Third, they should be responsive to the learning needs of the spectrum of students that make up the classes, with the goal of supporting each student in accessing and succeeding with learning that positions them to be fulfilled and contributing citizens of their time. (Tomlinson, 2015, p. 205)

A major challenge for schools with these three benchmarks in mind is managing skill groups and differentiating classroom instruction. Tomlinson (2015) extended her previous research, “Teach Up” (Tomlinson & Javrus, 2012) that helped frame possible solutions to the challenges of skill grouping and classroom differentiation of instruction (p. 205). Her later research revealed that another aspect to effective instruction is that teachers must exhibit high expectations. In her research, Tomlinson (2015) provided the six key principles of Teach Up:

Learning is enriched by varied perspectives; Growth mindset enables equity of access; Diverse learners calls on teachers to be students of their students; Students arrive to the classroom with varied points of entry so teachers must provide both whole and small group personalized goals; Rigorous and relevant curriculum and instruction; and Reflective practice enables teachers to calibrate instruction to address both student needs and content requirements. (pp. 205–206)

**Strategies.** Understanding the educational needs of students affected with homelessness is at the root of possible instructional strategies that would support this identified population. McDaniel (2012) conducted a research study using the methodology of phenomenology to understand, “how do teachers develop an understanding of and address the educational needs of homeless children” (p. ii). McDaniel (2012) laid out her research plan to observe and interview classroom teachers for 5 weeks during an afterschool and summer program for students experiencing homelessness. The qualitative study combined phenomenology with critical theory to grasp an understanding from the viewpoint of the teacher. McDaniel’s (2012) research findings indicated,

on some level participants made an effort to include knowledge of students when planning and implementing instruction . . . and . . . a teacher’s background experience, beliefs, and knowledge did impact the relationships and pedagogical practices implemented in the classroom. (p. 157)

It appears the research provided the foundation of instructional strategies could be derived from the teacher understanding their own background experiences and belief system and how it could impact the teacher’s planning, student relationships, and teaching presentation methods in the classroom. Additional research in instructional strategies conducted by Van der Jagt and Madison (2006) with highly mobile and homeless students provided a list of possible instructional strategies to include:

- Graphic organizers—help to identify and compare plots, main ideas, concepts, and to sort relevant and non-relevant cues. [SEP]
- Coding—helps identify main ideas, details, for the who, what, why, and when parts of a story. [SEP]

- Draw comparison charts of different geographical phenomena such as weather, seasons, rocks or plants. [L] [SEP]
- Compare characters in literature according to values, ambitions, and personalities. [L] [SEP]
- Compare note-taking procedures to select what fits best according to content. [L] [SEP]
- Uses of language-determine which word and/or gesture is suitable for different contexts or situations. (p. 319) [L] [SEP]

Building strong student and family relationships is another instructional strategy introduced in the review of literature. Walker-Dalhousie and Risko (2008) stated, “As human resources, teachers can be involved in and support local events held in homeless shelters or community centers that engage parents and children in reading and writing activities (e.g., producing a newsletter, sharing books at home) or can offer tutoring” (p. 85). Based on this research, it seems students who feel connected to their teacher and classroom are more likely to feel safe at school and want to attend more frequently. Moreover, Walker-Dalhousie and Risko (2008) connected the research of Noddings (1992) which stated, “Teachers’ expressions and modeling of genuine caring, coupled with compassion and safe classroom spaces, can change unengaged, disruptive children into active group participants” (p. 84). This research implies instructional strategies should include compassion and maintaining a welcoming safe classroom.

Building relationships among peers begins with the classroom teacher. A leading author and empirical researcher on poverty and building relationships in the classroom, Ruby Payne (2008) cited James Comer (1995) saying, "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship" (para. 1). This is a powerful statement and is supported by this review of literature. Further research in specific techniques to building positive relationships among peers in the classroom included Cuthrell’s et al. (2010) suggestions that:

It is important to learn names quickly. Teachers can have children use each other's names positively and often in the classroom. Integrating quick team-building exercises throughout the week to establish positive relationships among the children is also key to reinforcing a positive classroom environment. Something as simple as tossing a smiley face beach ball into a circle of children and telling them they are responsible for keeping the beach ball happy and off the ground unites children and make them feel like they belong. (p. 107)

The research indicated classroom teachers should present a sense of accepting all students and genuinely want them in their classroom. Cuthrell et al. (2010) stated, "By believing in a child cultivating positive relationships, and offering meaningful activities, teachers can build positive classroom environments that affect the child for much longer than a single school year" (p. 107). Connecting previous research of Ruby Payne (2008) in building relationships, a teacher must be prudent when using nonverbal communication in the classroom because, "Nonverbal signals communicate judgment, and students can sense when a teacher's intent is to judge them rather than to offer support" (para. 4). The research seemed to indicate positive relationships begins with the actions of the classroom teacher. The article review written by Payne (2008) also provided techniques to build peer relationships through collaboration assignments, "Whenever possible, introduce new learning through paired assignments or cooperative groups" (para. 5). Another aspect to building relationships is the aspect of empowerment. Heinze's (2006) qualitative research using an ecological-developmental framework with a 6-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis for the surveys was used with the focus groups of homeless youth who were receiving support from governmental agencies found:

A significant main effect for empowerment, suggesting that the combined effect of feeling accepted and comfortable (Belonging), having positive relationships with caring supportive staff, and feeling successful, valued and responsible (Opportunities for Efficacy) predict overall agency satisfaction above and beyond demographic factors, time in program, response characteristics, and safety. (p. 106)

Based on this researcher, it seems reasonable to utilize a classroom strategy that may evoke a sense of empowerment when interacting with students who were affected with homelessness to increase the likelihood they would accept support from others more readily.

The number of students affected with homelessness has increased over the past 2 decades and the classroom teacher needs effective instructional strategies to meet their unique needs to achieve student learning. The review of literature found many unique strategies and behaviors teachers could employ in the classroom to enhance student growth and achievement. Moreover, student attitudes of feeling safe, empowered, and part of the classroom community seem to be on the forefront of literature.

**Developing the teacher.** Developing a classroom teacher to meet all the needs of their students is a difficult task, especially within pre-service education programs. Pre-service teachers begin their journey in becoming a classroom teacher with a varied of personal biases related to poverty and the homelessness experience. Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) stated,

Ten of thousands of new teachers, especially in low-income urban and rural areas, have had little or no exposure to basic information about children, curriculum, or schools. And too many of those who have gone through a teacher-education program have not received

a rigorous education in some of the essential knowledge and clinical training that would prepare them for success in the classroom. (p. 111)

In addition to pre-service teachers have varied personal biases to the homeless or poverty experience, they also must learn competent pedagogical content absorbed in a university setting and apply those techniques through their practicum and student teaching assigned classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2010). It is important to note though, this review of literature found an extensive research on field placements and how they positively affect pre-service teacher instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Haberman, 1989; Stallings & Quinn, 1991).

The research in this category emphasized the use of cooperative teachers to enhance the student teacher's ability to manage time and present curriculum in an orderly fashion. The use of reflection with a cooperative teacher after an observation of the student teacher seemed to support more accurate correction and a feeling of competency for the student teacher. Stallings and Quinn (1991) stated, "Observations indicated academy student teachers changed their instructional behaviors (to a statistically significant degree) so that they spend more class time instructing and less time managing students. They increased their use of higher-order questions and positive support" (p. 26). The research supported the use of cooperative teachers help to guide student teachers in their path of meeting the needs of their students is an important element of the field experience. Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) stated,

However, all must ensure that candidates understand the basics of learning, development, curriculum, and teaching before they are asked to practice independently. Where prospective teachers are learning on the job—whether through student teaching or internships—candidates should be supervised by expert veterans who are available daily



to coach, model, and oversee decisions in curriculum development, instruction, and the needs of individual students. (p. 115)

The cooperative teacher conversations to improve practices relates to professional learning communities (PLC) where teachers improve their practice through sharing content and classroom management situations. In relation to teacher's improving their practice, Haberman (1995) Stated, "Teachers must be able to improve and develop. In order for this to happen, they must be able to take principles and concepts from a variety of sources (i.e., courses, workshops, books, and research) and translate them into practice" (pp. 779–780). The research seems to indicate pre-service teachers need a cooperative resource to observe and reflect their initial practice of teaching to enhance the ability to meet the needs of their students. This aspect to improving a teacher's practice through peer collaboration is important in supporting the changing public school population but does not address the homeless experience as it relates to understanding the point of view of the teacher. There is ample research demonstrating the importance of teachers developing the capacities to understand and instruct student populations that are diverse with regard to culture, ethnicity, and race; however, the literature search conducted for this study did not reveal similar research that would extend to understanding and instructing students affected by homelessness (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Grant & Secada, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Melnick & Zeichner, 1995). Based on the review of literature thus far, further research may be warranted in the aspects of homelessness as it presents similar characteristics to culturally diverse populations with a possibility of an emerging category in diversity.

## **Review of Methodological Issues**

The extensive review of literature in this study covered different methods of empirical research. Heinz (2006) used qualitative and quantitative data in an ecological-development framework (Haber & Toro, 2004; Lerner & Castellino, 2002), to collect a better understand of programming characteristics to support homeless and at-risk adolescents. Similarly, NCFH (2014) summarized a meta-analysis to review primary empirical studies using quantitative and mixed methods between 2007 and 2013 that investigated the effectiveness of housing interventions and housing and service interventions for homeless families in the United States. The use of quantitative data helped provide a systematic empirical investigation to visualize a phenomena through statistics but lacks a descriptive or interpretative synthesis of the participants point of view.

A strong component to understanding the essence of an educator's point of view was provided through the qualitative research of Ladson-Billings (1994) with an ethnographic methodological approach that focused on culturally relevant teaching. The statistics and significant correlations presented in this unique body of research did appear more quantitative than qualitative though, which again would not directly support understanding a teacher's point of view with a phenomena. Additionally, ethnographic studies require an extensive time commitment that would impact the availability of this studies participants. Another qualitative approach reviewed was an interpretive study that employed a phenomenological framework through a culturally responsive and social justice lens (McDaniels, 2012). During a five-week period, teachers were observed during academic instruction sessions along with formal interviews. The phenomenological interpretive approach in this methodological design sparked an interest to how a research study can attempt to understand a participant's point of view. The

final review of empirical research methodological designs focused on a qualitative approach with an emphasis on a teacher's perception came through the case study design (Powers-Castillo & Swick 2008; 2011). The Powers-Castillo and Swick (2018, 2011) used service learning projects to increase the awareness of the homeless experience with classroom teacher.

To capture the essence of understanding the educator's point of view when working with students affected by homelessness, a qualitative methodological approach seems imperative along with some form of interpretive design to the study. A phenomenological study is rooted in the structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view; hence phenomenology is the study of what and how we experience phenomena. This methodology could capture the essence through understanding what and how an educator is affected by their students who are homelessness.

## **Chapter 2 Summary**

Through the four narrowing-focus lenses of this chapter, the review of the literature presented the gap in empirical research on the phenomenon of the educator experiences of instructing children affected by homelessness. Specific attention was examined to how educators develop expertise and understanding of homeless experience in the K–12 public school environment. The national regulation addresses three main goals: (a) increased student access to school; (b) student success in school; and (c) student attendance at school. Beyond the McKinney-Vento Act, most of the material about homelessness reflected statistical data and instructional strategies developed to help engage the student in the classroom setting. Additional research examined as part of this literature review focused on understanding the link between poverty and homelessness (NAEH, 2015). The literature concluded with a review of research literature that focuses on the classroom teacher's perspectives in relation to students' homeless

experiences and examined the teachers' perspective in relation to their student's homelessness experience, which is limited and needs further investigation.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter presents the qualitative methodology for a phenomenological interpretive inquiry associated with the phenomenon of the educator experiences of instructing children affected by homelessness. In this study, the researcher recruited and interviewed middle school teachers from three urban schools in the Pacific Northwest in order to have them describe their lived experiences that relate to instructing students affected by homelessness. Additionally, teachers reflected on their past and current practice in the classroom setting where students were identified as homeless.

This study employed an interpretive phenomenological methodology to gather data to answer the research question and sub-questions. Chapter 3 also outlines the participants' demographics, the sampling methods, and the instrumentation for the study, along with the data collection and analysis procedures. In closing, the chapter will address the limitations, credibility, dependability, and ethics associated with a phenomenological design.

#### **Research Question**

If educators do not possess a clear understanding of how homelessness affects some students, they may not be able to support the learning process for this group, and in turn this may affect the overall student achievement in the classroom. If the educator's points of view and lived experiences of students affected by homelessness can be better understood, then schools, districts, teachers, and administrators of teacher preparation programs may better understand the types of preparation and professional learning that are needed for educators to be effective in assisting this marginalized population of students to become contributing members of society. This research study is designed to answer the following research questions:

**Research question.** What is the lived experience of a selected group of educators who work with homeless adolescents in the public middle school settings in the Pacific Northwest?

**Sub-question 1.** How do study participants describe their lived experiences prior to working with an adolescent affected by homelessness?

**Sub-question 2.** How do study participants describe their lived experiences while working with an adolescent affected by homelessness?

**Sub-question 3.** How do study participants describe the impact on their teaching methods after working with a student affected by homelessness?

The researcher investigated these four questions using an interpretive phenomenological design in order to understand the lived experiences of participants who work with students affected by homelessness. Study participants were interviewed and asked to reflect on how their classroom experiences influenced their teaching, engagement strategies, emotional states, and student relationships.

### **Purpose and Design of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to discover the essence of teachers' lived experiences with students affected by homelessness in their classroom. By *essence* the researcher means the phenomenological interpretative analysis to understand the *what* and *how* of the phenomena. The research literature on teachers' lived experience of students in homeless crisis is limited.

Husserl's (2014) aim for phenomenology was to capture experience in its primordial origin or essence, without interpreting, explaining, or theorizing. Martin Heidegger's, who was Husserl's student and then a seminal philosophical theorist in his own right, thought that aim of phenomenology was "to let that which shows itself, be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 58). The human experience occupies the central

role in phenomenological research within the context of a phenomenological method of study. Langdridge (2007) affirmed that phenomenology, “aims to focus on people’s perceptions of the world in which they live in and what it means to them; [this is] a focus on people’s lived experience” (p. 4). Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that can be used to discover the underlying meaning of lived experiences.

Phenomenology is rooted in the structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view; hence, phenomenology is the study of what and how individuals experience phenomena. Freeman (2008) notes that when using a hermeneutic approach the researcher needs to comprehend the mind-set of a person and language which mediates one’s experiences of the world, in order to translate his or her message. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is used to help the researcher understand a participant’s lived experience through a set of interpretative activities, which allow the researcher to discover meaning. The analytical process in IPA is often described in terms of a *double hermeneutic* process, because the participants make meaning of their world first and then the researcher tries to decode that meaning (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Phenomenology originated in the discipline of philosophy. This form of inquiry explores how human beings “make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). One dimension that characterizes phenomenology is the idea of *essence*. With phenomenology, there is an assumption that there is essence to the lived experience that when expressed creates a descriptive understanding of the phenomena. (Patton, 2002, p. 106)

In an editorial on clarifying what is phenomenology, van Manen (2017) explained the intent of the phenomenological writing process:

Phenomenological writings (implicitly) display a phenomenological reflectiveness that constitutes the epoché and the reduction. This is a method of abstemious reflection on the basic structures of the lived experience of human existence. Phenomenology sets out to grasp these exclusively singular meaningful aspects of a phenomenon or event. (p. 777)

Moustakas (1994) indicated that, “Husserl called the freedom from suppositions the *epoche*, a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain” (p. 85). For his part, Moustakas (1994) defined *epoche* as, setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence and *reduction* in terms of describing just what you see, external and internal, the relationship between phenomenon and self (p. 180–182). By practicing the *epoche* and phenomenological *reduction*, the researcher can gather naïve descriptions through open-ended interview dialogue and questions. The various definitions noted in this section from scholars informed and refined the approach to deepen a more refined understanding of the human experience and essence of the phenomenon.

## **Design**

This study employed a phenomenological methodology using a hermeneutic–interpretive approach. Moustakas (1994) described *hermeneutics* as, “how human studies are related to the fact of humanity” (p. 9). Van Manen (1990) stated that phenomenology is not a set of fixed procedures but,

Hermeneutic phenomenological research is a combination of six activities:

1. turning to a phenomenon, which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;



3. reflecting on the essential themes, which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. manipulating a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30–31)

Moustakas (1994) offered that the hermeneutic method accepts lived experiences and a thematic pattern may emerge so that the researcher can develop and interpret authentic meaning and the essence of the phenomena through the combined lived experiences of the participants. Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) initiated the philosophical approach known as phenomenology, with a view towards philosophy that included understanding the lived experience of man. Reiners (2012) stated, “Husserl believed that phenomenology suspended all suppositions, was related to consciousness, and was based on the meaning of the individual’s experience” (p. 1). To gain access to the foundations of human knowledge, Husserl utilized *bracketing*, which attempts to limit the researchers possible past experiences in the phenomena. Going deeper in connecting this study with an interpretive design, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) extended phenomenology to include the branch of knowledge known as *hermeneutics*, which embraces the philosophy of interpretation (Reiners, 2012). Hermeneutics, from a phenomenological standpoint, is focused on being in the world rather than on knowing the world, and “makes it clear that the essence of human understanding is hermeneutic, that is, our understanding of the everyday world is derived from our interpretation of it” (Reiners, 2012, p. 2). Hermeneutic phenomenology supports the recording of deep and rich description of a participant’s experience, as well as the context and complexities of the environments and timeframes within which these experiences exist. Van Manen (1990) supported the use of a hermeneutical research method to

gain an understanding of a person's lived experience because the design involves detailed description, interpretation, and self-reflective of the phenomena.

**Bracketing bias.** Phenomenology attempts to mitigate prejudgments of the researcher and describe the relationship between the phenomena and participant. The present study attempted to control the researcher's bias by employing the *epoché*, or *bracketing*, and establishing a reflective summary of personal lived experience of the phenomena, teaching students affected by homelessness. Prior to interviewing the participants, the researcher wrote in a reflective journal, the personal lived experiences of teaching students affected by homelessness. There is difficulty with controlling bias, which is due to the interpretive nature and individual perspectives with any lived experience. Van Manen (1990) indicated that there is a difficulty inherent in a theory of *bracketing* because when trying to understand personal experiences any researcher interpretations of the data always incorporate the assumptions that the researcher brings to the topic. LeVasseur (2003) helped provide a more refined definition of *bracketing*: "suspending briefly in a reflective move that cultivates persistent curiosity and allows us to make progress toward the things themselves" (p. 418). Bias cannot be eliminated from the natural attitude of any experience but when including the researcher's personal reflection of the phenomena, identifying attains some control of bias and acknowledging bias exists.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

**Target population.** The term *participant* was used in this study to describe the six educators who were interviewed in order to understand their lived experience with students affected by homelessness. The researcher respected the diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and viewpoints among the participants (Stake, 2010). The lived experiences expressed by the

participants are the subjects of the target population and the source of all information and data collected. The homeless experience in a public school as lived through the experiences of an educator is at the center of this study.

**Sampling method.** Purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was used to identify each of the participants and selected by the researcher, in consultation with the doctoral research committee, because the participants offer an insight into the phenomena's lived experience. Creswell (2013) described that purposive sampling is frequently used to identify the primary participants of a qualitative study to ensure that all participants will be able to "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and [the] central phenomenon of the study" (p. 156). The review of literature included five studies that incorporated a phenomenological interpretive (hermeneutic) design. These studies had between 3 and 10 participants. Studies included the following interview protocols: Oral, Written, Situational, and Essay (Ahern, 2011; Groenewald, 2004; Inaba, 2006; Lannan, 2015; McDaniel, 2012). This study utilized the methodology associated with a phenomenological interpretive-hermeneutic design and select six participants who participated in two in-depth, 45- to 60-minute semi-structured interviews, which provided a sufficient amount of data to draw findings that support answering the research questions, which is the goal of data saturation. Based on Creswell (2013), the number of participants and two semi-structured interviews fulfill guiding principles associated with a phenomenological interpretive-hermeneutic designed study (p. 81).

When interviewing participants, the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP, 2016) provides notification to the researcher about cultural competence and ethical guidelines, which includes the following three areas of focus: (a) *respect for persons*, including their autonomy; (b) *beneficence*, including respecting participant decisions, and balancing the risk of

any unexpected confidentiality issues (including the potential re-identification of de-identified data), and the contribution and benefits of the research to the field of educational research; and (c) *justice*, the assurance regarding the fair and impartial recruitment of study participants with regard to both ethnicity, age, gender and cultural diversity, as well as participant belief systems and values.

Participants were recruited from three secondary urban public schools based on the following purposive criterion sampling their lived experiences with students affected by homelessness, years of teaching experience, and ethnic and demographic diversity. The participants selected were selected with regard to each level of teaching experience; 1 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, and 11 or more years, along with varied demographics including: gender, age, and ethnicity differences. According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), a small sample size is acceptable because “PA is an idiographic approach, concerned with understanding particular phenomena in particular contexts” (p. 49).

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

#### **Primary data source.**

*Semi-structured, in-depth interviews.* Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. For this interpretative-hermeneutic phenomenological study, the primary method of data collection are semi-structured, in-depth, one-to-one, audio-recorded interviews. The participants dialogued with the researcher on two separate occasions focusing on a defined set of open-ended questions that explore these two questions; what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influences or affected [participants’] experience of the phenomenon? (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher engaged the participants using an open-ended interview protocol that represents guided questions to help facilitate the “how” and “what”

of the lived experience along with using active listening skills to gathering data that lead to a textual and structural description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 81).

The researcher utilized the interpretative phenomenological interviewing guidelines described in Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), which included the following protocol. Two in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted on the same subject, allowing the participant dialogue to become more meaningful due to locating the interviews where the participant teach (pp. 62–66). Throughout the two semi-structured, in-depth interviews of this study, data collected was retrospective in nature, relating to the participants' lived experiences prior to, during, and after teaching students affected by homelessness.

The first interview established the context of the participant's experience, including both an historical narrative of their backgrounds as educators, describing their pre-service teacher instruction, first few years of teaching, and types of students they had in their classroom. The second interview concentrated on exploring the details and nuances of the participant's lived experience of the phenomena. During the phenomenological questioning, both questions and answers evolved and were revised during or between interview periods, and clarification of details and follow-up questions were asked of participants. (See Appendix A for the interview protocol.)

### **Secondary data sources.**

**Field notes.** *Field notes* are a secondary data source method in qualitative research. The human mind tends to forget quickly; field notes assist the researcher to record or note contextual factors that are not part of recorded interview and assist in gathering data (Lofland & Lofland, 1999 as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 15). Field notes annotate the what, who, and where of the interviews and experiences noted, and are typically written soon after an interview has been

completed. This implies that the researcher must be disciplined to record, subsequent to each interview, as comprehensively as possible, but without judgmental evaluation (Lofland & Lofland, 1999 as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 15). Additionally, Groenewald, (2004) incorporated a model of four types of field notes based on a scheme developed by Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss supplemented by Robert Burgess: (a) observational (what happened), (b) theoretical (attempts to derive meaning from described experiences), (c) methodological (reminders, instructions or critiques), and/or (d) analytical (end-of-a-field-day summary or progress review) (pp. 15–16).

***Audio digital tape.*** Each interview was recorded digitally with a digital recorder and labeled with a unique code associated the participant, interview time, and date. Backup digital audio equipment was available during the interview such as spare device, cords, and charger to ensure the entire interview was recorded. The researcher verified the interview setting was as free as possible from interruptions and background noise. Field notes accompanied the transcribed digital audio recordings of the interviews. The digital files were saved on a password protected system, encrypted files/password protected files. The digital recording were transcribed into a word processing document by the researcher and deleted the recordings after each participant member checked their interview.

***Artifacts.*** The researcher invited participants to provide other forms of data, including any personal artifacts, reflections, or written statements of their lived experience as they related to the phenomena. This data provided another opportunity to view of the participant's lived experience of teaching students affected by homelessness. No participant in this study provided artifacts of their lived experience as they related to the phenomena.

**Data storage protocol.** All data was stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office along with encrypted hard drive for digital material. If a participant would have withdrawn from the study, all interview, audio tapes, and artifacts would have been destroyed. After the transcription and data analysis needs were met with coding, all digital audiotapes, recordings, and digital voice files were destroyed. At the completion of the study, all study documents and informed content documentation will be destroyed at the three-year mark.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data analysis for this interpretive study is based on the research and publications of Creswell (2013), Saldaña (2015), and Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). The IPA framework and analysis is typically described as an iterative and inductive cycle (Smith & Olson, 2008; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Prior to analyzing of the data, the participants had an opportunity to participate in *member checking* of both interview transcripts in order to review and cross-check transcripts for accuracy. The data analysis occurred over three stages to include: initially reading and making notes of the interview transcripts, transferring the researcher's field notes and comprehensive exploratory comments into emergent themes, and cluster units of meaning along with search for relationships to themes. The intent of repeated readings of the transcripts and transferring notes into emergent themes created structured, systematic analyses of the data. The systematic analysis employed the following tools: (a) *horizontalization* by highlighting statements or phrases that reflect each participants' experience, (b) *clustered units of meaning* or significant statements into themes using a selective approach, (c) used *textural descriptions* and provided specific examples of experiences related to the phenomenon, and (d) recorded *structural descriptions* related to the contextual and situational factors involved in participant experiences (Creswell, 2013).

The first stage of the data analysis involved reading and re-reading the participant transcripts along with listening to the audio recording, which ensured the participant is the focus of analysis. This first stage began with *open coding*, “coding the data for its major categories of information” (Creswell, 2013, p. 86). During the second and subsequent readings, the researcher developed annotated preliminary notes, while attended to semantic content and language. In this type of process, the researcher took on a reflective posture recommended by van Manen (1990) and adopted a holistic view of each participants’ lived experience before attempting to divide the described experiences into parts. The second stage, described as *theming the data*. “A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent [patterned] experience and its variant manifestations. As such a theme captures and unifies the nature of basis of the experience into a meaningful whole” (DeSantis and Ugarriza, 2000 as cited by Saldaña, 2015, pp. 175–176). Even though the IPA analysis is not used in this second stage, the researcher did find worth in how IPA broke down the initial set of data into three types of comments: Descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. Descriptive comments focused on the content of what the participant said, the linguistic comments focused on the specific use of language, and the conceptual comments engaged at a more interrogative level (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 84).

The second stage of data analysis involved transferring the researcher’s comprehensive exploratory comments and field notes into emergent themes. There was a shift with the data in the second stage because the notes were an interpretation of the researcher upon the discrete sections of transcript. The separate analyses began to formulate what phenomenologists call *the hermeneutic circle*. By this theorists meant that the part is interpreted in relation to the whole and the whole is interpreted in relation to the part (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 12). Identifying emergent themes involved breaking up the narrative flow of the interview and



turning comprehensive exploratory and field notes into concise statements that were expressed as phrases, “which speak to the psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 92).

The third and final stage of data analysis involved searching for clusters and unique relationships within the emergent themes. Understanding the human experience of being in the world, essence, is derived through this interpretation (Moustakas 1994; Patton, 2002; Reiners, 2012). The intent of the final stage helped: (a) interpreted the overall essence of what and how participants experienced the phenomenon; (b) examined interpretations and reflections to ensure representation of the meaning of each participant’s lived experiences, as well as the commonalities that established a relationship between the participants past, present, and future experiences; and (c) reaching a saturation level in which the information gathered from participant responses as well as researcher field notes provided sufficient analytical materials, information, or data-sets from which themes emerged and the discussion of results formulated (Creswell, 2013, Groenewald, 2004; van Manen, 1997). The researcher used a data analysis matrix (Appendix C), to compile and analyze the interconnection between the research questions, conceptual framework, interview protocol, and emergent themes.

### **Identification of Attributes**

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was constructed with the first interview gathered data on the ontology, *what*, of the participant’s lived experience and the second interview addressed the epistemology, *how*, of the experience. The researcher grouped similar participant descriptions of their experiences using *a priori* attributes that defined specific meaning units for the study. On the forefront of the open coding process, the researcher used the

three *a priori* attributes from the literature review; teaching, emotional state, and student relationships along with the attributes associated with each sub-research question; prior, during, and after the experience. The researcher then clustered the meanings to support the formation of three emergent themes. In Chapter 2 of this study, the conceptual framework built on four lens; federal legislation, recent changes in student population, teacher staffing, and the diversity of the student body, impact of homelessness on the child, and the teacher's perspective on the student homelessness as it relates to their professional practice. The identifying and operationalizing the attributes with the previously constructed conceptual framework helped derive the essence of the participant's lived experience around student's affected by homeless.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

This interpretive qualitative study is based on an educator's lived experience with students affected by homelessness in their classroom. One delimitation to the study was the small number of participants; however, phenomenological methodology is not designed to generalize to a large population. The transferability of the study's results and the understanding of the total context of the research will therefore be strongly influenced by reader judgment and interpretation of the results (Mertens, 2014).

### **Validation**

Madison (1988) states how complex the issue of validity is within a phenomenological-hermeneutical study by asking, "What makes an interpretation true or valid?" (p. 15). The inherent design of a hermeneutical study is based on accepting the interpretation of a lived experience. Madison (1988) describes validity, "is nothing other than the harmonious unfolding and reciprocal confirmation of successive experiences (interpretations)" (p. 15). The validity of this research study will not evolve from the interpreted themes itself, but from the judgments that

are formed by those who take the time to understand the essence of this research study.

Furthermore, bracketing techniques were applied to help control bias. This ensured that any preconceived influences about the phenomena helped control bias during the interpretative analysis. Additionally, each interview was recorded and transcribed to guarantee accuracy, and to ensure that the analysis focused on each participant's responses. Member checking ensured the accuracy of the transcribed interviews. The study included multiple interviews and artifacts to enhance the credibility of the data along with continuous checking of transcripts and materials for consistency and correctness.

Lastly, to capture the rich and thick descriptions through the interview process, the researcher employed techniques of reflective questioning and active listening. These procedures served to triangulate and validate the data sources utilized throughout the study. The researcher also used the professional software, Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). CAQDAS programs such as Microsoft Word and Excel, along with Atlas.ti (2013) to give the text additional relevance and increase the accuracy of the data analysis process.

### **Expected Findings**

The fundamental goal of this study was to discover meaning around the phenomena, the educator's lived experience of students affected by homelessness in their classroom. Creswell (2013) describes how the nature of the particular phenomenon comes through multiple forms of interpreted data to form clusters of meaning. The researcher's expectation of this study helped provide meaning around how an educator's can improve their teaching, engagement strategies, and student relationships to enhance achievement in the classroom. There was an expectation the study would find the essence of the phenomena to understand how schools, districts,

teachers, and administrators of teacher preparation programs may better to support the homeless experience in the classroom.

### **Ethical Issues**

**Conflict of interest assessment.** For this empirical study, the six participants along with the primary researcher were employed by the same public school district but there was no professional relationship that would introduce any coercion into the study. The primary researcher was assigned in one of the three urban secondary schools associated to the study; the researcher had duties pertaining to professional staff development but did not serve in a supervisory or evaluative position. There was no conflict of interest occurred because of this professional role.

**Researcher's position.** Palmer (2004) says that the journey to inner truth is too difficult to do by oneself and if one does not ask for help, one will not reach success. This research study was designed to discover the how the phenomenon of homelessness affects the classroom experience of teachers as they interact with students experiencing this negative life situation. Students must be provided the opportunity to obtain the appropriate academic, social and emotional skills necessary to contribute to society. Palmer (2004) describes the "circles of trust" as different than traditional framework of families and communities. Palmer (2004) also expands how our relationships and interactions are unique within trust and relational dependencies; within such relationships, persons may speak a truth that may not match the paradigms and frameworks of the communities surrounding them. Educators must intentionally strive to build these circles of trust within the classrooms and school systems along with identify the obstacles that may impede the success of our students. In his doctoral studies the researcher

has investigated many theoretical ethical frameworks, which can be applied to various real world settings. Borgmann (2006) states,

The moral of the story is that the landmarks of theoretical ethics give us orientation that is as broad as it is indispensable. They give us a rough bearing, but they leave the regions of daily life unmapped, and their very visibility can become blurred in a moral crisis, personal or social” (p. 51).

One aspect to this study addressed how ethics was applied into the classroom through the support of professional educators and their role by seeking out marginalized populations and meeting the needs of all students.

**Ethical issues in the study.** Minimal foreseeable risk was associated with this study. The open-ended type interview questions the participants reflected on and answer were presented in a dialogue format so the participant could control the conversation. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, and this consent included: volunteer participation, selecting the location of the interview and convenient scheduling times (see Appendix D).

During the interview process, the participant’s verbal responses were not challenged or discarded by the researcher. If the 45-60 minute interview became uncomfortable for the participant, the researcher adjusted according to the participant’s individual needs. The participants also were informed about their right to privacy especially if they choose not to answer or skip any of the interview questions. They also had the right to withdraw at any juncture of the research and have their study data deleted at any point of final member checking. Furthermore, the researcher ensured privacy and confidentiality throughout the data collection and analysis process. The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP, 2016) does indicate some potential risk with unanticipated problems that may arise with regard to participant

confidentiality, such as data being de-identified, re-identified or compromised through the previously mentioned safety mitigations. Participants who participated in this study may have benefited through sharing their lived experiences and contributing to this body of research study along with improving their teaching practice in classroom. Overall, professional learning around the homeless experience will benefit in supporting this marginalized population of students. Deception was not, in any manner, used in this study.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

The aim of this study was to extend the research on educators who experience students affected by homelessness. The themes that were developed from the educators' viewpoints will support a deeper understanding of the homeless experience and increase student achievement through improved engagement and instructional strategies. Van Manen (1990) summarized the intent of a phenomenological study saying it can, "transform lived experience into a textual expression—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which the reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience" (p. 36). Additionally, this body of research could extend further conversations with regard to both pre-service teacher programs and professional learning communities around the homeless experience and increase the instructional toolbox of both the current classroom and pre-service teacher.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

In this chapter the researcher will present a description of the sample, the research methodology and analysis, the data and results, and a summary of the findings. The purpose of this phenomenological interpretative analysis study was to discover the essence of teachers' lived experience with students who are affected by homelessness, specifically students who they are instructing. By *essence* the researcher means to understand the *what* and *how* of the phenomenon. Six teachers from three urban public secondary schools were interviewed to gain individual perspectives of their experience of teaching students who are affected by homelessness. Through a detailed data analysis the researcher discovered the lived experience of teacher-participants share three attributes based on the review of literature: (a) teaching using engagement strategies; (b) emotional states; and (c) student relationships.

The following research questions guided this interpretative analysis:

**Research question.** What is the lived experience of a selected group of educators who work with homeless adolescents in the public middle school settings in the Pacific Northwest?

**Sub-Question 1.** How do study participants describe their lived experiences prior to working with an adolescent affected by homelessness?

**Sub-Question 2.** How do study participants describe their lived experiences while working with an adolescent affected by homelessness?

**Sub-Question 3.** How do study participants describe the impact on their teaching methods after working with a student affected by homelessness?

The researcher's position as an embedded observer provided additional perspective for interpreting the data and arriving at the essence of the participants' lived experience. It is the researcher's hope that a more developed understanding of this phenomenon may help bridge the

gap for school districts and administrators of teacher preparation programs to refine professional learning for educators, which may allow novice teachers to be more effective in assisting this marginalized population of students to become productive members of society.

### **Description of the Sample**

The researcher conducted data collection in three urban public middle schools in the Pacific Northwest. Each school used inclusive practices with all students and taught students between 11 and 14 years of age. The researcher used purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, to identify each participant and selected by the researcher, in consultation with the doctoral research committee. All six teachers interviewed worked in their classroom without other adult staff and had experienced a homeless student in their practice. The participants' professional experience included a wide variety of curriculum areas, including: math, language arts, social studies, health, physical education, and reading. The researcher gave consideration to demographic data when selecting participants to make the sample representative of the student population demographics in order to select participants with similar, race, ethnic background, and gender. The sample included representation of four racial categories that include: Caucasian, African American, Asian, and Hispanic. The selected sample also had an equal number of male and female participants, and age of participants ranged from 35 to 61 years old. Lastly, the researcher, as part of the selection criteria, considered the teaching experience of each participant with two teachers, one male and female in each of the following categories: one to five years teaching experience, six to 10 years teaching experience, and more than 11 years teaching experience.

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

In Chapter 2 of this study, the researcher developed the conceptual framework using the



following four frames developed from a thorough review of the literature: (a) federal regulations around homelessness; (b) recent changes in student population in public schools; (c) the impact of homelessness on the child; and (d) the teacher's perspective on the student homelessness as it relates to their professional practice. The researcher identified and operationalized a number of *a priori* attributes based on these conceptual frames. The attributes are evident in the study's interview protocol and assisted the reader in deriving the essence of the participant's lived experience in relation to their teaching of students affected by homelessness.

The data analysis occurred over three stages: (a) initially reading and making notes of the interview transcripts; (b) transferring the researcher's field notes and comprehensive exploratory comments into emergent themes by deriving clusters units of meaning; and (c) connecting the clustered units of meaning with the interrelationship of the emergent themes. The researcher began the data-collection process by assigning each of the six participants a pseudonym using an alphabetical code. The researcher then conducted two separate interviews using a total of nine interview questions (see Appendix A). The researcher used the interview protocol to create an environment in which the participants could provide a rich depiction of how teachers experience and understand homelessness in their classroom. Careful analysis of the interview transcriptions allowed the researcher to identify word and thought patterns that set the stage for later theme emersion (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009).

After reading each transcription multiple times, the researcher entered into phenomenological reduction by delineating units of meaning. The researcher grouped similar participant descriptions of their experiences using *a priori* attributes that defined specific meaning units for the study. On the forefront of the open coding process, the researcher used the three *a priori* attributes from the literature review; teaching, emotional state, and student

relationships along with the attributes associated with each sub-research question; prior, during, and after the experience. The researcher then clustered the meanings to support the formation of three emergent themes. Additionally, during the interview process, the researcher collected field notes to help limit bias. Prior to the next interview, member checking with each participant helped with validity and accuracy of each participant's point of view. The first interview established the context of the participants' experience, including both an historical narrative of their backgrounds as educators, describing their pre-service teacher instruction, first few years of teaching, and types of students they had in their classroom. The second interview concentrated on exploring the details and nuances of each participant's lived experience of the phenomena.

The researcher constructed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) constructed with the following aims in mind. The researcher crafted the first interview protocol, questions one through five, in order to gather data on the ontology, *what*, of the participants' lived experiences. The researcher designed the second interview, questions six through nine, to gather data on the epistemology, *how*, of the experience. In the first stage of the data analysis, the researcher extracted units of meaning around the participant's teaching, emotional state, and student relationships with regard to the participant's pre-service instruction and teaching prior to experiencing homelessness in their classroom, which is the *prior* attribute. The *during* attribute interview questions focused on extracting the participant's emotional state, student relationships, and teaching strategies when the student affected by homelessness was in the classroom setting. The *after* attribute interview questions, extracted themes around the participant's emotional state, post engagement strategies and student relationships after the homelessness experience attended the participant's classroom.

The researcher transcribed 12 audio-recordings and separated into the three attributes related to the sub-research questions; *prior*, *during*, and *after* the participants' lived experience. The researcher categorized each of the six participants' transcribed responses into the attributes based on the interview protocol questions. Questions one through five of the protocol focused on the *prior* attribute, questions six and seven collected details for the *during* attribute, and questions eight and nine collected answers for the *after* attribute. Atlas.ti (2013), a computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, increased the accuracy in the first stage of data analysis process. The researcher used Atlas.ti (2013) software to link the open codes directly to the transcribed content and record sorting of the data into clustered units of meaning. In the *open coding* process of the first stage, the researcher extracted codes based on each participant's teaching, emotional state, and student relationships maintaining the initial categorized responses of the three attributes of prior, during, and after. The *open coding* process developed 97 codes between the three attributes; 40 codes for *prior to the experience*, 37 codes for *during the experience*, and 20 codes for *after the experience*.

In the second stage of data analysis the researcher brought meaning and identity to reoccurring experiences from the participants using a process described in the literature as *theming the data*. "A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent [patterned] experience and its variant manifestations. As such a theme captures and unifies the nature of basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000 as cited by Saldaña, 2015, pp. 175–176). In the process described by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) there is a shift with the data because of the interpretation the researcher provides to the discrete sections of the interview transcript. The separation of narration analysis from participants to interpretation of the researcher is an example of what phenomenologists call *the hermeneutic*

*circle*. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), state that *the hermeneutic circle* means that the part is interpreted in relation to the whole and the whole is interpreted in relation to the part (p. 12). In the present study, identifying emergent themes involved breaking up the narrative flow of the interview and turning the comprehensive exploratory analysis of the transcripts into concise statements that were expressed as phrases. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) describe this comprehensive exploratory analysis by stating, “the psychological essence of the piece [participant’s comments] and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual” (p. 92). During the second stage of data for this study, analysis the researcher developed identified three emerging themes from the data: (a) building positive student relationships; (b) insightful reflection; and (c) applying unique engagement strategies to support homelessness in the classroom.

The third stage of data analysis for the study involved connecting the unique associations within the emergent themes. The essence of what and how the participants experienced the phenomenon (i.e., homelessness in their classroom) is reflected in this final stage. The participants’ drive to gain knowledge and seek introspective reflection allowed them to build positive relationships with their students, which led to increasing the likelihood of using unique engagement strategies with all students, including those affected with homelessness.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The researcher conducted two separate interviews with each participant and extracted themes based on three attributes; prior, during, and after the lived experience is founded on the participant’s teaching, emotional state, and student relationships. The basis of the participants’ lived experience utilized transcribed data using their experience, pre-service teacher instruction, first years of teaching, and types of students in the classroom prior to the homelessness

experience. The researcher examined the *prior* attribute and identified four categories in the teaching *a priori*, five categories in the emotional state *a priori*, and three categories in the student relationship *a priori*. The categories the researcher identified helped reveal the ontology, that is the *what* of the participant's lived experience.

Interview questions six and seven allowed the researcher to analyze the participants' lived experience during which they worked with students affected by homelessness. The researcher examined the *during* attribute and identified four categories in the teaching *a priori*, three categories in the emotional state *a priori*, and three categories in the student relationship *a priori*. The categories the researcher identified helped derive the first portion of epistemology, that is the *how* of the participant's lived experience.

The final interview questions, eight and nine, provided the data for the researcher to analysis the last portion of epistemology and understand the participant's lived experience. The researcher examined the *after* attribute and identified two categories related to the *a priori* attribute *teaching*, three categories related to the *a priori* attribute *emotional state*, and two categories related to the *a priori* attribute *student relationship*. The researcher used the rich depiction of the *after* experience to gain a more refined understanding of the participant's lived experience and complete the first stage of data analysis.

During the second and third stage of data analysis for this study, the researcher identified three emerging themes from the data: (a) building positive student relationships; (b) insightful reflection; and (c) applying unique engagement strategies to support homelessness in the classroom. The researcher identified the first emergent theme, seek introspective reflection, through connecting clustered units of meaning from each of the *a priori* attributes, teaching, emotional state, and student relationships. Participants felt a sense of failure and vulnerability,

along with adjusting their teaching practice and a willingness to change. These categories led to the researcher to identify the emergent theme of insightful reflection.

The second emergent theme, building positive student relationships, is connected with all six participants. Participants related how building a relationship with their students impacted learning in the classroom in a positive manner along with using trust and empathy to build a stronger rapport with students affected by homelessness. The researcher noted in the *after* attribute analysis, participants attempted to build more positive relationships with all of their students.

The researcher identified the last emergent theme, increase engagement strategies, by recognizing that all six participants used multiple strategies in the classroom to improve student attention. Participants assigned classroom jobs, used humor, and provided supplies to their students. The researcher determined that when the participant engaged their students in class, the student maintain a connection to school and the curriculum in the classroom. Participants use many different strategies to engage the entire class and removed distractions to increase participation from all students.

The researcher pursued an interpretive analysis of the descriptions from the participants to derive the essence of what (ontology) and how (epistemology) the participants experienced the phenomenon, instructing students affected by homelessness in their classroom. The participants' introspective reflection enabled them to use multiple engagement strategies to build positive relationships with their students.

### **Presentation of the Data and Results**

The researcher used a qualitative design that offered the opportunity to engage directly with six participants to understand their experiences of instructing students affected by

homelessness. The following descriptions are designed to help the reader understand the essence through the lens of the research sub-questions and associated attributes.

**Lived experience prior to encountering homelessness in the classroom.** The phenomenological interview questions one through five allowed the participants to describe their lived experience prior to working with their students. The following *open codes* were developed in the first stage of data analysis. The *prior* attribute was examined through the participant's teaching, emotional state, and student relationship. The researcher identified four categories in the participants' teaching; chaos, student demographics, teaching before teaching, and prior desire to teach to help describe the ontology of the participant's lived experience. The researcher identified five categories in the participants' emotional states; feelings, give to the community, pursue teaching, need improving, and professional learning around homelessness to help capture the ontology element of the lived experience. In the last section of the *prior*, the researcher used the attribute, student relationships, to identify three categories; learning from students, role model, and recognition of achievement to complete the ontology portion of the participants' lived experience. The first interview established the participants' experience, pre-service teacher instruction, first years of teaching, and types of students they had in their classroom prior to the homelessness experience. The categories the researcher identified helped reveal the foundation of the *what* portion in the participant's lived experience.

**Teaching.** The teaching *a priori* attribute in this section refers to the participants' experiences related to the classroom setting and interacting with students. Open codes in teaching, for the *before* portion are labeled in the following manner: Chaotic classroom events, changing student demographics, teaching before teaching, and prior desire to serve.

*Chaos.* A common trait of the prior lived experience included a chaotic first few years of teaching with random and unpredictable behaviors from students. The participant's identified a chaotic environment that increased the likelihood of stress and lack of focus in teaching the content. All six participants spoke about their struggles when they began teaching. Interviewee A maintained his, "first year was chaotic and scary," and Interviewee B described the first year as, "a guy running, trying to find a bucket with water while his hair is on fire." Interviewee C reported, "My first couple years were like a blur, I was very tired all the time." Interviewee D had some very difficult students in their first year and described the students, "super disrespectful; for example, I would come in and they [students] had their feet up on my desk, pulling chairs up so their feet were up on my desk." This common thread of challenging and chaotic first few years continued with Interviewee E who stated, "my classroom first year, it was a little challenging" along with "kids not being very respectful to each other within the classroom." Interviewee F depicted a frustration that her expectations and actual classroom events did not align. She said, "so like I expected it to go one way and I couldn't just switch if it wasn't going the right way, sometimes I still kept trying it." Participant F continued the descriptions of an experience of chaos by saying,

My first year teaching classroom was on a cart and I didn't have my own classroom so it was really just whatever the other teacher had in the class, it was what I had to [show] "the look like" [of the classroom]. Um, "feel like," it's felt a little chaotic some days like I just didn't, I had these expectations of how I wanted lesson plans to go and I didn't have that, like monitor and adjust part of it.

The commonality of descriptions of chaotic events from all the participants provided a vivid picture of the stress many new teachers endure, which may impact learning in the classroom.



*Student demographics.* Two of the six participants detailed a recent change in student demographics in the classroom that made the learning environment more challenging than previous years. Interviewee E stated, “I would say some of the challenges were just meeting the needs of the kids because they all had different backgrounds, they were all at different levels and abilities as far as their math skills go.” Interviewee E noted challenges when he discussed teaching current events at the nation level. He said, “it was hard to kind of deescalate that because there were so many views and opinions of a [de-identified item] grade age, kind of stemmed from politics and just what was happening.” Interview F spoke about her student teaching demographic were not the same as her first years of teaching, “my student teaching program or pre-service teacher program at the school I taught at was much different than coming back to [de-identified item]. The population here is just a different population.” Additionally, Interviewee F discussed the effect that changing demographics has on teaching when the teacher is not aware of the background of her students,

I think back, like with the behavior students because [de-identified item] was a subject they were always pushed into, so I want to say that my first experience with those students was one of the challenging ones, because I don’t think we were given as much background information as our students now. . . . And that changes how you interact with students as having that background information and it just gives you a better understanding of where they’re coming from and I think that’s true.

The researcher noted participants come to the classroom with different experiences similarly to the change in student demographics in school, which may create challenging learning environments if not addressed.

*Teaching before teaching.* All six participants experienced working with students prior

to entering the teaching profession. The experience of supporting students before teaching in the classroom enabled the participant's to build on a schema when they began to teach in the classroom. Interviewee A tutored in high school and Interviewee B worked as a paraprofessional. Interviewee B maintained what helped guide his decision to teach was working with students prior to attending pre-service program. He stated, "prior to my teaching, one thing I think that helped me is working in the classroom. . . . Trying to find myself and I worked with kids in different capacities, like mentoring, tutoring, working with autistic kids and whatnot." Similarly, Interviewee C experienced many opportunities to work with students prior to enrolling in a pre-service teacher program. She said, "I was very immersed in the school systems because I was basically working in the [de-identified item] and then going to school at night to take my classes." Prior to attending a pre-service teacher program, every participant experienced supporting students in a learning environment.

*Prior desire to serve.* Motivation is the desire to do things and a crucial element is setting and attaining goals. Five of six interviewees expressed that they had a sense of knowing their career path and chose the teaching profession. Interviewee A stated, "When I went to college, I kind of said pretty early on I wanted to get into teaching." Interviewee B indicated it was the first time they actually thought about teaching as a career and Interviewee C said, "I was young and I had a lot of motivation." Interviewee D described the effect teachers had on their children as a motivation to want to teach, "I also saw the effect that teachers had on my own [de-identified item], both positive and negative. And my kids had some wonderful teachers that helped immensely." Interviewee D continued to explain her desire to serve by saying, "I realized I wanted to be one of the teachers who could go in and have a positive effect with kids." Interviewee E had several other optional careers after graduating college but chose teaching,

“when I started working in the profession and in between those years I worked a lot of [de-identified item] jobs.” Participants chose the teaching profession and desire to serve their community by educating the youth of tomorrow.

***Emotional state.*** The emotional state *a priori* attribute in this section refers to the participants’ emotional state in the *before* portion of the lived experience. Open codes identified by the researcher are as follows: Feelings, give to the community, pursue teaching, need improving, and professional learning around homelessness. The researcher noted a connection of all six participants’ felt vulnerable and a desire to improve their teaching practice.

***Feelings.*** The researcher coded the category of feelings in the emotional state *a priori* into vulnerability and failure. Four of six participants felt vulnerable and a sense of failure. Interviewee A stated a feeling of failure, “I was failing these kids at times,” and Interviewee B indicated they were still working in the classroom after the first two years of teaching, “I haven’t tucked tail.” Interviewee C spoke about feeling vulnerable when his confidence was low, “and that led to a few circumstances that made me feel very vulnerable.” Interviewee D described the physical space of the classroom creating feelings of vulnerability and failure, “I taught [de-identified item] within a mod, modular unit, a trailer out completely by myself. I didn’t have much interaction with other teachers. The first day I walked in and they said, “here’s your mod, here’s the books. Good luck!” It was apparent Interviewee D struggled with feeling vulnerable as well when she described her first classroom:

I didn’t have what those student’s had, which was absolutely nothing and tons of violence in their life and just seemingly insurmountable challenges. There were fights every day. Police were there everyday. They spilled out into the neighborhood. It was very rough and I honestly think, if I would have had any way to quit, I would have because it was so

hard, I'd come home and cry everyday. I practiced deep breathing on my way out there everyday. . . . There was cussing in the classroom, you know like calling me bitch and stuff like that and after like the first month, they realize I wasn't going anywhere. And some of the other guys on the team would say get your feet on her desk and they started kind of supporting me.

At one point, Interviewee D feeling of failure created such a frustration they, "turned my car around and drove back home and I called in sick." Interviewee D's situation did have a positive end to her sense of failure and she persevered. She said, "that was kind of a turning point for me because I thought, "I can't do this. I can't not do this: You know I have to do this."

Vulnerability and a sense of failure occurred when participants did not feel supported and exhibited low confidence in their teaching skill.

*Give to community.* Based on the researcher's open coding process, the category of giving to the community was discovered with half of the participants under the emotional state *a priori*. The participants expressed a sense of giving back to their community in the following ways. Interviewee B stated, "I guess as a younger person I always, hmm, felt the need to give back or do something." Interviewee A felt teaching was an opportunity to change and make a difference in students' lives. Interviewee C had the most to say around giving to the community,

There are kids, in this building, whose families have never graduated from high school. So if we make one of them happen, imagine the impact that has on that family and then I saw how we begin to work, is like yes!, if you make that happen for one kid. The ripple effect goes into now not just that kid but siblings, cousins anybody who might live you know and then all of a sudden you have the support of that community that be that family. . . . I've been lucky to make connections which not all kids but with some kids

that if I get old in this community like, they'll remember me you know and that that's, that's like human capital almost.

The participants' descriptions of giving to their community resonated throughout the emotional state section in the *prior* attribute.

*Pursue teaching.* The participants made life-changing decisions to pursue teaching. Interviewee B attended night school for 2 years and Interviewee A moved to student teach in a high school. Interviewee D spoke about teaching not being her first choice but that it fit the multitude of responsibilities in her life:

Teaching wasn't my first choice but it was a choice that was a good fit for me to still be able to be home and take care of responsibilities as a [de-identified item] of course and then just have flexibility as far as you know having those times off to work and be home with them.

Participants must attend a pre-service teacher program to attain a license to teach in a public school. The researcher inferred the category, *pursue teaching*, affected every participant in the study due to the requirement to attain a teaching license.

*Need improving.* The commonality with introspective change and needing to improve one's self appeared in all of the participants' responses. The researcher identified significance in the introspective change category based on the following transcribed comments. Interviewee A described how a positive or negative mindset influenced outcomes before they occurred, "You know there were certain things I think I did well but there were some areas where I definitely needed quite a bit of work." Interviewee C referred to pre-service programs needing more cultural sensitivity instruction along with struggling with understanding the connection of content to brain development. They stated, "I did not have the understanding of the connections

between the teaching and learning with the developmental stage of kids brain.” Interviewee B referred to becoming a more well-rounded teacher and expressing little more patience each day. Reflective teaching practice among the participant’s comments created this category. Moreover, the researcher found the participants responded to the interview protocol with an introspective need to change or adjust their practice in order to meet the needs of their student more readily.

*Professional learning around homelessness.* The researcher identified significance in the lack of professional learning around homelessness. All six participants described that they received no professional learning or instruction on the topic of homelessness in their pre-service instruction. Interviewee F stated, “I don’t think before I started teaching I had any professional learning about homelessness.” Interviewee E spoke about the lack of professional learning stating, “No, nothing. No formal training, nothing about how to deal with that.” Interviewee B and D had similar responses about having next to nothing about how to support students who were in a homeless situation. Interviewee C said, “I think we seldom talk about homelessness.” Interviewee A stated, “I don’t think I got a lot of professional development or learning surrounded connected to homelessness.” The researcher noted the lack of pre-service education or professional learning on homelessness for all participants. The participant’s were aware of the topic of homelessness but lacked the professional learning tools to impact learning of students affected by homelessness.

*Student relationships.* The student relationships *a priori* attribute in this section refers to the participants’ experiences related to the relationships between the student and the participant along with past experiences the participant had when they were students. Open codes in the student relationships section of the *before* portion are labeled in the following manner: Learning from students, role model, and recognition of achievement. In chapter 2 of this study, Wolos et

al. (2007) identified role models increase the likelihood student affected by homelessness would graduate from high school.

*Learning from students.* Many of the participants described situations with their students where they learned something about themselves. Interviewee A reflected on a conversation with a student who returned to visit them at the school and learned how to laugh at himself, “he’s like one of the lessons, or most important things you taught me, you know the ability to laugh at myself.” Interviewee B was caught off guard when intercepting a note in class that indicated how adolescent students may have more impacting experiences in their life other than homework: “I got a letter and it was about a kid who might be pregnant.” Interviewee C’s comments were introspective about building student relationships, for example: “I was able to build relationships and everything but it was difficult for them to understand or even learn in my class, just because I was not yet at the point where I was able to communicate with them.” Interviewee F explained about growing within the practice of teaching by learning from their experiences in the classroom, “You learn with experience. Your first year teaching you think that every kid will, you know, participate and do the assignments and you learn that there’s different reasons that I think like kids don’t.” The researcher identified a similarity in regards to reflective teacher practice in the category of *learning from students* and *need improving* from the emotional state *a priori*. Participant’s recognized the need to improve their practice through learning from students and open to change.

*Role model.* The participants used examples of positive role models and mentoring to describe relationships when they were students or were early in their career of teaching. Interviewee A stated, “I had some really good mentors you know, just kind of in the school that took me under their wing and helped me out which was awesome.” Participants admired their

mentor and the success they saw through building student relationships in the classroom.

Interviewee C described their first experience employed in a school as a paraprofessional and how the principal impacted their career in teaching:

The principal, [de-identified item], helped me a lot like [de-identified item] used to tell me things that kind of made sense to me at the time, but really make more sense to me now, like show them, not teach them but show them, or little things like always condition your directions.

The researcher identified the *role model* category in student relationships through participants' recognizing relationships with experienced teachers. Wolos et al. (2007) research brief supports the thought students need adult role modeling can increase the likelihood of students who are homeless graduating high school and becoming a productive member of society. The mentor relationship is built through trust and a connection to the learning environment, either school or classroom.

*Recognition of achievement.* All of the participants responded to interview protocol question five in a similar manner. When the researcher asked each participant about their achievements, every response was student-focused and about relationships with their past students. Interviewee A stated, "I got an e-mail from a student I had in one of my first years and he ended up actually becoming a teacher and was teaching in the classroom that I taught him and so took over my spot." Interviewee B and D made reference to building good relationships with their students. Interviewee C described an event in the community where a past student approached him:



He approached me and my family, right there, and he was like, I just want in front of like everybody, I just wanted to let you know how much of a difference you made for me.

Thank you very much!

Interviewee E spoke about the classroom experience and how rewarding it is when their students are learning. She stated, “I mean that’s rewarding to me in itself is just seeing the joy in the kids when they’re learning what they’re learning, they’re engaged, they’re interacting, they’re having fun, and retaining what you’re teaching them.” The most detailed description of recognition of achievement occurred when Interviewee F spoke about her experience living in the community where she teaches:

I mean most of the kids that I coach like I see them and I live in the community, I see kids all the time outside of school and so I think the kids that any coach watching that you know they often times come back and want to help the next year, sports, or you know with tryouts and I go to a lot of their games and watch them as they go through high school. . . . think improving student management and improving monitoring, adjusting to just improving my overall teaching, like how to, adjust when things aren’t going well, how to keep things flowing, if there are interruptions; I think those are huge accomplish as just being more comfortable with the curriculum gives you more flexibility with how you deal with the students.

The researcher identified a commonality in the recognition of achievement category. All participants’ expressed their individual achievement through a student-centered reward. The participants recognized positive student relationships or individual student success when commenting about their personal teaching achievement reward.

The ontology section of the interview is represented in the researcher's examination of the *prior* attribute through the participant's teaching, emotional state, and student relationship. This section established the participants' experience, pre-service teacher instruction, first years of teaching, and type of students enrolled in the classroom prior to the homelessness experience. The *prior* section deals with the participants' background information. Descriptions of chaotic events experienced by the participants provided rich descriptions of stress many new teachers endure along with changes in student demographics over the past few years. Prior to attending a pre-service teacher program, every participant experienced working with students in a learning environment and chose to the teaching profession. Participants felt a sense of failure and vulnerability when not feeling supported in the classroom but demonstrated a desire to give to back their community. The researcher noted another commonality among the participant's comments centered around introspective change to improve their teaching practice. Similarity exist with building relationships with students in the classroom and role models for the participants with regard to reflective teacher practice. Additionally, all six participants were aware of homelessness but lacked the professional learning tools to impact the learning of students affected by homelessness. The researcher recognized that the lack of prior knowledge and experience could limit the teachers' ability to deal with the issue of homeless students.

**Lived experience during encounters with homelessness in the classroom.** The phenomenological interview questions six and seven provided an avenue for the participants to describe their lived experience while to working with their students affected by homelessness. The following *open codes* were developed in the first stage of data analysis. The researcher established a set of *a priori* codes from the literature search. These codes were related to empirical and theoretical findings that were presented in chapter 2: Teaching, emotional state,

and student relationship. The researcher identified four categories in the teaching; teaching practice, classroom jobs, strategies in the moment, and student needs to help describe the epistemology of the participant's lived experience. The researcher identified three categories in the emotional state; trust, empathetic towards student, and patience to capture the epistemology element of the lived experience. In the last section of the *during*, the researcher used the *a priori*, student relationships, to identify three categories; communicate home, listen, and recognize relationships to help derive the epistemology portion of the participant's lived experience. The researcher utilized the participant's responses of questions six and seven of the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to derive the rich depiction of the *during* experience. The categories the researcher identified with the *how* portion in the participant's lived experience helped build upon the ontological foundation in the prior attribute analysis previously mentioned.

***Teaching.*** The teaching attribute in this section refers to the participants' instructional practice in the *during* portion of the lived experience. Open codes identified by the researcher are as follows: Teaching practice, classroom jobs, strategies in the moment, and student needs. The researcher noted the participants' recognized students who were not participating in the learning process and then attempted different strategies in the classroom to engage them.

***Teaching practice.*** The participants engaged in adjusting their teaching practice while in the moment of experiencing homelessness in their classroom. Interviewee A referenced how the homelessness experience affected the student and how he [i.e., the teacher] needed to meet his student's needs more succinctly:

I starting to realize that and all of that, how it affects them. And then we started getting some of the trauma informed practices in recognizing when a kid is triggered or you know what caused that state of mind and the rate of their ability to learn or to engage

conversations or class assignments or whatever is very limited. So how, how you respond in those situations I think is what I've been working on to try to change, does that make sense. . . . the most challenging piece is when they have to miss school because they're in some kind of transition.

Interviewee C described how he made adjustments in his recognition of how to meet the student's individual needs through a relational level and accept the child is going through something different than their peers:

I don't even know if we have clothes, I don't know why I don't know, it's a whole different level of complexity, it was beyond this section or page that you're covering. So you kind of have to try to bond with them. Just make a human connection with them. . . . I tried to always kind of maintain that level of service that I do for kids that are getting the curriculum and so that part of the thoroughness is that I'm going to make sure that those kids still get a fair share.

Interviewee D used similar strategies with students who miss several classes:

I guess the way I acted was a lot like I would do for somebody who had to be gone for reasons of sickness or something else. You know, make sure they have what they need and they have a place to do it.

Interviewee F explained how she adjusted her teaching and coaching strategies in different environments, depending on the immediate needs of the student in crisis around homelessness.

These were depicted how in one telling of those adjustments:

I think like kids that are tardy, especially at the very beginning of the school day because a lot of kids that are homeless from my understanding don't live in the district, or you know and so they're riding the city bus to school. I had a girl on the basketball team that

for games and stuff she had no way to get to the games and so you understood if they were late. She forgot her jersey one time, I usually wouldn't give out an extra jersey but I did for this instance because it was probably dirty or she couldn't find it, or they moved again. . . . If they're late to class or they're missing an assignment that you just kind of make adjustments for them, not calling them out for stuff.

Participants adjusted their teaching practice to fit the immediate need of their student who was affected by homelessness.

*Classroom jobs.* Many of the participants used classroom jobs to build familiarity with common classroom tasks and engage students affected with homelessness who missed time in the classroom. Interviewee D stated, “we have a job, kind of like a delivery person [student], which is handing stuff out. And this person was superb at this job and also collecting binders at the end of the day.” The participant continued saying:

One thing I found that was really great with one of them was, treating her exactly like everybody else and keeping it on the down low. This particular student, she loved being engaged in the classroom, she wanted jobs, anything that connects them more to the classroom and pulls them in [participation].

The researcher noted classroom jobs enabled teachers to connect with the student affected by homelessness and recognize the student is participating in the learning environment.

*Strategies in the moment.* All of the participants were able to identify engaging strategies that helped provide participation of the student affected by homelessness into the classroom environment more readily. Interviewee B spoke about acting like nothing had changed. Similarly, Interviewee E provided a justification why she acted like nothing had changed by stating,

The student was living in their RV because they didn't have the money to pay for a permanent site for any length of time, they were mobile. What I've noticed with these kids with homelessness, with one student, she didn't want anyone to know, she did her best to try to just be, I guess what you want to call, normal.

Interviewee F did not call on the student in class but instead went over and helped them directly, which was similar to comments from Interviewee A. He described not wanting to initiate conversation with his student's plight of homelessness, "I am typically not going to be the one to necessarily ask them about their [de-identified item] because I want them to get to a point where they're potentially talking to me about it." Interviewee A and B were lenient towards tardiness and gave breaks regularly to their students but never lowered the academic or behavioral expectations in the classroom. Other strategies used by the participants included: the use of humor, providing supplies and food, being in proximity to students, and using non-verbal cues for interaction.

*Student needs.* The participants recognized many individual needs of their students during the instruction of content in their class. Interviewee A depicted scenarios that may cause distractibility to the lesson being taught and attempted to understand the plight of their students:

I think just trying to figure out where they're at and have a better understanding of where they're coming from, in order to address some of those needs. . . . maybe they get distracted, maybe they're irritable, whatever it might be at that moment in time, be a little more understanding of where they're coming from and tempering my response to where I used to go so quickly.

Interviewee B attempted to engage his students during the instruction time with one-to-one conversations, "I had a lot of one on one conversations in the hallway, taking breaks, trying to

get the student to warm up to let it me in.” Participants recognized differences in their students affected by homelessness and attempted to adjust their teaching practice to meet the student’s individual needs.

***Emotional state.*** The emotional state attribute in this section refers to the participants’ emotional state in the *during* portion of the lived experience. Open codes identified by the researcher include: Trust, empathetic towards students, and patience. The researcher discovered the participants’ expressed trust towards the student affected by homelessness and use it to build on their relationship with the student.

***Trust.*** The emotion of trust resonated from the participants throughout the second interview. Interviewee D eloquently stated the commonality of trust from the participants with asserting:

I think lots of times you’re not going to know who’s homeless and you’re not going to know who needs that extra help if you don’t have that trust. And they, they need to trust you as a human being that you’re going to have some compassion and also as a teacher that you’re going to keep it professional as in ‘on the down low’ because nobody wants to make other people know they’re homeless, you know. So I guess just trust that you’ll be sensitive and that you’ll be helpful. . . . Sometimes even just the little stuff like, make them feel special if you can, I need somebody I trust, how about you.

Interviewee E spoke about the classroom aspects of trust, saying:

Building that classroom trust and the trust with the students, so they don’t feel like they have to hide it. And they do feel like they can ask you for whatever assistance they need in order to continue being successful.

The researcher identified the emotional state of trust reoccurred many times during the second interview. The participants commented on a need to express trust towards the student affected by homelessness and use it to build on their relationship with the student.

*Empathetic toward student.* All six participants' echoed the emotional state of empathy with regard to homelessness in their classroom. Interviewee A expressed his empathy through allowing breaks of his student to the nursing station to nap and never wanting to single out a student for their differences. He stated, "school is only one part of the whole child." Interviewee B described being empathetic by remembering what it felt like to be homeless and continued with, "I'd rather have more information than less if there's a particular student that I need to know has a situation going on, I think that would help me be more empathetic." Interviewee C expressed empathy by allowing a student who was homeless to sleep in class or just take a break from following along with the material covered in class. He said,

I did not make a big deal to see somebody, if I knew they were homeless, were trying to go to sleep, I would be like, yeah I'm going to just let that happen for a little bit... I can't really have you wake up abruptly and tell you to pay attention to page 99 because I don't even know they had food today. . . . Not that I could do anything about situations I don't have money for like an apartment for them.

Interviewee D expressed empathy by meeting her student's needs in the moment,

One thing I found that was really great with one of them was, treating her exactly like everybody else of course and keeping it on the down low, "Do you need anything" and this particular student she loved being engaged in the classroom, she wanted jobs, Anything that connects them more to the classroom and pulls them in.



Interviewee E assimilated empathy by how life experiences outside of school affected the homeless student's priorities by stating,

It does create learning gaps though. I mean that's the biggest piece right there is again focusing on school when you've got all these other real life issues happening and both of them, the other person did have more chronic attendance issues for sure and his effort was not quite as much effort like the other student classes. . . . the struggles that are happening behind the scenes, it definitely puts things into a different perspective because here's the student who never once shared with me about being homeless.

Interviewee F applied the emotion of empathy through her acts of compassion. She stated,

I think there's often times that you don't know about homelessness until you're told or something else came up and so, like you react to them differently once, and not like blatantly but like you understand it, they're missing something, then just have a little compassion for them and other things don't seem quite as important.

Participants expressed the capacity to understand and feel what their students affected by homelessness were experiencing and shared a common responsibility to care for them in the learning environment.

*Patience.* During the second interview, participants revealed the emotion of patience and nurturing mannerisms when a student affected by homelessness was in their classroom.

Interviewee A spoke about being more aware of his responses to the student. He stated, "But just to be more aware of that and having a lot more patience in terms of my response when they're not necessarily on their game or you know." Interviewee B recognized a need to treat students affected by homelessness with a more nurturing response when they asked for help. Similarly, Interviewee E described her nurturing emotion by stating,

I feel like for me you're definitely more aware, you're more graceful, you're more sensitive, you're more I don't know, try to be a little bit more nurturing. . . . Just things that we offer here, the food pantry, just any of those other services, letting them know that we have, food to eat because I mean that was a big deal that we were able to provide through this program and just making sure that there's access to basic needs.

Participants expressed patience and nurturing care through recognizing their students are going through a difficult situation and more willing to respond to a student's requests more readily.

*Student relationships.* The student relationships attribute in this section refers to the participants' experiences related to relationships between the student and the participant in the classroom setting. Open codes in the student relationships section of the *during* portion are categorized in the following manner: Communicate home, listen, and recognize relationships. Participants' used individual, private conversations with their students to support the student's needs are being heard.

*Communicate home.* The participants prioritized communicating to parents on a regular basis to help build a connection with their student and attempt to create a seamless transition of school-to-home life events. Interviewee B described a situation when a student's father was living with a co-worker and the student slept on the couch of a cousin. He maintained that knowing the situation about his student's living conditions impacted the student relationship with the participant in a positive manner. Interviewee B built a positive relationship with this student through familiarity of his situation and the student not having to continually explain their state of affairs. Interviewee E discovered homeless crisis with a family during conferences, which created an immediate acceptance of support from the student because she was on the forefront of providing clothes, food, and other services.

Participants used communicating home to help unify support of the school and build a stronger relationship with the student affected by homelessness.

*Listen.* The participants expressed the importance in creating opportunities to listen to their students in crisis, which helped reinforce trust and develop positive student relationships.

Interviewee C recognized the importance to listen at anytime during the day:

every now and then when I had a chance and when it was appropriate and the kid was willing to share, you know kind of like listen a little bit about what they were saying. I think that was kind of like sometimes what they needed, to know that somebody knew. . . . I would meet him sometimes at my desk and help me do other things and just ask questions that were not maybe related to him in the school.

Interviewee E discussed her attempts to create opportunities to listen to students by checking in with them. She described this as, “just constantly checking in. What can I do for you? Do you need help with anything? Do you need some support?” Interviewee B used one-to-one conversations to help facilitate student relationships and acknowledge his student has another person willing to listen. The researcher noted many of the participants used one-to-one conversations to listen with their students. Opportunities to engage with students through listening allows the student to trust that their needs are being heard.

*Recognize relationships.* A major component of the second interview incorporated the sense of relationships and recognizing when to build upon strengthening these with students.

Interviewee A always over emphasized when his student was in school by using multiple high fives or just expressing verbally how excited he was when he saw them in school. Interviewee B acknowledged with his student that they missed them when he returned and made sure to smile.

Interviewee A utilized the concept of comfort to describe how he could impact his student or not. Interviewee B depicted a moment of just needing the student to recognize being in class and letting everything else fall away:

Let the student know we need them here. Just lighten the mood, but there is credence behind making the mood lighter, sometimes asks, “Can I help? Is there anything I can help you with? All right, You got this. I know you have been here. All right. Are there any holes? Have you done this before with integers? Oh, you got the number chart.” Whatever and just try to make sure that they know they’re a part of something like if everything outside is crumbling at least they know when they’re here, I am here with them.

Interviewee C tried to use moral support to build a relationship, “I think that just placing that type of moral support in the classroom where they confide things in you, makes a bridge and it makes it more of a personal relationship and less of a professional relationship.” He concluded with emphasizing the importance in teachers must try to bond with students in order to make a human connection with them. Interviewee D spoke about respecting her students regarding how they were able to maintain emotional composure in the classroom while going through the homeless experience and hopefully the relationship she built is strong enough for the students to feel comfortable in asking for help. A positive student relationship represented a key factor in the lived experience when the participants described their lived experiences while working with an adolescent affected by homelessness.

The epistemology section of the second interview is represented in the researcher’s examination of the *during* attribute through the participant’s teaching, emotional state, and student relationship. The researcher utilized the participant’s responses of questions six and

seven of the interview to originate a thick description of the *during* experience. Participants adjusted their teaching practice to meet identified needs of their student affected by homelessness along with utilized engagement strategies to increase the likelihood the student maintained connection to the learning environment and content. Assigning classroom jobs, humor, providing supplies and increasing non-verbal cues by the participants supported students affected by homelessness in their classroom. The researcher identified participants commented on a need to express trust towards the student affected by homelessness, which helped build a positive relationship with their student. Participants expressed empathy, patience, and a nurturing demeanor toward their students affected by homelessness along with a willingness to respond to a student's requests for help. Participants wanted to communicate home, which presented a unified support of the school and built a stronger relationship with the student affected by homelessness. The researcher noted many of the participants used one-to-one conversations with their students, which reinforced opportunities to build trust and allow student's needs are being heard.

**Lived experience after encountering homelessness in the classroom.** The researcher utilized the participant's responses of questions eight and nine of the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to derive the rich depiction of the *after* experience. The following *open codes* were developed in the first stage of data analysis. The *after* attribute was examined through the participant's teaching, emotional state, and student relationship. The researcher identified two categories in the teaching; engage students and strategies to help describe the epistemology of the participant's lived experience with the *after* attribute. The researcher identified three categories in the emotional state; build rapport, empathy, and willing to change capture the epistemology element of this attribute portion of the lived experience. In the last section of the

*after*, the researcher used the *a priori*, student relationships, to identify three categories; awareness, increase relationships, and recognize homeless connections to community to help derive the last epistemology portion of the participant's lived experience within the context of the *after* attribute. The phenomenological interview questions eight and nine provided an ending pathway, which the participants used to describe their lived experience after experiencing students affected by homelessness was in their classroom.

**Teaching.** The teaching attribute in this section refers to the participants' instructional practice *after* the lived experience. The researcher identified two open code categories in this teaching section: (a) engage students; and (b) strategies.

*Engage students.* The participants attempted to engage their students more often after the homelessness experience. Interviewee A wanted to increase the number of engagement strategies in his toolbox. He stated,

In terms of classroom engagement strategies, I think the other thing is just that you know kind of trying to broaden my toolbox in terms of how I engage kids in the classroom whether they are homeless or not we just need to do a better job of that. You know it's just something I continue to work on. Hopefully that helps kids that maybe homeless and others that are not so.

Interviewee B used just wanted to broaden his connection with his students through engaging them more in class. He said, "I mean just trying to be empathetic and trying to figure out any way I can to reach them. So not just emotionally you know, but like strategy wise, I'll try almost anything to connect with the kids." Interviewee F recognized her content may effect the comfortability of her students and how powerful engagement and student motivation is connected with regard to students wanting to be present in class. She stated,

If you get them engaged, they will want to be there. When they are really shy, finding ways to talk to them, like especially in health, we talk to kids about stuff that goes on at home and if it's something that's going to be uncomfortable for them, and it's not calling them out on it, or making them answer in front of the class, but making them also try to feel comfortable that they can talk to you about it if they want to, like outside of class.

The researcher noted that engaging students helps maintain connection to school and the curriculum in the classroom. The participants expressed a desire to improve their engagement and connection to all students in the classroom.

*Strategies.* Participants commented on specific strategies that helped increased students to participate in the classroom. The strategies of provided supplies attempted to remove barriers students expressed as excuses to not complete work. The participants used this negative aspect of removing barriers to engage with students in a positive manner by giving them a tool for successful completion of an assignment. Interviewee D spoke about how she provided resources and extra time to complete work for all students. She said,

It is our demographics here. I mean, I think that is just a given, that you're going to have pencils, you can have paper, "who needs a pencil," so that you don't have to have anybody raising their hand; "I got paper, if you need paper, come up, and get a pencil too." So it's for everybody. But it just happens to work well for homeless kids. . . .

Majority of homework always starts in class. They can often get started in class and get about 70 percent done. If that student is not done, I give them 10 or 15 minutes at the beginning of the next class. So ample time to ask questions and do work in class is one way I engage my students.

Interviewee B reflected on his creativity and how he engages students after his homelessness experience. He said,

I don't know if it directly came from dealing with students or homeless, homeless students but just being more in contact with the parents whether it's by email or by phone and finding time to do that. . . . trying to be more creative and not getting stale and stuck in my ways.

Interviewee A uses more verbal prompts to help check in with the entire class and decrease the his past consequence strategies of calling students out who were not on task. He now will say, "Let's get to work," or "Where are you at?" to address the whole class, which helps him maintain order in the classroom but not isolate a student who is not focused on the instruction. The researcher recognized participants want to use strategies that engage the entire class and work for all students but are willing to do what almost anything to remove barriers from students not participating in the classroom instruction.

***Emotional state.*** The emotional state attribute in this section refers to the participants' instructional practice *after* the lived experience. The researcher identified three open code categories in this section: (a) build rapport; (b) empathy; and (c) willing to change. The researcher discovered each of the participants' expressed successful teaching incorporates a willingness to change.

***Build rapport.*** Interviewee C used simple questions that any student could answer to build rapport with his students. He said,

I ask questions like, "Do you know how to connect this or do you know how to find one." You can ask the kid in anyway you can to help them that way. Then they trust you and then they can actually give it a shot. They can actually start getting to where you are



willing to help them academically and do it with the class. So there is not so much the engagement strategy but the approach to learning that changes, it is the rapport.

Interviewee C emphasized trust from students who he felt had a good rapport with him.

*Empathy.* All six participants expressed empathy through their responses in second interview. Interviewee C expressed his empathy towards the homelessness plight by stating, I think of like the homelessness problem now not just in school but like everywhere in places in the United States. And you know it is so out of control sometimes that I think of like India you know and they had Sutra, the untouchables and that's just kind of like a casting they've been around forever and is just so human, you know. And if we don't get a handle of this, this generational thing that you know is the homelessness just becomes part of our social class and that's just how we roll. . . . Made me think of inequality in different lenses also. You know I began to kind of think about what the future of this kid is, you know, like the impact of homelessness at this age probably doesn't really ever go away you know has this effect on you as a person. So you grow up you know and whether they be able to overcome it is like beyond me, I have no clue. You know. Hopefully they are, but this sense of powerlessness that they probably have, just lowers their self-esteem.

Interviewee E articulated her empathy by knowing her student might go through a crisis and knowing helps put context to the situation. She said,

You just feel bad, I feel bad in a way that they're dealing with that situation because they're just kids and they don't have any control over their environment. I mean if their parents lose a job then they can't provide for themselves or you know maybe parents are making poor choices in that. . . . It's not my place to judge why they're in the

circumstance they're in. But it's not something that a [de-identified item] would ask for, you know. So to be in that situation you really have to make the best of it. As far as you know because I feel like here we're doing everything we can to provide structure and a safe, warm inclusive environment. But at the same time it's they, they have no control necessarily when they're going to eat and how they're going to, you know, take care of proper hygiene, it just puts things into perspective. I don't know, it's something to think about, makes you grateful, that I know.

Interviewee A and B responded about how empathy may help with students relationships.

Interviewee A stated,

I should read and respond in a way that I think is appropriate, the way that we should not get to a point where they can do that. And again, you know I try much harder now for the kids that I might have a harder time connecting with or building that relationship with, to check, to see what's kinda going on. I think it's just created more empathy.

Interviewee B said,

I mean just trying to be empathetic and trying to figure out any way I can to reach him. So emotionally you know, but like strategy wise, I'll try anything to connect, almost anything to connect with the kids.

Interviewee F employed her empathy through using consistency in the classroom to build a foundation so students can count on her support and reactions. She said,

I try to be a consistency for them and how I'm going to react to, like I mean their behavior can change from day to day to putting on where their living situation is or where they slept the night before, so I try to be consistent with them and not, play in or you know, like be affected by their emotional states, just be consistently support for them.

The researcher identified the participants' use empathy in the classroom in different way but it all relates to building a connection with students and began to understand the plight of homelessness.

*Willing to change.* Participants reflected on their practice and appear willing to change in order to meet the needs of their students. Interviewee A made changes to how he responds to students differently that before the homelessness experience. He said,

I think the big thing is just the awareness piece. Then like just shifting. I think I used to be a lot more consequence based in terms of how I would respond to stuff. I would have less patience or tolerance for certain behaviors, or lack of getting work done earlier in my career when I didn't have an understanding of that. And so, I think some of the things already you know even just like little things, like where it's if they're a little tired, do some activity, they get up for two minutes and move around or just getting out of the classroom to go get a drink of water or something to get them, you know up and going a little bit.

Interviewee D spoke about how her approach in the classroom changed when she made adjustments to respecting how homelessness can impact her students. She said,

I think it makes your heart bigger and especially if you live in a district and you see homeless people constantly. And what it did for me was give me a whole new level of respect for the students who come into the classroom because often I think, "oh my God, how are you handling this so well. You show up clean, you show up eager to learn. You make an effort." It definitely opened my heart more and filled me with respect for their strengths.

Interviewee B attempts to increase his creativity and not be afraid of improving his practice.

He said,

I guess that it comes back to being creative and trying different things like, you know some things don't work. I'm just in my [de-identified item], like, mostly everything I did year one, I don't do. So it took a while to see it, so I was just, you know, just being creative. Changing, not being afraid to try different things, you know.

All the participants recognized a need to maintain success in teaching was rooted in a willingness to change throughout their career. Participants reflect on how their willingness to change also improves connection with students.

***Student relationships.*** The student relationships attribute in this section refers to the participants' instructional practice *after* the lived experience. The researcher identified three open code categories in this teaching section: (a) awareness; (b) increase relationships; and (c) recognize homeless connections to community. The researcher discovered participants' increased their awareness of events impacting students outside of school after experiencing a student affected by homelessness in the classroom.

***Awareness.*** Participants became more aware of situations that affect students outside the classroom impact the learning inside the classroom. Interviewee A described how he made adjustments to his classroom management based on recognizing students are incurring trauma outside of school. He said,

I think the big thing is just the awareness piece. Then just shifting. I think I used to be a lot more consequence based in terms of how I would respond to stuff. I would have less patience or tolerance for certain behaviors, or lack of getting work done earlier in my career when I didn't have an understanding of that [trauma]. And so, I think some of the things already you know even just like little things like where it's if they're a little tired

do some activity they get up for two minutes and move around or just getting out of the classroom to go get a drink of water or something to get them you know up and going in a little bit. . . . What they're doing in school is secondary to what they're concerned about and just having that because they just have an awareness of that and they go back to that trauma inform stuff and just recognizing how it impacts brain development and their ability to logically think through stuff where are they, you know, I'm more responding because they don't know how to take that.

Interviewee B used expressed how his awareness of a student's situation allowed him to build on his creativity in the classroom setting. He stated,

A little more creative in how I approach situations. Umm, yeah and how I relate to the students, a little more creative and I relate to the students and maybe, maybe I like assume. You know if I start seeing patterns like missing days or whatnot. I might not assume homelessness but I'll assume something.

Interviewee C questioned himself about the future of his students' education in order to build his awareness around what impacts learning in the classroom. He said,

I wonder if this kid is actually going to leave. I wonder if this kid is going to get some education. I wonder if that's going to happen. I wonder how they are going to be in the weekend how that they're going to be how am I going to help him Monday when I see them. You know and hmm, it puts a different type of layer in the teaching.

Interviewee E became aware of how events outside of school affect her students when they were not in class. She said,

You do think about them constantly. Like even not just talking about it's like, "oh I wonder what they're doing." Like because I haven't seen either one of them here.

So I mean I haven't seen all my kids either. I'm still seeing kids, that I you know because they're not up here. So you're just wondering like.

The researcher noted participants increased their awareness of how events outside of school affect student learning in the classroom. The participants became more engaged in asking questions about situations outside of school with their students.

*Increase relationships.* Increasing positive student relationships was an important point in the *after* portion of the second interview when the participants described their lived experiences. Interviewee C spoke about building relationships takes work. He also said,

There's many factors in the system right now but I think that the personal relationship and connection is more needed than ever. And that goes for them that goes for a lot of other students, I also have emotional needs and that's just, you know it's not just one of many other needs. But I think that that type of approach where the emphasis is on a person not a relationship as opposed to a professional one where later teaching becomes very much like, like in the real world not in the classroom but more about, "OK, so let's talk about how are you going to get a bus ticket if you need one today."

Interviewee F, who lives in the community, tries to build relationships, even outside of the school. She said,

If she [student] needed rides to and from places that she lives in a hotel and so like I normally wouldn't give rides unless I had my daughter in my car me. She would not let me drop her off at her place like where she lived, we dropped her off at a bus stop. And so it took a while and after a while once you realize her trusted me then I mean I was able to take her home to her the hotel that she lived in with my daughter in the car. So it took a

while though there was that like, trust issue and feeling comfortable enough to let us take her there.

Interviewee E attempts to use her ability to listen and presence in the classroom to increase relationships with her students. She said,

I mean I think I allow all the kids an opportunity to stay in here if they want to and I do check in with all my kids and I think it's important no matter homeless or not just to build that relationship, and that open lines of communication, if they want to talk about stuff.

Participants increased relationships with their students after they experienced a student affected by homelessness in the classroom. They engaged in conversations, stayed after school, and provided transportation to build opportunities to increase the likelihood students might participate in build a positive relationship with a trusted adult.

*Recognize homeless connections to community:* One participant expressed a direct connect to the increased homelessness situation in his community to his classroom. He shared, I have the experience that I can probably tell you about, I mean you know I had a kid that I just did not know about this homeless situation and I happened to go to a park with my kids and it was just when to a Saturday walk in the morning and this is before it was a crisis. This is in [de-identified item], this is the beginning of it maybe five years ago, four years ago. And there was a tent in the park and I see the kids come out of the tent and I'm with my kids and that was my student. And I'm like faced with the reality that you know like the problem is so now, like huge that it's in my classroom, it's its, somebody who I know somebody who I work with everyday.

Participant responses for the final two questions of the interview protocol (see Appendix A) yielded thick descriptions of the *after* experience. The researcher discovered engaging students

helps maintain connection to school and the curriculum in the classroom along with participants desired to increase a relational connection to all students in the classroom. Participants use strategies that engage the entire class. They will do almost anything to remove barriers to learning from their classroom and increase participation from all students. Participants each expressed empathetic behaviors differently, but all related to building a connection and willingness to change to meet individual needs of their students. The researcher noticed that participants became more engaged and aware that events outside of school affected their students. Participants attempted to build more positive relationships and trust with their students after they experienced a student affected by homelessness in the classroom.

**Lived experience of educators encountering homelessness in the classroom.** During the second and third stage of analysis for this study, the researcher identified three emerging themes from the data: (a) building positive student relationships; (b) insightful reflection; and (c) applying unique engagement strategies to support homelessness in the classroom. The clustered units of meaning in relation to the three emergent themes helped derive the essence of the lived experience of educators who work with homeless adolescents in the public secondary school setting.

*Seek introspective reflection.* The first emergent theme, introspective reflection, is connected with all six participants seeking to improve their teaching practice. The researcher connected several open codes to participants' seeking introspective reflection in each of the *a priori* attributes teaching, emotional state, and student relationships. In the *a priori* attribute analysis, the researcher linked the following open codes to introspective reflection: prior desire to teach, give to the community, and need improving. Participants recognized in themselves a



sense of failure and vulnerability, which is connected to the participants' describing an introspective change and willingness to improve their teaching practice.

In the *during* attribute analysis, first part of the epistemology section, the researcher linked the following open codes to introspective reflection: Strategies in the moment, student needs, trust, empathetic towards student, and patience. The researcher identified a connection to each participant adjusted their teaching based on recognizing a student's need. The adjustment by the participant to meet the needs of their student requires an introspective reflection by the teacher.

In the *after* attribute analysis, which was the final part of the epistemology section, the researcher linked the following open codes to introspective reflection: Empathy, willing to change, and awareness. The researcher identified a connection to the participants engaged their students by attempted different strategies with the entire class. Participants attempt to remove any barrier to learning and increase the participation of all students. The researcher recognized that participants expressed a willingness to change as another representative of the participants' seeking introspective reflection.

*Building positive student relationships.* The second emergent theme, building positive student relationships, is connected with all six participants describing the impact of a strong bond with their students. The researcher connected several open codes to participant's building positive relationships with their students in each of the *a priori* attributes, teaching, emotional state, and student relationships. In the *prior* attribute analysis, the researcher linked the following open codes to building positive student relationships: Learning from students, role model, and recognition of achievement. The researcher connected a similarity with building relationships with students in the classroom and role models for the participants.

In the *during* attribute analysis, which constituted the first part of the epistemology section, the researcher linked the following open codes to building positive student relationships: Teaching practice, Listen, Student needs, Trust, Empathetic towards student, Patience, and Recognize relationships. The researcher identified a connection between the participants' actions of expressing trust toward the student affected by homelessness and their building positive relationships with their student. Participants expressed empathy, patience, and a nurturing demeanor toward their students that also increased the likelihood of a positive relationship. The researcher noted that participants wanted to communicate to their student's parents, which strengthened a positive relationship with the student because the adolescent did not need to continually re-tell their story and the participant was invested in the relationship. Many of the participants used personal conversations with their students, which also helped enabled them to build trust and increase the opportunity for the student's needs are heard.

In the *after* attribute analysis, final part of the epistemology section, the researcher linked the following open codes to building positive student relationships: Engage students, build rapport, empathy, awareness, and increase relationships. The researcher recognized that participants attempted to build more positive relationships and trust with their students after they experienced a student affected by homelessness in the classroom. The researcher identified the emotions of empathy and trust helped participants build a connection with their students. Participants attempted to build more positive relationships with their students after they experienced a student affected by homelessness in the classroom. Additionally, participants were more engaged and aware of events outside of school affecting their students.

*Increased engagement strategies.* The third emergent theme, increased engagement strategies, is connected with all six participants' use of multiple strategies in the classroom to

improve student attention. The researcher connected several open codes to participants' increasing the use of multiple engagement strategies in each of the *a priori* attributes, teaching, emotional state, and student relationships. In the *prior* attribute analysis, the researcher did not link any of the open codes to increase engagement strategies.

In the *during* attribute analysis, which constituted the first part of the epistemology section, the researcher linked the following open codes to increase engagement strategies: Teaching practice, Classroom jobs, and Strategies in the moment. Participants assigned classroom jobs, used humor, provided supplies and increased the use of non-verbal cues to support all students, even those affected by homelessness.

In the *after* attribute analysis, last part of the epistemology section, the researcher linked the following open codes to increase engagement strategies: Engage students and Strategies. The researcher distinguished that when the participant engaged their students it helped maintain a connection to school and the curriculum in the classroom. Participants use many different strategies to engage the entire class and removed distractions to increase participation from all students.

The final stage of data analysis for the study involved connecting the association of all three emergent themes. The interpretive analysis of the rich and thick descriptions from the participants derived the essence of what and how the participants experienced the phenomenon, homelessness in their classroom. The essence of the lived experience of the participants' in this study is centered around an educators' drive to gain knowledge and seek introspective reflection, along with building positive relationships with their students, which leads to increasing engagement strategies with all students, including those affected with homelessness.

## **Chapter 4 Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher discussed data analysis findings regarding six public school teachers from three urban secondary schools.

As a result, of systematically analyzing transcribed interviews of teachers who experienced the homelessness phenomena in the classroom, the researcher created a thick, rich description of their experiences to understand the unique perspective of the participants. Three emergent themes established from the data analysis in this study developed the educators' perspective to support a deeper understanding of the homeless experience and potentially increase student achievement through improved engagement and instructional strategies. Additionally, this body of research may extend further professional learning opportunities with pre-service teacher programs and school districts around the homeless experience. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the results, a discussion of the results in relation to the literature, and implications of the results, and will provide recommendations for future research on understanding the perspective of educators' who teach students affected by homelessness.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

In this chapter the researcher will present a summary and detailed discussion of the results of this qualitative study. The researcher will relate the results to the review of literature in Chapter 2 and the limitations associated with the study. The researcher will conclude Chapter 5 by examining the implication of the results for practice, policy, and theory along with recommendations for further research.

In the summary and discussion sections of this chapter, the researcher will summarize the results, review the literature, methodology, and research questions associated this study. In the discussion section, the researcher will address his interpretation and share implications of the results of the study. The researcher will describe the relationship of the results to the literature by addressing the following: (a) how the results relate to teaching; (b) how the results relate to current literature; and (c) how the results relate to other scholars in this field of research. The researcher will examine the implications of the study's results in an informative discussion format based on the literature and conclude with recommendations for future research possibilities.

### **Summary of the Results**

Based on the results of this study, the researcher discovered the essence of the experience for a selected group of teachers who have taught students affected by homelessness in their classrooms in the Pacific Northwest. The human experience occupies the central role in phenomenological research. Husserl's (2014) aim for phenomenology was to capture experience in its primordial origin or essence, without interpreting, explaining, or theorizing. The researcher in the present study used an interpretive method of phenomenology founded by Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger who thought that the aim of phenomenology was "to let that which

shows itself, be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 58).

In this interpretive phenomenological study, the researcher recruited and interviewed secondary school teachers from three public urban schools in the Pacific Northwest in order to have them describe their lived experiences that relate to instructing students affected by homelessness. The researcher used two semi-structured, conversational interviews with six participants who reflected on how their classroom experiences influenced their teaching, engagement strategies, emotional states, and student relationships. Based on understanding the essence of the lived experience of educators who work with homeless adolescents in a public school, the researcher has begun to fill in the missing gap of literature and potentially assist educators to be more effective in supporting this marginalized population of students.

Adolescents who experience homelessness are impacted on several developmental levels including social, emotional, physical, and academic domains. The National Center on Family Homeless (NCFH) (2014) reported:

The impact of homelessness on the children, especially young children, is devastating and may lead to changes in brain architecture that can interfere with learning, emotional self-regulation, cognitive skills, and social relationships. The unrelenting stress experienced by the parents, most of whom are women parenting alone, may contribute to residential instability, unemployment, ineffective parenting, and poor health. (p. 9)

To help connect teachers to their community and develop relationships with students affected by homelessness, Power-Castello and Swick (2011) emphasize educators should participate in service learning projects to help understand the perceptions of their students. The National

Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) noted the significant role and responsibility that teachers have:

Although there are some simple steps that teachers can take to provide continuity and stability in the lives of HHM students, teachers should understand their responsibility to identify and readjust their own misperceptions about students and families experiencing housing instability. (NCHE, 2013, p. 4)

These developmental challenges may result in school behavioral and academic issues for homeless students and negatively impact teacher perceptions of the students along with limiting teacher engagement and support of a student's academic success.

The present study extended the limited amount of previous research on educators who experience students affected by homelessness. The themes developed from the educators' viewpoint support a deeper understanding of the homeless experience and may increase student achievement through improved engagement and instructional strategies. Van Manen (1990) summarized the intent of a phenomenological study saying it can:

transform lived experience into a textual expression—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which the reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p. 36)

The researcher discovered three emergent themes based on the in-depth analysis of six educators' detailed descriptions of their lived experience of teaching students affected by homelessness. The essence of the lived experience of the participants' in this study discovered a teachers' drive to seek introspective reflection and gain knowledge, along with building positive

relationships with their students, which leads to increasing engagement strategies with all students, including those affected with homelessness.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The researcher identified three emerging themes from the data: (a) building positive student relationships; (b) insightful reflection; and (c) applying unique engagement strategies to support homelessness in the classroom. Participants felt a sense of vulnerability in their teaching and a willingness to change, which led the researcher to identify the theme of insightful reflection. The researcher discovered the theme, increase engagement strategies, by recognizing that all six participants used multiple strategies in the classroom to improve student attention. Additionally, the researcher discovered the theme, building positive student relationships, due to the participants relating how their student-teacher relationship impacted learning in the classroom. Moreover, the researcher found participants expressed using trust and empathy to build a stronger rapport with students affected by homelessness. The meta-analysis research by Cornelius-White (2007) support the use of a nurturing and more empathic approach to students by their teachers, will increase the level of school adjustment and achievement by students. Students need to know teachers have their best intentions in mind but also need consistency and a sense of security by adults they trust.

After the participants experienced a student affected by homelessness in their classroom, they applied several different strategies to engage the entire class and removed distractions to increase participation from all students. The researcher also established that the participants attempted to build more positive relationships with all of their students after the experience of interacting with a student affected by homelessness in their classroom. Palmer (2004) elaborates how our relationships and interactions are unique within our trust and relational dependencies.



Within such relationships, persons may speak a truth that may not match the paradigms and frameworks of the communities surrounding them. Educators must intentionally strive to build these circles of trust within the classrooms and school systems along with identify the obstacles that may impede the success of our students.

Building relationships begins with the classroom teacher. A seminal researcher on poverty and building relationships in the classroom, Ruby Payne (2008), cited James Comer (1995), “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship” (para. 1). The review of literature in Chapter 2, indicated classroom teachers should present a sense of accepting all students and genuinely want them in their classroom. Cuthrell et al. (2010) stated, “By believing in a child, cultivating positive relationships, and offering meaningful activities, teachers can build positive classroom environments that affect the child for much longer than a single school year” (p. 107). The research supports the results of the present study by indicating positive relationships begins with the actions of the classroom teacher.

The present study discovered how the phenomenon of homelessness affected the classroom experience of teachers who interacted with students experiencing a major negative life-changing event. One component of this study is the aspect of ethics and how it was applied in the classroom by the participants and to respond appropriately to any learner and meet the needs of all students. The researcher’s interpretations of the results of this present study are that all teachers must seek to increase positive student relationships to impact student growth and achievement with all students. If the teacher finds a student who is affected by a negative life event like homelessness or severe poverty, he or she should use an empathic approach to initially build trust with the student in a marginalized population and maintain consistency along with

trust to build a deeper rapport with the student. This will enable all students an opportunity to achieve academic, social, and emotional skill to contribute to society.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

In the researcher's post-secondary teaching practice with teacher preparatory programs, he found scant information provided, either through course objectives, instructional materials, or textbook resources, which would prepare pre-service teachers for understanding how the issue of homelessness can affect their future classrooms and students. Teacher preparatory materials that the researcher had seen in use focused on at-risk youth experiences and engagement strategies designed to fit the majority of student needs; however, these materials did not address Adverse Childhood Experiences or the specific traumas associated with homelessness. In this section, the researcher will discuss the results of the present study in relation to the review of literature in Chapter 2. The four constructs of the conceptual framework in Chapter 2 are used to outline the discussion. The four constructs are labeled in the following manner: (a) homelessness in America; (b) public school setting; (c) impact of homelessness; and (d) teacher perspective. In each discussion of the four constructs, the researcher will describe the relationship of the results to the literature by addressing the following: (a) how the results relate to teaching; (b) how the results relate to current literature; and (c) how the results relate to other scholars in this field of research.

**Construct one, homelessness in America.** In the Chapter 2 Literature Review a summary of National regulation provided homelessness in America, as the first frame of the conceptual framework. The McKinney-Vento Act addresses three main goals: (a) increased student access to school; (b) student success in school; and (c) student attendance at school. The Act is a United States federal law, and mandates a school that has an enrolled student who has been identified as homeless must remove barriers like providing transportation and allow

attendance to a school that is outside the catchment area to ensure that a student receives an education. The literature reviewed provided the background information and history of legislation impacting students affected by homelessness and their access to educational supports. The three urban secondary schools for the present study are located in the Pacific Northwest. The student homeless population in Oregon increased from 19,189 to 22,637 between 2012 and 2015, while the student population in the State of Washington increased from 30,609 to 35,511 between the same years (National Center for Homeless Education, 2016, p. 13). The reported numbers indicated an increase in the student homeless population over the last several years, which could lead to classroom teachers in the Pacific Northwest experiencing homeless students in their classroom.

The researcher noted each of the participants were aware of homelessness and the federal guidelines requiring school districts to removing barriers in order to support homeless students. However, the researcher also discovered that all six participants received no professional learning or pre-service education around homelessness. Prior to experiencing a student affected by homelessness in their classroom, the participants lacked instructional tools to positively impact learning of this marginalized population.

**Construct two, public school setting.** The second conceptual framework of the present study focused on changes in the public school setting over the past two decades. The research indicated two main issues with the public school changes; increased class size and decline of classroom experience of teachers. The *Digest of Education Statistics* (2015) reports that, “public school enrollment rose 28 percent, from 39.4 million to 50.3 million, between 1985 and 2015” (p. 5). Public school enrollment is projected to reach record levels, rising from 50.3 million public education students in 2015 to 51.4 million by 2025 (NCES, 2015, p. 5). To address the

increase of class size, public schools began using paraprofessionals and instruction coaches/coordinators. NCES (2015) reported that,

between 1980 and 2013: The number of instructional aides rose 127 percent, and the number of instruction coordinators rose 255 percent. Taken together, the percentage of staff with direct instructional responsibilities (teachers and instructional aides) increased from 60 to 62 percent between 1980 and 2013. In 2013, there were 8 pupils per staff member (total staff) at public schools, compared with 10 pupils per staff member in 1980. (NCES, 2015, p. 72)

Secondly, the level of teacher experience, measured by years of service, declined over the past 25 years. In 1987, teachers with fewer than three years of experience represented 2.1% of the teaching population compared to 2012 in which this same group represented 8.4% of the overall teacher population (NCES, 2015, p. 153). With higher levels of inexperienced teachers working and with larger class sizes becoming the norm, marginalized students, such as those affected by homelessness, may not receive the support necessary to achieve in school.

In the present study, the researcher used purposive sampling to select the participants in a number of curriculum areas and classroom teaching experience. All six teachers interviewed worked in their classroom without other adult staff assigned. In each of the three urban public schools, an instructional coach does provide professional learning opportunities to the entire staff along with classroom management supports for all teachers. Moreover, one participant in the present study, expressed a direct connect to the increased homelessness situation in his community to his classroom. He shared,

I have the experience that I can probably tell you about, I mean you know I had a kid that I just did not know about this homeless situation and I happened to go to a park with my

kids and it was just when to a Saturday walk in the morning and this is before it was a crisis. This is in [de-identified item], this is the beginning of it maybe five years ago, four years ago. And there was a tent in the park and I see the kids come out of the tent and I'm with my kids and that was my student. And I'm like faced with the reality that you know like the problem is so now, like huge that it's in my classroom, it's its, somebody who I know somebody who I work with everyday.

The researcher noted an increase of classroom size along with some support to classroom teachers is available by an instructional coach along with participants are recognizing an increase of homelessness in the community.

Furthermore, the researcher identified two participants who expressed a recent change in student demographics in the classroom that made the learning environment more challenging than previous years. Interviewee E stated, "I would say some of the challenges were just meeting the needs of the kids because they all had different backgrounds, they were all at different levels and abilities as far as their math skills go." Interview F spoke about her student teaching demographic were not the same as her first years of teaching, "my student teaching program or pre-service teacher program at the school I taught at was much different than coming back to [de-identified item]. The population here is just a different population." Interviewee F discussed the effect that changing demographics has on teaching when the teacher is not aware of the background of her students,

I think back, like with the behavior students because [de-identified item] was a subject they were always pushed into, so I want to say that my first experience with those students was one of the challenging ones, because I don't think we were given as much background information as our students now. . . . And that changes how you interact with

students as having that background information and it just gives you a better understanding of where they're coming from and I think that's true.

The researcher noted in the present study, participants identified changes in student demographics in school, which created challenges in learning environments if not addressed. In review of literature by the researcher, he also addressed similar concerns to changes in the public school setting and less experienced teachers in the classroom. The researcher infers a connection to the changes in public school student demographics and participants indicating challenges in the learning environment with regard to meeting the needs of all students.

**Construct three, impact of homelessness.** The third construct from the literature review is the impact of homelessness, which focused on the effects of homelessness from student's perspective. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 provided a basis for linking poverty and the homeless experience. Children affected by homelessness are impacted in multiple way, which begin with poverty and low family socioeconomics conditions. The researcher summarized a NAEH (2015) indicating the impact of families who ultimately become homeless, have strained financial resources and are challenged with the high cost of housing (p. 36). Families in poverty who cannot afford housing, most likely will end up living with family or friends. The 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment report to Congress indicated that 74.7% of people who had housing prior to accessing a shelter were living in the home of a family or friend (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2015, p. 36). Payne (2008), a seminal researcher on poverty describes how poverty is much more than just a lack of money and identifies ways to measure the possible affects on the whole child. Cuthrell (2010) summarized the eight resources that Payne identified, whose presence or absence determines the effect of poverty. These resources were identified by the following terms: *financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support*

*systems, relationships and role models, and knowledge of hidden rules* (p. 105). The burden of poverty increases as a family has fewer of these resources.

If an individual has limited financial resources but strong emotional, spiritual, and physical support, the burden of poverty may be lessened. Although teachers may not be able to change financial resources, they can affect some of the other areas like emotional and mental fortitude along with building relationships with adults in a positive manner (Cuthrell et al., 2010, p. 105).

In the present study, the researcher discovered teachers expressed support to students affected by homelessness with empathy and trust to build a positive relationship. Additionally, teachers interviewed in this study expressed a willingness to give to their community prior to experiencing a student affected by homelessness in the classroom. Participants wanted to communicate home, which presented a unified support of the school and built a stronger relationship with the student affected by homelessness. The researcher also discovered the participants used one-to-one conversations with their students, which reinforced opportunities to build trust and allow student's needs are being heard.

In the present study, the participants indicated a lack of pre-service instruction on the topic of homelessness. In review of literature, Deborah Woolridge (1993) affirmed that pre-service teacher programs needed to address strategies for managing stress, poverty, abuse and neglect, and dysfunctional family situations (p. 34). Woolridge (1993) used Bloom's taxonomy to frame her discussion on how to support curriculum for pre-service teachers, saying:

Several strategies are suggested here to enhance the educational experiences of pre-professionals and to empower them to work effectively with children at risk such as the homeless. These strategies should encourage a holistic approach to learning and should be based on Bloom's taxonomy for the cognitive domain. (p. 34)

The literature review and present study seem to indicate that the homeless student experience could be a serious problem with a possible solution, which entails educating our future teachers to help break the cycle of poverty and homelessness. Van der Jagt and Madison (2006) indicated support within family structure could improve if children experienced a positive relationship with school personnel. Teachers may not be able to change the limited financial resources of families in poverty but they may be able to support students through building positive relationships and having empathy will support the student's development and success.

**Construct four, teacher perspective.** The fourth construct focused on the classroom teacher's perspectives in relation to students' homeless experiences. The researcher selected all six teachers using the primary criteria that they had experienced a student affected by homelessness in their classroom. The teachers' lived experience is at the root of this study and necessary to determine the essence of understanding their point of view. A main attribute to the present study addressed the student-teacher relationship, which highly affects student development. The research of Davis (2003) indicated that the role and interrelationship between students and their teacher affects the students' self-worth, confidence, and desire to learn more. Love and Kruger (2005) conducted a qualitative study to measure a teacher's cultural relevant beliefs and ascertained which items correlate with higher student achievement. Love and Kruger (2005) found:

Teachers in 6 urban schools serving African American children endorsed beliefs regarding a communal learning environment, success of all students, teaching as giving back to the community, and the importance of students' ethnicity. In contrast to prior studies, teachers who taught students with high academic achievement viewed their role as disseminators of knowledge and believed in drill and practice. (p. 87)



Moreover, to support the literature of Love and Kruger (2005) connection to a teachers' belief and student achievement, Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) linked the transformation of a teacher's perceptions about homeless children when they conduct service learning into a teacher preparatory program (p. 210). Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) emphasized the need for teachers to understand the perceptions of their students who are experiencing homelessness, by means of service-learning projects, which help connect the teachers to their community and helps them develop relationships with the families and students affected by homelessness.

The researcher noted in the review of literature and the present study the teacher's perspective is addressed to improve student relationships. The researcher discovered that all six the participants expressed empathy and patience with their student affected by homelessness. Interviewee A expressed his empathy through allowing breaks of his student to the nursing station to nap and never wanting to single out a student for their differences. He stated, "School is only one part of the whole child." Interviewee F applied the emotion of empathy through her acts of compassion. She stated,

I think there's often times that you don't know about homelessness until you're told or something else came up and so, like you react to them differently once, and not like blatantly but like you understand it, they're missing something, then just have a little compassion for them and other things don't seem quite as important.

During the second interview, participants revealed the emotion of patience and nurturing mannerisms when a student affected by homelessness was in their classroom. Interviewee E described her nurturing emotion by stating,

I feel like for me you're definitely more aware, you're more graceful, you're more sensitive, you're more I don't know, try to be a little bit more nurturing. . . . Just things

that we offer here, the food pantry, just any of those other services, letting them know that we have, food to eat because I mean that was a big deal that we were able to provide through this program and just making sure that there's access to basic needs.

Participants expressed the capacity to understand and feel what their students affected by homelessness were experiencing and shared a common responsibility to care for them in the learning environment.

The review of literature in the fourth construct also identified effective instruction and strategies will help encourage success for students already experiencing difficulty external to the school environment. Past research findings support the idea that implementing effective instruction to students affected with the homelessness experience could increase the likelihood of academic success for them (Kennedy, 2010; McDaniel, 2012; Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Tomlinson (2015) provided three benchmarks for classrooms where all students can succeed.

First, those classrooms should be heterogeneous in nature—microcosms of the world in which today's students live and will live. Second, they should be characterized by dynamic, contemporary, compelling curriculum and instruction that commends learning as a supremely gratifying human endeavor and prepares all learners for life in a complex and rapidly changing world. Third, they should be responsive to the learning needs of the spectrum of students that make up the classes, with the goal of supporting each student in accessing and succeeding with learning that positions them to be fulfilled and contributing citizens of their time. (Tomlinson, 2015, p. 205)

Tomlinson's (2015) research of the third benchmark, describes effective instruction by the classroom teacher and their responsiveness to supporting each student. The researcher noted a similarity to the effective instruction in the present study when the participants engaged in

adjusting their teaching practice while in the moment of experiencing homelessness in their classroom. Interviewee A referenced how the homelessness experience affected the student and how he [i.e., the teacher] needed to meet his student's needs more succinctly:

I starting to realize that and all of that, how it affects them. And then we started getting some of the trauma informed practices in recognizing when a kid is triggered or you know what caused that state of mind and the rate of their ability to learn or to engage conversations or class assignments or whatever is very limited. So how, how you respond in those situations I think is what I've been working on to try to change, does that make sense. . . . the most challenging piece is when they have to miss school because they're in some kind of transition.

Interviewee C described how he made adjustments in his recognition of how to meet the student's individual needs through a relational level and accept the child is going through something different than their peers:

I don't even know if we have clothes, I don't know why I don't know, it's a whole different level of complexity, it was beyond this section or page that you're covering. So you kind of have to try to bond with them. Just make a human connection with them. . . . I tried to always kind of maintain that level of service that I do for kids that are getting the curriculum and so that part of the thoroughness is that I'm going to make sure that those kids still get a fair share.

Participants adjusted their teaching practice to fit the immediate need of their student who was affected by homelessness.

In relation to the literature and the present study, the researcher discovered increased engagement strategies as another emergent theme. All six participants identified engaging

strategies that helped provide participation of the student affected by homelessness into the classroom environment more readily. Interviewee F did not call on the student in class but instead went over and helped them directly, which was similar to comments from Interviewee A. He described not wanting to initiate conversation with his student's plight of homelessness, "I am typically not going to be the one to necessarily ask them about their [de-identified item] because I want them to get to a point where they're potentially talking to me about it." Interviewee A and B were lenient towards tardiness and gave breaks regularly to their students but never lowered the academic or behavioral expectations in the classroom. Other strategies used by the participants included: the use of humor, providing supplies and food, being in proximity to students, and using non-verbal cues for interaction.

In reviewing the literature, the researcher found developing a classroom teacher is a difficult process. Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) stated,

Ten of thousands of new teachers, especially in low-income urban and rural areas, have had little or no exposure to basic information about children, curriculum, or schools. And too many of those who have gone through a teacher-education program have not received a rigorous education in some of the essential knowledge and clinical training that would prepare them for success in the classroom. (p. 111)

In addition to pre-service teachers have varied personal biases to the homeless or poverty experience, they also must learn competent pedagogical content absorbed in a university setting and apply those techniques through their practicum and student teaching assigned classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2010). It is important to note though, this review of literature found an extensive research on field placements and how they positively affect pre-service teacher instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Haberman, 1989; Stallings & Quinn, 1991).

The research emphasized the use of cooperative teachers to enhance the student teacher's ability to manage time and present curriculum in an orderly fashion. In relation to teacher's improving their practice, Haberman (1995) stated, "Teachers must be able to improve and develop. In order for this to happen, they must be able to take principles and concepts from a variety of sources (i.e., courses, workshops, books, and research) and translate them into practice" (pp. 779–780). There is ample research demonstrating the importance of teachers developing the capacities to understand and instruct student populations that are diverse with regard to culture, ethnicity, and race; however, the literature search conducted for this study did not reveal similar research that would extend to understanding and instructing students affected by homelessness (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Grant & Secada, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Melnick & Zeichner, 1995). All six participants experienced working with students prior to entering the teaching profession. The experience of supporting students before teaching in the classroom enabled the participants' to build on a schema when they began to teach in the classroom. Interviewee A tutored in high school and Interviewee B worked as a paraprofessional. Interviewee B maintained what helped guide his decision to teach was working with students prior to attending pre-service program. He stated, "prior to my teaching, one thing I think that helped me is working in the classroom. . . . Trying to find myself and I worked with kids in different capacities, like mentoring, tutoring, working with autistic kids and whatnot." Similarly, Interviewee C experienced many opportunities to work with students prior to enrolling in a pre-service teacher program. She said, "I was very immersed in the school systems because I was basically working in the [de-identified item] and then going to school at night to take my classes." Prior to attending a pre-service teacher program, every participant experienced supporting students in a learning environment.

The researcher noted the significance of the lack of professional learning around homelessness. All six participants described that they received no professional learning or instruction on the topic of homelessness in their pre-service instruction. Interviewee F stated, “I don’t think before I started teaching I had any professional learning about homelessness.” Interviewee E spoke about the lack of professional learning stating, “No, nothing. No formal training, nothing about how to deal with that.” Interviewee B and D had similar responses about having next to nothing about how to support students who were in a homeless situation. Interviewee C said, “I think we seldom talk about homelessness.” Interviewee A stated, “I don’t think I got a lot of professional development or learning surrounded connected to homelessness.” The researcher noted the lack of pre-service education or professional learning on homelessness for all participants. The participants’ were aware of the topic of homelessness but lacked the professional learning tools to impact learning of students affected by homelessness. The researcher noted a similar experience of missing instruction to pre-service teachers in his post-secondary teaching assignments. A potential link to supporting the teacher’s perspective towards the homeless experience is to incorporate more direct instruction in pre-service teacher programs to improve the learning environment in classroom setting and adjust the perspective of new teachers.

The number of students affected with homelessness has increased over the past two decades and the classroom teacher needs effective instructional strategies to meet their unique needs to achieve student learning. The researcher found relationships between the literature and the present study that there are many unique strategies and behaviors teachers could employ in the classroom to enhance student growth and achievement. Moreover, student attitudes of feeling safe, empowered, and part of the classroom community impact their acceptance and

learning in school. There is also a relationship to student achievement when the teacher has a richer perception of the student's homelessness, which relates to a stronger relationship with both the student and family. In this section, the researcher discussed the results of the present study in relation to the literature associated with the phenomenon of the educator experiences of instructing children affected by homelessness. In discussion of the four constructs, the researcher described addressed the following: (a) how the results related to teaching; (b) how the results related to current literature; and (c) how the results related to other scholars in this field of research. Based on the review of literature and the present study, future research may be warranted in the aspects of homelessness and pre-service teacher programs.

### **Limitations**

This interpretive phenomenological study was based on educators' lived experience with students affected by homelessness in their classroom. One delimitation to the study was the small number of participants. In the present study, the researcher interviewed six participants but phenomenological methodology is not designed to generalize to a large population. The transferability of the study's results and the understanding of the total context of the research will therefore be strongly influenced by reader judgment and interpretation of the results (Mertens, 2014). Another limitation to a phenomenological study is the bias of the researcher. The researcher in the present study used bracketing techniques to help control his bias. The validity of this study will not evolve from the interpreted themes itself, but from the judgments that are formed by those who understand the essence of this research study.

### **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

In Chapter 2, the researcher found empirical research recommending adjustments to the federal legislation at the school district level. Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) sought to

identify important perceptions of homeless students through the point of view of the classroom teacher to highlight implications and recommendations for successful school policy frameworks that would support students affected by homelessness. Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) compiled a comprehensive list of recommendations that were derived through an analysis of three concurrent case studies that sought to provide evidence to support an understanding on how to enhance a teacher's view of students affected by homelessness (p. 211). A summary of the recommendations of the Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) case study research included: (a) enhancing the school environment by encouraging school; (b) community awareness of the homeless experience; (c) guiding student support in the classroom through teachers developing positive relationships; and (d) involve the community advocacy along families supports outside of the school (Anooshian, 2000; Milenkiewicz, 2005; Nunez, 1996; Swick 2000; 2005).

These policy recommendations could improve the overall support of students affected by homelessness and support districts in meeting the intended goal of the McKinney-Vento Act, i.e., lowering the number of homeless individuals and support youth in school affected with homelessness. Additionally, the policy adjustments may bring to light the homeless experience is a social issue. Legislation could prescribe long term goals to end homelessness through supporting children in school more readily, hence break the cycle of homelessness and improve the plight of this marginalized population. The data collected through interviewing participants and analysis by the researcher support the summary of recommendations of Powers-Costello and Swick. The researcher found in the process of discovering the essence of a teachers' lived experience who work with homeless adolescents that encouraging students to attend school and increasing the awareness in the community of the homeless experience along with teachers developing positive relationships meets the intended goal of the Mckinney-Vento Act.



The present study identified gaps in pre-service teacher programs with regard to support the marginalized population of students affected by the homeless experience.

All six participants did not receive pre-service instruction to support students affected by homelessness. The review of literature confirmed many new teachers, especially in low-income urban and rural areas, have had little or no exposure to basic information about children, curriculum, or schools (Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden, 2007, p. 111). The research in the present study will expand conversations around professional learning with the homeless experience and increase the available resources of both current classroom and pre-service teacher.

The homeless experience is increasing across the nation. Moreover, there is a need to examine how educators can develop a more refined understanding of the homeless experience in the public school setting. The researcher found in this study teachers have increased empathy, improved engagement strategies, and seek more positive relationships with their students after teaching student affected by homelessness. The essence of the lived experience of the participants in this study is centered around a teacher's drive to seek introspective reflection and gain knowledge, along with building positive relationships with their students, which leads to increasing engagement strategies with all students, including those affected with homelessness.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There is a gap in the empirical research of the teacher's perspective educating marginalized populations like students affected by homelessness. With the review of literature, the researcher confirmed the homeless experience is increasing in the Pacific Northwest and across the nation. Furthermore, there is a need to examine how teachers develop a more sophisticated understanding and support of the homeless experience in public schools with the

absence of professional learning about how to engage students affected by homelessness in pre-service teacher programs. The researcher in the present study discovered the essence of the educator's point of view to derive a deeper understanding of the homeless experience and increase student achievement through improved engagement strategies and building positive relationships with their students. This research needs to extend discussions about professional learning with the homeless experience and increase the available resources of both current classroom and pre-service teacher.

If teachers lack a clear understanding of adolescents who are homeless, they could impede the learning student achievement in the classroom. An expansion in the research on the teacher's perspective with students who are in crisis due to homelessness or other marginalized populations, could help schools, districts, and educational staff to better appreciate how to reach all students and help them toward a goal of becoming productive members of society. A delimiting factor in the present study is the limited number of participants along with the sampling was collected at the secondary level. The researcher recommends to increase the number of participants in a similar methodological approach to discovering the essence of a teacher's point of view when educating students affected by homelessness or other marginalized populations and other settings. A second recommendation of the researcher impacts professional learning around the topic of marginalized populations, specifically homelessness. The researcher discovered all six participants lacked professional learning about the impact of homelessness in the classroom. The researcher established the third construct of the present study's conceptual framework, impact of homelessness, to highlight how the homeless experience affects students in this marginalized population. The researcher found a potential link of poverty and homelessness but further research is necessary to determine a correlation. The researcher recommends a

quantitative methodological approach to linking poverty to homelessness because phenomenological methodology is not designed to generalize to a large population nor designed to connect theory to practice.

Additionally, the researcher found in the review of literature similar characteristics of homelessness and culturally diverse populations. Martha Burt's (2001) research on helping America's homeless provides clear support for understanding that, "Of all homeless people, homeless children are the most vulnerable" (p. 137). The state of vulnerability seems to occur because of a child's limited power and control over their circumstances. Students in a state of homelessness are burdened with the weight of their personal lives, which could bring down potential success in the classroom. Cuthrell et al. (2010) indicated, "Impoverished students are far more likely to enter school as linguistically disadvantaged because they have not had experiences that promote literacy and reading readiness" (p. 105). This research indicated students affected by homelessness enter the classroom with a reduced vocabulary and limited expressive or receptive language skills. There is abundant research demonstrating the importance of teachers developing the capacities to understand and instruct student populations that are diverse with regard to culture, ethnicity, and race; however, the literature search conducted for this study did not reveal similar research that would extend to understanding and instructing students affected by homelessness (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Grant & Secada, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Melnick & Zeichner, 1995). The researcher recommends further research to extend the possibility that the homeless experience is an emerging category in diversity.

Teachers play a critical role in supporting the needs of all students in the classroom especially those who are experiencing homelessness. The ability of the classroom teacher to

build a positive relationships needs further research, especially when support a student affected by homelessness. The researcher revealed the use of an empathetic approach through trust by the teacher helped deepen the student-teacher relationship with the student affected by homelessness. Further research is necessary to discover how trust is a major component in the student-teacher relationship, which could effect academic and social growth of an adolescent and increase possible role models with school staff.

## **Conclusion**

The essence of the lived experience of the participants' in this study is centered around teachers' drive to seek introspective reflection and gain knowledge, along with building positive relationships with their students, which leads to increasing engagement strategies with all students, including those affected with homelessness. Similar to introspective reflection and desire to gain knowledge, the motivation of the researcher to complete the present study was to understand the homeless experience from the teacher's point of view to improve his teaching practice. In 20 years of teaching students in public schools, the researcher found few resources on teaching students who were impacted by homelessness. Moreover, in the researcher's post-secondary teaching practice with teacher preparatory programs, he found negligible information provided, either through course objectives, instructional materials, or textbook resources, which would prepare student teachers for understanding how the issue of homelessness can affect their future classrooms and students. In the present study, the participant's also indicated a lack of pre-service instruction about the homeless experience, which may help adjust the teacher's perspective and meet the needs of this marginalized population.

Palmer (2004) says that the journey to inner truth is too difficult to do by oneself and if one does not ask for help, one will not reach success. The second theme discovered by the

researcher in the present study is building positive relationships with students. A seminal researcher on poverty and building relationships in the classroom, Ruby Payne (2008) cited James Comer (1995) stated, "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship" (para. 1). The review of literature by the researcher in chapter 2 provided the foundation that indicated classroom teachers should present a sense of accepting all students and genuinely want them in their classroom. Cuthrell et al. (2010) stated, "By believing in a child cultivating positive relationships, and offering meaningful activities, teachers can build positive classroom environments that affect the child for much longer than a single school year" (p. 107). The present study discovered how the phenomenon of homelessness affected the classroom experience of the six participants.

The interpretation of the essence by the researcher is the classroom teacher must seek out marginalized populations to meet the needs of all students. Teachers must seek to increase positive student relationships to impact student growth and achievement with all students. If the teacher finds a student who is affected by a negative life event like homelessness or severe poverty, he or she should use an empathic approach to initially build trust with the student in a marginalized population and maintain consistency along with trust to build a deeper rapport with the student. This will enable all students an opportunity to achieve academic, social, and emotional skill to contribute to society.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_(1st interview)\_\_\_\_\_ (2nd interview) Interviewer: Tim Smart

Location:

Interviewee: (A) (B) (C) (D) (E) (F) (G) (H) (I)

Years of Experience: Age: Sex: (M F Other) Ethnicity:

Researcher Describes the Study.

(1st interview)

1. Describe your pre-service teacher program and background. What led you to becoming a classroom teacher?
2. Describe your first year(s) of teaching. What did your classroom look and feel like?
3. Describe a challenging experience you encountered early in your classroom experience.
4. Describe a few accomplishments you have achieved in your teaching.

(2nd interview)

5. Describe your professional learning about homelessness and homeless students, especially how to support students who are affected by homelessness prior to experiencing a student affected by homelessness in your classroom.
6. Tell me what it's like to teach while a student affected by homelessness was in your classroom.
7. Describe your teaching and/or classroom engagement strategies when you were teaching in a classroom with a child affected by homelessness.
8. After experiencing a student's homelessness in your classroom, describe what you did, if anything, to adjust your teaching and classroom engagement strategies.
9. Has your emotional state and/or student relationships changed since experiencing a student's homelessness in your classroom.

Thank the participant for their time and detailed descriptions, assure them of confidentiality of their responses.



## Appendix B: Field Notes Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_(1st interview)

Location:

Interviewee: (A) (B) (C) (D) (E) (F) (G) (H) (I)

Researcher Describes the Study: Thank you in advance for sharing your experience, I appreciate you participating in this research about the teacher's lived experience with students affected by homelessness. I want to review the consent form and your voluntary participation. The district does not review the interviews and your participation is confidential. Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator, the district, or Concordia University.

{Begin Recording}

1. Describe your pre-service teacher program and background. What led you to becoming a classroom teacher?
2. Describe your first year(s) of teaching. What did your classroom look and feel like?
3. Describe a challenging experience you encountered early in your classroom experience. This does not need to be a homelessness situation.
4. Describe a few accomplishments you have achieved in your teaching.

Thank the participant for their time and detailed descriptions, assure them of confidentiality of their responses.

(Continued)

## Appendix B: Field Notes Protocol (Continued)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_(2nd interview)

Location:

Interviewee: (A) (B) (C) (D) (E) (F) (G) (H) (I)

Researcher Describes the Study: Thank you again for sharing your experience, I appreciate you participating in this research about the teacher’s lived experience with students affected by homelessness. I want to review the first interview transcript and have you “member check” the details of your initial interview. Your participation in this study is still totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator, the district, or Concordia University.

{Begin Recording}

5. Describe your professional learning about homelessness and homeless students, especially how to support students who are affected by homelessness prior to experiencing a student affected by homelessness in your classroom.
  
6. Tell me what it’s like to teach while a student affected by homelessness was in your classroom. {Prompts: emotions, connections, engaging the class }
  
7. Describe your teaching and/or classroom engagement strategies when you were teaching in a classroom with a child affected by homelessness.
  
8. After experiencing a student’s homelessness in your classroom, describe what you did, if anything, to adjust your teaching and classroom engagement strategies.
  
9. Has your emotional state and/or student relationships changed since experiencing a student’s homelessness in your classroom.

Thank the participant for their time and detailed descriptions, assure them of confidentiality of their responses.

### Appendix C: Data Analysis Matrix

Research Questions	Conceptual Framework	Interview Protocol	Themes
RQ.	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	Seek introspective reflection Build positive relationships Increase engagement strategies
Sub1.	2	1,2,3,4,5	Seek introspective reflection
Sub2.	3	6,7	Seek introspective reflection Build positive relationships
Sub3.	2,3	8,9	Build positive relationships Increase engagement strategies

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Research Study Title:** Teaching Middle School Children Affected by Homelessness: An Interpretive Phenomenological Investigation of Teachers' Lived Experiences

**Principal Investigator:** Timothy B. Smart

**Research Institution:** Concordia University - Portland

**Faculty Advisor:** Marty Bullis, PhD

#### **Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this study is to conduct a dissertation research project at Concordia University, Portland in the doctoral program. This phenomenological study will incorporate two interviews with each participant about their lived experience with regard to teaching students affected by homelessness. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at anytime without affecting your relationship with the primary researcher, Timothy B. Smart.

Data collection will involve two 45 to 60 minute conversational interviews between October to December, 2017. Transcripts of the interviews are provided to the participant to review during the data collection phase of the project, which ends January, 2018. The first interview will establish the context of the participant's experience, including both a historical narrative of your background as educators and describing your pre-service teacher instruction. The second interview will concentrate on exploring the details of the participant's lived experience of the phenomena.

#### **Risks:**

There are minimal risks associated with the participants sharing their experiences but sharing personal information and autonomy is at the highest regard. The homelessness topic may cause some slight discomfort with the participant with regard to emotional well-being. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked in my office desk. When I or any of the co-investigators review the data, it will not contain your name or any identifying information. We will refer to your data with a code that only the principal investigator, Timothy B. Smart, knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

**Benefits:**

This research hopes to find the essence of the homeless student experience to better understand how schools, districts, teachers, and administrators of teacher preparation programs may support homeless students in the classroom.

**Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time we sense that you are uncomfortable we will pause the interview and ask if you would like to continue.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Tim Smart at email [researcher email redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email [email redacted])

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	Participant Name	_____	Date
_____	Participant Signature	_____	Date
<u>Timothy B. Smart</u>	Investigator Name	_____	Date
_____	Investigator Signature	_____	Date



Investigator: Timothy B. Smart;  
email: [researcher email redacted]  
c/o: Professor Marty Bullis, PhD  
Concordia University – Portland  
2811 NE Holman Street  
Portland, Oregon 97221 s