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Mitigating the Effects of Poverty in Elementary Schools in Windsor and Essex County

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Mitigating the Effects of Poverty in Elementary Schools in Windsor and Essex County

by

Jillian R. Pizzo

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Mitigating the Effects of Poverty in Elementary Schools in Windsor and Essex County

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ABSTRACT

In this phenomenological design, I explored the perspectives of teachers from Windsor and Essex County, Ontario, Canada concerning their roles in mitigating poverty for students in their elementary school classroom. The study explored teachers' viewpoints on the impacts of poverty when it comes to student learning and holistic school experiences, and the implications that these effects have on their roles as teachers. Data from Statistics Canada indicates that in 2017 Windsor and Essex County has the highest poverty rates in all of Canada and that as many as one in four children were living in poverty. The study used qualitative research strategies to explore how teachers, schools, and school boards are responding to the effects of poverty on students. The goal was to identify exemplary practices in local schools throughout Windsor and Essex County and within school boards that may offer lessons to other jurisdictions across Canada and elsewhere. The data collected from this research suggested that teachers in Windsor and Essex county are lacking the necessary training and professional development to work with vulnerable students. The teachers interviewed for this research suggested additional professional development in teachers college and throughout their career to support vulnerable students. Additional classroom supports and resources would also be beneficial.

Keywords: Poverty, Resilience, Mitigating Risk, Socio-Economic Status, Vulnerability, Marginalization.

DEDICATION

"Every child deserves a champion: an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists they become the best they can possibly be"

-Rita Pierson, Educator

Most importantly, I dedicate this thesis to the teachers who come to work every day and aspire to be the champion that their students need. You are recognized, you are important, and you are making a difference. Never stop fueling your passion and never underestimate your strengths.

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Lastly, thank you to the educators who participated in my research. Your passion and energy inspire me to be a better educator. Keep making a difference!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CTF   Canadian Teachers Federation

FNMI   First Nations Metis & Inuit

LICO   Low-Income Cut-Off

LIM   Low-Income Measure

SES   Socio Economic Status

CHAPTER I

Introduction

One of the most powerful predictors of life outcomes is socio-economic status (Levin, 2011). Levin (2011) describes the term "socio-economic status" as a measure that is associated with desirable outcomes in life such as education, health, longevity, and citizenship. In 2015, Statistics Canada reported that nearly 1.2 million Canadian children are living in low-income households. These children are determined to be living with a lower socio-economic status (SES). "The primary purpose of Statistics Canada's low-income lines is to provide some indication of the extent, nature, and evolution of persons with low-income who may be said to be at risk of poverty" (Murphy, 2010). Seventeen percent of children under the age of 18 are unable to meet the minimum standard of food, shelter and other necessities: "Poor means lacking not only material assets and health but also capabilities, such as social belonging, cultural identity, respect and dignity, and information and education" (Engle et al. 2008, p. 1).

Consequently, Windsor, Ontario has the highest rate of children living in low-income households in Canada with 1 in 4 children (24.0%) living in poverty among large urban centres(Statistics Canada, 2015). Socio-economic status can be difficult to measure, as the community one lives in, the current economy, and the size of the household play important roles in its determination (Ciuffetelli-Parker, 2012). Measuring and assessing the prevalence of poverty can be difficult due to multiple measurement tools (Best Start Resource Centre, 2017). In Canada, socio-economic status is

measured by various indices such as the Low-Income Measure (LIM) and Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO). Socio-economic status is defined by the term poverty or social disadvantage (Black & Engle, 2008). They described the economic definition of poverty based on low-income measures

(LIM). The LIM takes what a family can afford to purchase itself, with the necessities of life such as food, water, shelter and clothing into consideration. Although the Canadian government provides various programs to support families and children with significant financial needs, many children continue to miss social, emotional, and educational opportunities easily accessible to children of higher socio-economic status (SES). "We are making progress on reducing the gap between income and the cost of living through increases to the minimum wage, the introduction of OHIP+, housing supplements, child care fee subsidies, full-day kindergarten, and free average tuition" (Government of Ontario, 2017). This is supported by Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) who believe that families with high SES afford their children with a variety of services, goods, parental actions, and social connections that potentially redound to the benefit of children. They also show a concern that many children with low SES lack access to those same resources and experiences thus putting them at risk for developmental problems.

Since children are such a vulnerable population in our society, society must recognize the profound impacts that poverty has on this demographic. These can include, but are not limited to, lower educational achievement, poorer health outcomes, and higher rates of social exclusion (Government of Canada, 2016). Ruby Payne (2003) defines poverty as an external environment where the evidence of poverty surrounds the child throughout their everyday life. Knowing the limitations presented to children due to their SES, it is essential to consider that the most powerful tool to break the cycle of poverty is education. Black and Engle (2008) suggest that poverty limits the chances of educational attainment, while at the same time educational attainment is one of the principal mechanisms for escaping poverty.

According to Brooks- Gunn and Duncan (1997) the effects of poverty on children's cognitive development occur early. They also found that the duration of time that children lived

poverty had a strong negative correlation with their cognitive development, which also has adverse effects on their social achievement. Finne, Childs, and Wismer (2011) suggest that those who are most vulnerable in our community are less likely to succeed in school. Children living in poverty are a vulnerable sector of the population and can be further identified as "at-risk" youth. Children who identify as at-risk are living with an abundance of social and emotional stressors. Poverty and socio-economic status can heighten the stress experienced by at-risk youth: "Children raised in poverty rarely choose to behave differently, but they are faced with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine school performance" (Jensen, 2009, p. 231). Jensen also noted that children raised in poverty are challenged with an abundance of risk factors affecting their daily life. These risk factors can be identified with the mnemonic, EACH, which stands for Emotional and Social Challenges, Acute and Chronic Stressors, Cognitive Lags and Health and Safety Issues. As educators, we must alleviate the impacts of these risk factors for students and ensure that they are provided with equal opportunities both in and out of the classroom that will support them throughout their educational journey.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers perspectives on the impacts of poverty on children's educational experiences in Windsor and Essex County, Ontario, Canada. The study seeks to understand the perspectives and perceptions of elementary school teachers and other key stakeholders regarding the impact of poverty on students and students learning experiences. This study will focus on what educators in Windsor and Essex County are doing to support their students physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially when they are dealing with the stress of living in poverty.

Research Questions

This study aims to investigate teacher's perspectives on their role in mitigating the effects of poverty for their students. Research questions for this study include:

(1) How do participating teachers perceive the impacts of poverty on students in the classroom?

(2) How do teachers address the issues of poverty among students through their teaching pedagogy?

(3) How do teachers see their role to mitigate the effects of poverty on children's education in Windsor and Essex County?

(4) How can teachers acknowledge the non-academic needs of their students while still tending to their needs in the classroom?

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study will shed new light on the critical role teachers play in the life of vulnerable or marginalized students. It will help to bring awareness to the dynamic concept of poverty for elementary school students in the community of Windsor and Essex County. More importantly, this study can give educators a local perspective on how educators from a local school board, Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB), are supporting their students who are living in poverty.

This study will be a beneficial resource to any educator, administrator or frontline staff member (i.e., Educational Assistant or Child and Youth Worker) who is working with students living in poverty. Since the purpose of this research is to understand the perspectives of teachers who are working with these students, it will provide a real-world example of best practice and

successful pedagogies when working with this vulnerable population. This is a very useful tool for educators living in Windsor, Ontario due to the high childhood poverty rates in the community.

Positionality

The term positionality refers to the individual's worldview and the position they have chosen to adopt for a specific research task (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). I am a Canadian, Caucasian-female educator from LaSalle, Ontario. My family identifies as a middle-class, nuclear family, with five people living in our household. Education is a top priority for my parents, therefore, my positive experience in school has allowed me to obtain two degrees, a diploma and pursue a master's degree over the last six years. My parents have supported my educational career.

Being born and raised in Windsor, Ontario, I grew up with the assumption that everyone had a similar upbringing to what I experienced. The group of friends I surrounded myself with lived in families that had very similar life values and experiences as my own. In fact, I attended both elementary school and high school in communities where 90% of the families were white, middle-class families of European descent. These experiences developed who I am as an educator and meant that I never witnessed poverty until the second year of my undergraduate degree.

During the second year of my undergraduate degree, I traveled abroad to a developing country with an organization called Students Offering Support, where I had the opportunity to participate in building sustainable education projects for extremely impoverished communities. My experience with traveling abroad gave me a different perspective on how education works in other parts of the world. It was a completely humbling opportunity to bring sustainable education

to communities around the world who have very little. I was also able to see the positive impact that adults can have on the life of vulnerable children — seeing children who are attending school as a privilege changed my North American perspective on having the "right" to education. These experiences shaped who I am as an educator and how I view the concept of poverty.

When I returned home, I did my first pre-service placement for the Faculty of Education in a compensatory education environment. This experience led me to enroll in the LEAD course during my practice teaching. The Leadership Experience for Academic Direction (LEAD) program gave me an opportunity to work with "in-risk" students in and out of the classroom at local schools in the community. The course allowed me to learn different social learning theories, theories of resilience, and personal and social responsibility, and then apply them in my teaching practice. Throughout my work with the program, I have exercised empathy and confidentiality to ensure the trust and safety of my students. I became very passionate about promoting student enrichment by providing the necessary life-skills to assist students in reaching their full potential. The LEAD program helped me to develop a passion for working with in-risk and at-risk youth.

Both opportunities helped me to see the very dynamic concept of poverty from different lenses. Though I had a chance to understand poverty from a global perspective, I feel that the issue has become very relevant in our local community. Before completing my research, I noticed an increase in articles regarding poverty in the local newspaper, *The Windsor Star*. This issue has been apparent in our community for many years, though many individuals do not see the immediate impact that it has on our community, and especially on the vulnerable members within our community. As an elementary school educator in Windsor, Ontario, I am aware of the

vital role that teacher plays in the life of their students, and I wanted to understand what other teachers in our community are doing to make a positive impact in the lives of their vulnerable students.

It is important to note that although I have witnessed poverty from an outsiders perspective, due to my upbringing and socio-economic status, I have never been in a position where I have lived in poverty. This affects my ability to truly understand what it is like to live in poverty.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is essential when completing qualitative research (Jaye, 2002; Leuke 2015). According to Adom et al. (2018), a theoretical framework provides a pathway for research and helps to establish its credibility. It makes the findings more meaningful and ensures a sense direction for the study. For the purpose of this study, theories from the transformational leadership theory and critical pedagogy will serve as a foundation for this research. Much of the research provided on these two topics highlights the importance of these qualities being displayed at the administrative level. For the purpose of this study, these two theories will be examined at the level of classroom educators and how teachers are approaching the pervasiveness of poverty in their classrooms.

When examining the perspectives of teachers in the community on the topic of poverty, it is important to recognize that they have displayed these theories in their own personal pedagogies. These theories in conjunction help to motivate, inspire and support the vulnerable students that teachers have in their classrooms. These two theories together will form a critical lens when looking at the impacts of poverty on elementary school students in Windsor, Ontario and how a teacher's overall pedagogy can impact this

Critical Pedagogy

"Critical pedagogy is a transformation-based approach to education" (Abraham, 2014 p. 2). According to Abraham (2014), the theory has roots in critical theory. It is a way of thinking: "Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institution of a school and the social and material relationships of a wider community…" (McLaren, 1998, p.45). The theory depends on the cohesiveness of all stakeholders to work together- the teacher, the pedagogy, and the learning environment. McKernan (2013) identifies that critical pedagogy is dependent on the relationship between teaching and learning. When the two work together, it gives students a foundation to gain self-consciousness and social awareness.

The critical pedagogy theory assumes a deeper connection than teacher-student relationships: "Many critical pedagogics in their discussion of this relationship mention that it should be based on compassion mutual understanding and common goals" (Darder, 2003, Zembylas, 2013; cited in Abraham, 2013, p. 5). According to Breunig (2005) critical pedagogy makes oppressed populations use critical thinking abilities to transform themselves.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Gomes (2014) defines the transformational leadership theory as a distinct type of leadership that influences changes in the attitudes, values and beliefs of individuals. The level of moral and motivation of the followers should be lifted by the leader's efforts to inspire. Khanin (2007), states that this leader involve their followers in the process of growth and transformation. It promotes a positive environment. Jovanovic and Ciric (2016) recognized in their research that Transformational Leaders in a school will improve schools overall, change teachers classroom practices, enhance quality of teaching, student learning and achievement and student engagement.

Though many studies have highlighted the concept of transformational leadership to be present in Principals, it is important to see teachers as transformational leaders in their own classroom: "Transformational leadership of teachers affects positively the learning outcomes of students and, primarily relates to the development of high-quality learning and teaching in schools" (Jovanovic & Ciric, 2016, p. 501). Teachers should be seen as contributors to the classroom community and as influences of others success. Another important note to highlight is that teachers ability to be transformational leaders in the classroom provides a significant number of benefits for their students: "The benefits of transformational leadership style of teachers comprises in empowering and increasing students motivation, enhance learning and engagement of students, experiencing success, improving performance and achievement, developing quality of relations in the classroom, etc" (Jovanovic & Ciric, 2016, p. 501). Teachers are at the forefront of providing the motivation and support that students need to feel successful at school. Their ability to inspire their students and lead them to making positive choices is detrimental to their success outside of the classroom and can often have lasting impacts on students in life.

Summary

When selecting theories to discuss my theoretical framework, my intention was to address the importance of teachers and their ability to connect with their students. Much of the literature on these topics highlight Principals ability to inspire, lead and motivate their school community, but I intend to address how teachers are facilitating these theories in their classroom to better support their students.

Critical Pedagogy is a theory that emphasizes the recognition of social injustices and oppression in education and gives students the ability to recognize these injustices in their life (Giroux, 2010). When analysing the perspectives of teachers working with students living in

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poverty, it is important to teach students to analyse the injustices in their lives with a critical lens and teach them to advocate for themselves. Teacher's interviewed in this study have a passion for working with vulnerable and marginalized students. They recognize that their job is to educate children so that they are successful outside of the classroom and throughout their life. When addressing the theory of critical pedagogy, teachers are challenging their students to challenge the injustices in their lives.

It is also important to recognize that teachers themselves use the theory of critical pedagogy to analyse the injustices presented to them when teaching in compensatory schools. Working in low-income schools adds another layer to the profession of teaching which is often forgotten about and over looked. Teachers become advocates for themselves and their students and fight the injustices that are present when working with this vulnerable group of children. They are often acknowledging themselves as advocates and recognize that their voice impacts their students ability to have a better chance.

The theory of Transformational Leadership is a theory that focuses on a leaders ability to inspire, motivate and transform their followers to achieve a common goal. In terms of poverty in elementary school, there are so many external factors that can limit children's ability to not only be successful in the classroom, but feel successful. Teachers have the ability to provide students with a safe space at school where they have the opportunity to learn and feel supported academically. Teachers also have the ability to lead students by example. They are such a positive role model in students life, and when children have someone who leads and inspire them, it gives them the motivation to do their best daily.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I intend to explore the multifaceted topic of poverty and the impacts that it has on student success and achievement. As stated in the previous chapter, my intention for this research is to explore the role of the teacher and how their individual pedagogy can impact elementary school student's ability to persevere throughout their life. I mainly focus on the impact that poverty has on children and more specifically on children living in Canada. I also explore the matters associated with this vulnerable group in the population and how they can be deemed as a marginalized sector in the community.

This section is organized into 12 sections. The first few sections start as broad introductions to how we can define poverty in Canada. The focus then moves into a more specific look on how poverty can be defined in terms of success in the classroom. Then finally, how teachers see their roles as mitigators of poverty for their students.

Vulnerability

According to the Government of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, vulnerable groups in Ontario includes people living in poverty, newcomers to Canada, Aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities and lone parents. Vulnerability can also be recognized as children under the age of 18 whose lives are in jeopardy due to conditions such as poverty, orphan hood, child abuse, child labor, hostile family conditions, and child abandonment, among others (Evans, 2002; Whitehouse, 2002; cited in Lekule 2014). Walker and Smimthgall (2009) explain that vulnerable children are those living in high-risk situations where their physical and social growth are threatened. Put into a local context, single-parent families, new comers to Canada and First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) peoples are more at risk than others (The United Way, 2015).

To be classified as a vulnerable population is a dynamic concept that can arise when people are isolated, insecure, and defenseless in the face of risk, shock, or stress. Although some Canadians may be more vulnerable to poverty than other, nobody can have immunity from poverty (Government of Canada, 2018).

Social vulnerabilities are the product of social inequalities (Cutter, Boruff, & Shirley, 2003). Cutter et al. (2003) attribute vulnerabilities to the lack of access to resources, limited access to political power and representation, social capital, and beliefs and customs. (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis (2003) describe vulnerability as a term that means being prone or susceptible to damage or injury. They offer a working definition that states that vulnerability is characterized by individuals and their situation, which influences their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of a natural hazard. Some groups of people are more prone to experience vulnerabilities due to their lack of 'capacity' to protect themselves (Wisner, 2003). Wisner (1999) further states that it is essential to understand that vulnerable people are more susceptible to finding themselves in vulnerable situations and that many vulnerable situations are temporary.

Marginalization

Watkins (2010) states that education should be a driver of equal opportunity and social mobility, not a transmission mechanism for social injustice, yet our education system has struggled with equality for decades. Marginalization refers to the set of processes through which some individuals and groups face systematic disadvantages in their interactions with dominant social, political, and economic institutions (Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, 2016). Marginalization is related to but different from inequality (UNESCO-International Institute for Educational Planning, 2010). Marginalization arises from culturally embedded

values, social class, educational status, disability, beliefs, and personal choices, standards, norms and other factors which determine acceptability within a social frame. Many factors contribute to marginalization in education, though they are not limited to specific causes making marginalization a difficult concept to measure: "Household surveys and other data provide insights into the relationship between poverty, ethnicity, health, parental literacy and other characteristics on the one side of education and the other (Petkovska, 2015; Watkins, 2010). However, while these are all characteristics associated with marginalization, they do not operate in isolation. Watkins (2010) also states that being born into poverty is one of the most influential factors leading to marginalization.

Some populations in Canada are more susceptible to poverty; therefore, the risk of poverty is not equal among groups of people (The Government of Ontario, 2014). Best Start (2017), notes that disparities amongst gender, region, disability status, ethno-racial identity, length of time in Canada and single-parent families create significant impacts of the number of people living in poverty in Ontario. Certain populations in Canada experience poverty more than others: "In addition to being more likely to experience low income these groups are also more likely to live in low income for long periods of time. This is troubling because the longer a person is poor, the harder it is to get out of poverty" (Government of Canada, 2016, page 8).

What is Poverty?

Poverty is a global issue that has disadvantageous impacts on almost all aspects of life for children and families (Black & Engle, 2008). Though the highest percentage of poverty affects minority groups, it is a phenomenon that occurs in all countries and affects all races of people (Mulvihill, 2006). According to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development in Canada, Jean-Yves Ducios (2016), poverty goes beyond low income, a significant component of

poverty is about food insecurity, social exclusion, inadequate housing and the lack of access to transportation and services. Poverty is often seen as a deficit and linked to many adverse effects on the physical and emotional well-being of a child (American Psychological Association, 2018). Ciuffetelli-Parker (2015) indicates that our society often blames people that are living in poverty, which results in the rationalization of poverty as a culture. In-order to change the mindset of society we must educate them on the conditions that create poverty. This does not include our previous understanding on class, race, culture and the underlying meaning of what it means to be poor. Ciuffetelli-Parker stresses that we should view families living in poverty as a possibility to society rather than a deficit.

Engle and Black (2008) define poverty as a dynamic process with some families cycling in and out of poverty in a relatively short time, while others experience cases that are more persistent. Poverty is complex, and it impacts individuals in different ways: "For some, poverty is temporary and associated with short-term life events such as job loss. For others, it can last a long time due to the multiple barriers they face. In some cases, it can be so pervasive that it is passed from parents to children" (Government of Canada, 2016, p. 7). Ciufetelli-Parker (2015) states that poverty can vary based on the community where you live. She states that poverty for some families can be characterized as intergenerational or can be more intermittent (i.e., business closures or downsizing of manufacturing companies). Intergenerational poverty is a term that refers to long-term poverty and is alternately known by the term "cycle of poverty" (Fathers, 2015). Intergenerational poverty is persistent and, according to Canada's poverty reduction strategy, the longer a person lives in poverty, the harder it is to escape it. Approximately one-third of low-income children in Canada cannot escape poverty, which results in becoming a low-income adult (Corak, 2006). The Government of Canada defines this type of poverty by the

specific number of years that a child has lived below the poverty line. In Windsor, Ontario, the childhood poverty rate is currently at 18 to 24 percent making intergenerational poverty the most prevalent type of poverty seen in our community. Canadian studies have concluded that there is a 20 to 25 percent chance for these children to move out of the cycle of poverty, as children living in these conditions are more at risk of negative impacts, including the lack of resources to break the cycle of poverty.

Access to Resources

Parents do their best to meet their child's basic needs. Skills, values, self-esteem, and attitudes are all learned skills that allow children to be fully immersed in society (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). Living in poverty can compromise a family's ability to do this (Best Start, 2017). Families can utilize supports implemented by the Government to access basic resources such as food, shelter and clothing; yet due to a shortage of resources and services, many needs are left un-met. Necessities should not be seen in just monetary terms, but also about the access to housing, healthy food, and health care. These needs can be met by action from communities, local and provincial governments (Government of Canada, 2018). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2009) states, that poverty can be displayed as a lack of access to vital resources such as education, employment, housing and health.

Access to Food

According to the Government of Ontario, hungry children cannot learn- it leads to lack of attention, focus and frustration. "One in six children in Canada live in homes that experience food insecurity" (Tarasuk et. Al., 2014). Tarasuk (2014) also notes that hunger leaves a lasting mark on children's physical and mental health. This can be manifested in a greater likelihood of certain conditions such as depression.

Access to Affordable Housing

"In 2015, there were 171, 360 families and individuals on the wait list for rent geared to income housing" (Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, 2016). Statistics Canada (2016) found that 8% of Canadians over the age of 15 have lived with family, friends, or in their car at some point in their life. Affordable housing is typically located in high-risk neighborhoods and can be deemed as inadequate (Dilworth, 2006). Consequently, if children live in quality affordable homes it can have positive outcomes on their school success and community engagement (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). The Ontario Association of Food Banks (2016), links quality affordable rental homes to reducing the need for hunger relief agencies, such as food banks.

Access to Health Care

"Researchers who have examined the relationship between income and a wide variety of indicators of health status- from life expectancy, infant mortality, mental health, time spent in hospital to chronic conditions- have found that the health of people with lower incomes are invariably worse than that of people with higher incomes, regardless of the health measure used" (Ontario Association of Food Banks, 2008, pg.10). The Ontario Association of Food Banks recognizes that the reasons between poverty and poor health are not hard to find. According to The United Way (2014), populations living in poverty require greater healthcare than those who do not live in poverty.

The Impact of Poverty on Students' Education

Since children are such a vulnerable population in our society, poverty has profound impacts on them: "In Canada, and internationally, individuals with more education are more likely to be employed, earn more money and are less likely to suffer from depression and are

physically healthier" (OECD, 2017). Other effects include but are not limited to, lower educational achievement, poorer health outcomes and higher rates of social exclusion (Government of Canada, 2016). With this disadvantage in mind, it is important to consider that an imperative tool to break the cycle of poverty is education: "Education is one of the most powerful tools to lift people out of poverty" (Fathers, 2015). Mulvihil (2006) recognizes that education plays a crucial role in the eradication of poverty; it's a way of fighting the effects of poverty.

When children are educated from an early stage in life, they are more likely to have a strong foundation for the development of their social, emotional, and cognitive skills that will affect them later in life: "Educational attainment is well recognized as a powerful predictor of experiences later in life" (Black & Engle, 2008). Rothman (2007), states that teachers and schools are essential and influential partners in improving life chances for low-income students. Rothman states that many teachers found that children from low-income households display lower motivation to learn, lags in cognitive development, a lack of participation in extra-curricular activities, lower career aspirations, interruptions in attendance, an increased risk of illiteracy, and higher drop-out rates. More importantly, he reported that not only is there a strong correlation between socio-economic status and children's academic performance, but the inequities displayed between affluent and low-income families concerning education demonstrate that children from lower income families were less ready to learn. Education Week discovered that the correlation between poverty and education is negative: "Research has found that concentrated poverty in schools is associated with lower achievement for both poor and non-poor students who attend schools" (Education Week, 2000). According to the United Way (2015), children from low-income households typically have lower achievement scores in school

than children from higher income families. It is important to note that, although many children living in low-income families have failed to break the cycle of poverty, there are those who have thrived (Black & Engle, 2008).

The Role of the Teacher

Role theories suggest that the expectation for one's role will change depending on the time, situation, and person (Turner, 2001). According to Waller (1932; cited in Valli & Buese, 2007), "the role inheres in the social situation". Therefore, there can be a "kaleidoscopic shifting of roles" (Valli & Buese, 2007, p.523). This shows that an individual's view about their role and the roles of others can change. It is important to note that the role of a teacher should not be viewed in a singular context, but rather in a multidimensional and dynamic way (Valli & Buese, 2007, p. 522). Traditionally, the role of a teacher has been known as a transmitter of knowledge. More recently, a teacher is seen as a professional that acts as a facilitator and mentor for their students (Palazzolo, 2015). Sharma (2017) defines a teacher as one who is not conformed to the classroom but is the catalyst of change in this "everchanging" world. Teachers are responsible for preparing students for the world of today and tomorrow, and we must provide students with unique learning opportunities both in and out of the classroom.

Teachers are facing daily challenges of larger class sizes, increasingly diverse populations, and students suffering from conditions that affect their mental, physical and emotional well-being (Fathers, 2015). When working in a classroom that is affected by poverty, it is important to understand that its' effects mainly occur outside of the classroom walls (Flessa, 2007). Many times, teachers only focus on the simplistic, practical solutions that they can take in order to help lessen the effects of poverty for their students (i.e. providing snacks in the classroom) (Gorski, 2018). Instead, teachers should tailor their teaching practice around developing a more in-depth

understanding of the inequalities that are experienced by their students and their students' families. This can be combated by the inclusion and collaboration of community partners in the classroom (Cookson, 2013).

Teachers are responsible for ensuring that their class meets the needs of all their students. The Ministry of Education's strategy for inclusive classrooms specifically notes striving to "ensure that all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted" (Ministry of Education 2009, p. 10). This is the basis of having an equitable and inclusive classroom. Equitable and inclusive education is a foundation of excellence that meets the needs of individuals and identifies and eliminates barriers. Equity and inclusion in school settings promote a sense of belonging and involves a broad community. Though the equity and inclusion strategy is a plan that is implemented from the efforts of the school administrator, it is up to Ontario teachers to be culturally responsive which refers to a pedagogy that understands the necessary measures of including students' cultural references in all areas of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). As well as being equity minded: "actions that demonstrate individual's' capacity to recognize and address racialized structures, policies, and practices that produce and sustain racial inequities" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015 p. 1). Administrators and educators must recognize and understand the concept of equity and inclusive education, where students not only learn about diversity but also experience it. Some strategies are outlined in the Ministry of Education strategy, such as providing school boards with funding to implement programs and the development of courses related to diversity and inclusion, Ontario schools continually lack equality. This can change through the individual teachers' ability to teach their students from using holistic approach.

How Teachers see Their Role

Sharma (2007) describes the role of a teacher from perspectives of the past. Teachers were told what to teach, when to prepare, and how they should present their lessons to their students. Their duty was to educate each student in their classroom the same way, regardless whether their students were grasping the new concepts and understanding the lessons. Their teaching methods were very traditional, and their administrators discouraged any deviations from this. This method was a disservice to teachers and students. Sharma compares these conventional methods to the new practices that modern teachers are adopting. Teachers are encouraged to utilize new and innovative teaching methods that take the "art and science" of learning into account: "They understand that the essence of education is a close relationship between a knowledgeable, caring adult and a secure, motivated child. They grasp that their most important role is to get to know each student as an individual to comprehend their unique learning style, social and cultural background, interests, and abilities" (Sharma, 2007 p.63).

Cuiffetelli, Parker and Flessa (2011) conducted a series of case studies to examine how schools and teachers lead their practice to "build community" within their schools and try to connect home and school life for their students:

> We learned about schools that systematically approached improving school culture and climate to shape a positive context for teaching and learning. We heard from teachers that their attitudes about the interaction between poverty and schooling were changing. They were moving from what they called simple answers to more complex ones, and away from deficit-based assumptions about students' capacity to learn or families interested in children's success. We heard from that school progress was an ongoing collective effort that setbacks were inevitable but surmountable (p.16).

Schools must shift their practices to a more holistic approach rather than skills-based and test driven. Professionals at the forefront of the issue including teachers, principals, and support staff understand that there must be a shift from focusing on actual test scores as a predictor for school effectiveness, to the more complex issues in school communities. Neufeld (1990) emphasizes the emotional and practical links between school and student, and the importance of developing positive student-teacher relationships. She notes that poor children may bring additional burdens into school with them, so supportive and understanding teacher can be particularly important. This leads to emotional growth in students which is coming from the support of an administration who believes in this approach.

Equity in the Classroom

"Equity in education has two dimensions. The first is fairness, which basically means making sure that personal and social circumstances should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential. The second is inclusion, in other words ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all" (OECD, 2008). Fairness and inclusion can help students overcome adversity when living in poverty. Equity in the classroom means giving each students a fair opportunity by meeting them where they are at.

Poverty Mitigation Strategies

Flessa (2007) stresses that schools should advocate for improved efficacy in recruitment, selection, preparation, and placement of teachers in schools affected by poverty. Teachers are imperative to social change and should be supported by programs that provide additional education regarding the complex needs of their students. This support comes through responses by local school boards, where offering further professional development for teachers who are working with these students is one of the most effective ways to promote change. A unified

approach is necessary, since "teaching practices are strongly influenced by the school and school district organization and policy…few schools have organized instructional resources such that children who need access to larger amounts of high-quality instruction actually experience" (Levin, 1995, p.9). The Canadian Teachers Federation (2009) also notes that these initiatives must come from ongoing professional development and availability of classroom resources for teachers and principals to support the development of teaching increasingly diverse classrooms.

Creating a more family-centric school climate should be at the forefront of teacher's agenda. Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) suggest that teachers should re-design parent-teacher activities so that all families can experience them. This will contribute to a more collaborative family-centric school climate and improve two-way communication and mutual support in achieving an education. They also suggest that parents should be included in opportunities to meet interpersonally, communicate the positive accomplishments of the child's day, and make school activities more meaningful and engaging. Essentially, families should be included in the planning, decision making, problem solving, and learning process.

Interventions

Many community partnerships are in place to help alleviate the effects of poverty. According to Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy (2015), community organizations are well placed on improving the well-being of individuals with complex and multiple barriers. The United Way (2014) states that there are many local groups who are working towards addressing the issue of poverty on a local level. Community engagement a key factor in community interventions (Faugno, et al., 2016). Since there is often a deficit in support at the school level, the community support is vital for student success and achievement: "…benefits of community

mental health providers and school personnel focused on improving student learning not only increases the likelihood that prevention and intervention strategies will be more available and sustainable in high poverty communities" (Cappella, Frazier, Atkins, Schoenwald, & Glisson, 2008, p. 9).

Along with community interventions, there should be a wide variety of interventions available for parents and students at the school level to meet their specific needs: "Interventions act to advance a child's development through a range of supports and services. Their underlying goal is to develop the skills lacking in children, that have already developed in other children who are of a similar age" (Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007, p. 703).

Implications for Teachers

Although schools do not create poverty and poverty is an issue that cannot be resolved solely by the efforts of teachers, there are many steps a teacher can take in order to address the issue and to help children cope with it more effectively (Levin & Gaskell; cited in Supporting Education Building Canada, 2009). Engle and Black indicate that the link between poverty and low academic achievement has been established. Flessa (2007), states that there is extreme complexity surrounding the topic of poverty. He highlights that environmental influences also have a detrimental impact on a student's success. Unfortunately, when children grow up in impoverished conditions, increasing negative factors affect their educational outcomes "Children raised in low-income families are at risk for academic and social problems as well as poor health and well-being, which can, in turn, undermine educational achievement" (Black & Engle, 2008). The Canadian Teacher's Federation emphasizes in their report *Children, Schools and Poverty* the consequences of living in poverty for children. These include hunger, inadequate childcare, behavior problems at school, low self-esteem, lower motivation, delayed development, lower

achievement, less extra-curricular participation, worse student-teacher interactions, streaming into less challenging programs, lower educational aspirations, interrupted attendance, lower university attendance, illiteracy, and increased risk of dropping-out (CTF, 1989). This confirms that the problems associated with students living in poverty are often a combination of the environment and school issues.

Teacher attitudes and expectations can be linked to the academic success of students living in poverty (Milner IV, Cunningham, Murray, & Alvarez, 2017). According to McLoyd (1998), teachers often view low-SES students less positively than they would their middle-class students:

"Many educators have been socialized to view poor people as morally and culturally deficient. Believing that poor families have attitudes, values, and behaviors that sustain their position at the bottom of the economic ladder, these educators often blame parents for passing on these traits to their children instead of passing on these traits to their middle-class cultural patterns they believe are necessary to succeed in school and in life" (Amatea, Ph.D & West-Olatunji Ph.D, 2012). According to Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007), schools and school staff have a strong effect on low-income parents and children. When working with children, teachers and educational leaders must address poverty with an asset mindset, rather than seeing it from a deficit lens. It is imperative to acknowledge and address poverty with a perspective that is driven by a model that promotes equity, resiliency, and engagement in our students (Ciuffetelli Parker & Flessa, 2011)

<div align="center">**CHAPTER III**</div>

<div align="center">**METHODOLOGY**</div>

In this chapter, I will be discussing the research design and methodological approaches that were adopted to achieve the purpose of the study, which is to explore the ways teachers are mitigating the effects of poverty through their personal teaching pedagogy.

Rationale of the Study

The rationale for this research highlight some of the harmful and damaging effects of poverty on learning and the need for teachers to understand how to mitigate them. The research focused on the issue of poverty in Windsor and Essex County and how teachers in elementary schools are working with their students.

Research Design

Qualitative Research. The research being conducted for the purpose of this study is Qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is research process that involves questions and data collection. It requires the researcher to interpret the data that was collected (Creswell, 2014). Creswell identifies that one of the main reasons for conducting this type of research is because it is exploratory. Since the study requires teachers to share their personal experiences of working with this population, an opportunity to explore perceptions and infer experiences will be best suited for this study.

Phenomenological Approach. This theoretical approach to a qualitative study attempts to understand the meaning of events to people. A phenomenological approach believes that there are many different ways of interpreting a situation and that reality is socially constructed (Bogan and Bilken). Creswell (2014) notes that the study typically begins with a personal statement from the author. This helps the researcher assume the point of view that will be taken in this narrative.

Since this study is dependent upon the personal insight of the participants, this approach will be best to understand the many perspectives that can be taken when working with students living in poverty.

Research Procedure/ Participants

Before conducting the interviews, ethical approval from the University of Windsor's Research Ethics Board (REB) was required. The participants for this study will be selected on a volunteer basis and interview times were selected based on what was convenient for the individual. All of this will be completed on a volunteer basis depending on who responded to the email sent.

This study adopts the purposive sampling method, which selects a sample population that best represents the population being studied. The interviewer deliberately decides its community. This process is essential for the research being conducted because the researcher will be able to select a population that can provide knowledge and wisdom on the topic based on personal experience with working a community of students who are living in poverty.

Teachers who chose to participate in this study were required to have a minimum of five years teaching experience or more in the same Compensatory Education school. The reason for this is to ensure that there is validity to the pedagogies that they use in their teaching practice. It is also an important element to the research because different parts of Windsor and Essex County experience different challenges associated with the issue of poverty. Educators who work in different areas within Windsor and Essex County will see poverty in different ways. This is due to the availability of community supports, transportation, grocery stores, child care and the availability of other support resources. Students from different schools experience different

vulnerabilities and marginalization's associated with poverty and that is an important element to this assignment.

Researcher's Role

Prior to entering the field and gathering data, approval from the University of Windsor's Research Ethics Board (REB) was required.

Once approval was granted, all participants within this study were contacted and an informed consent form was distributed. The consent form outlined and explained the purpose of the study. All participants had the chance to ask questions throughout the interview process and withdraw at any time without consequence. If the participant decided to withdraw from the study, their contributions were exempt.

As the researcher, it was my responsibility to advise the participants about the importance of confidentiality for this study. I established a positive relationship with my participants, so they felt comfortable during the interview process. This helped to show my appreciation for the participants of this study. A professional explanation of my education background, qualifications, and experiences working with marginalized and vulnerable students living in poverty helped to achieve desirable results from the participants.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with the elementary teachers who volunteered to participate in this study and discuss their experiences working with students who have been affected by poverty. Questions for this interview were consistent throughout the entire interview process. The meetings were conducted at a location that was

convenient for the participants. Each interview lasted 30-40 minutes. Audio recordings were used throughout the interview process to ensure the accuracy of the data collection.

The researcher was responsible for all aspects of the data collection, including the research invitation email that was sent out to the elementary school teachers, distribution of consent forms, and scheduling convenient times for the interviews. The researcher stored all interview materials in a safe place.

Instrumentation

A series of open-ended interview questions were developed to determine how teachers are mitigating the effects of poverty for their students. The same questions were asked to all participating teachers, with various perspectives attained through their teaching experiences, the initiatives that are being implemented in their schools and the school's culture and dynamics that represents their school community.

All questions were created and conducted by the researcher. The data was anonymized directly after the data collection takes place. All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. When the transcription phase was complete, audio-recordings were discarded for confidentiality purposes. Any transcriptions that were stored electronically required a passcode in order to gain access to the data. Please see the appendix I for sample questions that were used to interview the teachers.

Data Analysis

I organized the data that was collected during the interview process that I conducted with the teachers. This involved both the notes that I wrote during the structured interviews, as well as, audio transcripts that were recorded during these interviews. Audio recordings were needed for this study to help with the data transcription phase of the research. The audio recordings also

ensured that the data collected was authentic and accurate when transcribed. Data was digitally audio recorded to help with the safety and security when storing the data. Since the researcher is the only person with access to the data, digital recordings allowed for only the researcher to have these.

I coded the interviews to analyze the common themes, trends, and repetition of data. According to Rossman & Rallis (2012), "coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks and writing words representing a category in the margins" (p.198). The researcher also assigns a term to the data based on the language of the participant (Creswell, 2014).

Primary Data Analysis

During the data analysis phase of my research, close attention was paid to the repetition and themes presented in the audio tapes and transcriptions. In total, there were 10 participants interviewed for this research. Out of all of the participants interviewed for this study, there were 3 males and 7 females that participated out of the 12 compensatory education schools in the GECDSB, 9 schools were represented. This was due to the fact that participation in this study was on a volunteer basis. All teachers who volunteered to participate in this study fit the years of service requirements, which is over five years in the same Comp. Ed school and teachers roles within their school range from various job titles such as Intermediate French Teacher, Primary Pseudonyms will be used in this research study to maintain both participant confidentiality and anonymity as the researcher shares with you their responses to the research questions. The researcher assigned each participate with a pseudonym prior to the participants answering the research questions and were told that their pseudonym would be used throughout the study.

Participant A: Luciana

Luciana has been teaching at her current school for 20 years of her career. She is a teacher in the primary division.

Participant B: Olivia

Olivia is currently in her fifth year of her teaching career and has been teaching at the same school for her entire career. She is a strong presence in her school community by supporting extra-curricular activities.

Participant C: Matthew

Matthew has been teaching at the same school for his entire career. He teaches students from grade 2 to grade 8 daily and supports many of the extra-curricular activities offered at his school.

Participant D: Laura

Laura has been an educator for 20 years and has spent her career teaching in Comp. Ed schools.. She has been teaching in the primary division for most of her career. She leads many clubs that are offered at her school.

Participant E: Alyssa

Alyssa has been a teacher in the Intermediate division of her school teaching. She has experience with working with many of the parents in her school community by supporting various after school programs.

Participant F: Stefanie

Stefanie has been teaching at the same school for10 years. She has taught in the Junior division for most of her time at this school. Stefanie applied for various grants and opportunities to bring into her classroom. She also values field trips and experiential learning for her students because she feels that there is a lack of it in the neighborhood.

Participant G: Alex

Alex has been a teacher at the same school for the last 19 years. He has been in various roles within the school such as an intermediate teacher and a prep provider. Alex has supported many students in the such through various clubs and teams. He works hard to provide leadership opportunities to his students through various programs.

Participant H: Tony

Tony is an intermediate teacher and coach at his school. The school he works at has a mixed demographic and many students who are not living in poverty.

Participant I: Vanessa

Vanessa is a prep provider at her school. She sees many students from all grade levels throughout the day. She values the importance of offering students the opportunities that they may not have at home.

Participant J: Dana

Dana is a teacher in the final years of her career. She has been teaching at the same school for her entire career and plans to stay for her remaining years. Dana leads many extracurricular activities to support the learning of her students, and to provide life-long skills.

Ethical Considerations

The risk and vulnerability of the interview group is projected to be low, since all participants being interviewed are adult educators. The volunteer nature of this study also contributes to the overall low-risk factors. Finally, all participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any point before the analyzing of the data. Participants are made aware of this in their initial interview as well as their consent forms.

This study required approval from the University's REB, to ensure that the research conducted is ethical and that the focus of all interviews is for the purpose of this thesis. I disclosed my position as a researcher and inform the participants that this research is voluntary. Data collected for the purpose of this study was locked in a secure place so that no one other than my advisor has access to the results to ensure confidentiality. Once the research was complete, principals, teachers, and community organizations will have access to the results to offer suggestions that may enhance their teaching pedagogies for teaching students living in poverty

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impacts of poverty on children's educational experiences and to understand how the role of a teacher can help to mitigate or lessen the effects of poverty on children in elementary schools in Windsor and Essex County, Ontario, Canada. To accomplish this task, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) approach was chosen to analyze the methodology and interpret all the responses that were collected. A thematic analysis approach allows the researcher to analyze specific aspects of the research from a critical lens and assists with finding some common and reoccurring themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout the transcription process, the researcher was able to establish some common themes in the data and classify these themes into groups, which are revealed through the 5 phases of thematic analysis: i) transcripts; ii) coding; iii) analysis; iv) overall; and v) written reports (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The following themes were drawn from the interviews: 1) limited support and resources, 2) lack of resilience, 3) generational poverty, 4) the importance of supporting students, 5) empathy and understanding, 6) providing an equitable program.

Limited support and resources. One of the most common themes present in the data was the limited support and resources available to compensatory schools. Nahaiciuc (2017) states that 'Compensatory Schools' are any school that offers supplementary services, programs and supports designed to help students who are at-risk succeed. These services are given to the school through Ontario's Compensatory Education Grant (Education Funding in Ontario, 1994).

According to Luciana,

> Compensatory schools are determined by the amount of rental homes in the community and the transiency within the school. Out of the 58 elementary schools in the GECDSB, 15 of them are deemed with the status of "poor". From there, the 10 lowest income schools are given the compensatory school status. The school board supports these schools with one extra junior division teacher, a stipend of money to be used for student transportation for sports events, and Child and Youth Worker.

Students living in poverty are at higher risk for negative mental and physical health conditions (Guttmann, 2001). With the increase in mental and physical health conditions comes the need for more support. The United Way's study, Overcoming the Odds (2014), reported that family income plays a key role in the overall childhood outcome with income factors having strong impacts on their cognitive, emotional and physical well being. They are also are reported to have a lower social development than children classified as "middle-class". Bradley (2002) states that the chronic stress associated with the instable life of those living in poverty creates a diminished sense of self control over their life (SES and Child Development, 2002 pg 383). Through Olivia's experience of working in a Compensatory education school, she states that:

> Emotionally, students come to school not ready to learn because they are worried about things that are out of their control. They are thinking about what they are going to eat for the day, if they are going to get evicted from their house, if they are dressed properly for the weather. They go through their day with so much fear and anxiety of the unknown.

Olivia also states that:

The many other issues that these children are worried about present themselves as defiant

behavior, when, they are just trying to cope with the unknown in their lives.

According to Eric Jensen, students living with a low SES are often times subjected to additional

stressors. These stressors may lack crucial coping skills and experience significant behavioral

and academic problems in school. As the classroom teacher, you are often left with the task of

supporting these students and trying to mitigate the stressors in their life. Luciana supported this

statement by commenting on her experiences as a teacher in a compensatory school:

> Supporting students school is two-fold. It comes from a teacher standpoint, which
>
> includes providing students with classroom resources to support their learning,
>
> experiential learning, and additional help with content outside of the school hours; and it
>
> also comes from the school standpoint, which includes providing students with the
>
> physical needs that they may not be getting at home. Teachers often bring in clothes and
>
> shoes, winter wear and snacks for the students because they know that they are unable to
>
> get these at home.

Due to current funding models, additional supports for students typically come from

teachers volunteering their time. There is no set amount of time that teachers need to spend

coaching, volunteering or supervising extra curricular activities. These typically come as acts of

passion and enjoyment. They are also a service that teachers provide in low income schools to

supplement the fact that students are not receiving any extra-curricular activities after school.

Alex runs various programs at his school geared towards the social-emotional needs of his

students. These programs are crucial for his students social and emotional well-being. They also

help with gaining the trust of his students as it gives them an opportunity to see him as a figure

that supports them outside of the classroom:

A lot of the students in my programs are not on the sports teams and they are not the office helpers. I try to give them the opportunity to be successful. When you give students the ability to be an amazing leader in a non-academic setting, they will blow you away.

Not only are students in low-income families not being exposed to extra curricular activities, they are also not learning the life skills to grow into a healthy adult. Though the schools are unable to fully support students due to lack of resources, some of the lack comes from the inability for students to have their needs met at home. There has been studies showing that those living with low SES often have sedentary lifestyles, poor eating habits and increased risk for engaging in risky behaviors (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). At Stefanie's school, they used the school kitchen as an opportunity to allow students to bring skills home and teach their families. The Ontario Student Nutrition Program (OSNP) is a partnership between schools and Local Agencies who administer provincial grant funds to support the development and implementation of healthy breakfasts, snack and at times, lunch programs across the province (OSNP, 2020). This program has helped to provide the students at Stefanie's school with life skills that can be used outside of the classroom environment:

> One of the biggest things that I am proud of, is my schools' efforts to teach the students about healthy eating. We received a grant to build an industrial kitchen in the school which allowed for some amazing initiatives and incentives for the students. One of the best parts of this program was giving students the tools and knowledge of the importance of healthy eating. The hope was that students would then go home and educate their families, making the program very sustainable.

Finding home and school balance is also important, according to Stefanie:

We just tried to do everything that we could to give them the appropriate tools for life.
We can teach and teach and teach, but the truth is that once students leave school on
Friday, we have no clue what they are doing. If we give them tools to advocate for
themselves.

Lack of resilience. Lack of motivation is often how students from low socioeconomic status are
viewed. It is important to recognize that the lack is often from having a lack of optimism or hope.
Low socioeconomic status and the accompanying financial hardships are correlated with
depressive symptoms (Butterworth, Olesen, & Leach, 2012). The Canadian Teachers Federation
(CTF) released a document in 1989 stating that many low-income students experience reduced
motivation to learn, delayed cognitive development, lower achievement, less participation in
extra-curricular activities, lower career aspirations, interrupted school attendance, and an
increased rate of illiteracy (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2009). According to Luciana, when
working in schools that are impacted by poverty, you will see this lack of resilience in both the
parents and students:

Often, my days are spent going back and forth with students about giving up and they
typically use the excuse that it is too hard. When I contact parents to let them know that
their child is not putting effort into their work, they will respond with the idea that they
struggled with these concepts in school as well.

"Many parents from lower-socioeconomic status groups are often reluctant to approach a school
system where they have endured negative experiences as students themselves or have
experienced the climate of schools to be less than welcoming" (Ascher, 1987). Laura has
experienced similar responses from the parents at her school. She tries to speak with parents

regularly and attempts to educate them on the importance of working with their children on different learning skills at home:

> When I call parents to let them know that their child struggles in math, they attribute it to the fact that they weren't good at math either. I try to explain to them that struggling in specific subjects in school is not a hereditary trait. I feel that this is their learned helplessness coming out.

Tony states that:

> The socio-economic status of students impacts their ability to prosper. It's directly related to parental support; motivation and their ability understand how to deal with hardships.

According to the Canadian Teachers Federation (2009), teachers and schools are the most important influences in increasing the chances for students living in low income households. They become mentors to their students as their experience working with students living in poverty is detrimental to their daily success. It is important as teachers to help students overcome barriers. She teaches her students is how to be resourceful. As a society, we are so accustomed to taking the easy route in life. This easy route can also become quite financially irresponsible:

> I try to model the idea that we don't throw things out when they are broken, we fix them. We don't use single use items, we buy reusable. I also show them acts of kindness so that one day when they are in the position to provide an act of kindness to someone, they can pass it on. Modeling is huge in my classroom.

Stefanie used literacy as a tool to combat the lack of resiliency in her students. She spent the majority of her shared reading time reading empowering books about gender equality, rights, and strong children who made a difference:

> The incredible collection of empowerment books that I read to my students was two-fold; the first was to get them interested in reading. They do not enjoy reading, so at least these books are interesting. The second was to give them the tools to see what they are capable of.

Tony used a similar style of teaching to educate his students about poverty:

> The spectrum of poverty is so broad; therefore, I try to offer a wide array of resources, lessons and multi-media approaches to addressing topics and make it relatable.

Inter-Generational Poverty. Though the issue of inter-generational poverty is quite prevalent in elementary schools in Windsor, Ontario, an educator teaching in a compensatory education school has the added job of educating parents and giving them the tools to understand different issues that are occurring. According to the United Way, inter-generational poverty is know as poverty that has sustained for more than two generations while using supplemental resources. Stefanie has been teaching at a school with a high level of generational poverty:

> Students are so use to the idea of a cheque being delivered to their parents on a monthly basis that it becomes a reality for them. Quite frankly is was difficult to teach life skills when most of your class does not have the drive to escape the cycle of poverty. Parents do not have the tools to help their children leave poverty, so kids become a product of the cycle.

Alex commented on the idea of generational poverty becoming a "norm":

Due to the lack of resources available to these students and parents, the idea of living in

poverty is a norm due to the lack of education that parents are receiving to lift themselves

out of poverty. In a way it becomes acceptable because they never have the tools to

challenge it.

When considering what tools to teach students to lift themselves out of poverty, Dana considers

the basics that they may be lacking in other areas of their life:

For students to "get out of poverty", you must teach them the good foundations such as

how to be a good person, how to be polite, and a good work ethic. We think about the

social skills. I often look at a student's Learning Skills on their report cards as an

example. If you want curriculum marks to rise, you need to have those learning skills

mastered. The learning skills that we teach them are a foundation for the rest of their life,

and they are often the skills that their parents are not teaching them at home.

Olivia stresses the importance of not degrading parents. According to Sharma, it is important for

teachers to recognize and understand the changing dynamics of families in the 21st Century and

adults feel that they are under immense amounts of pressure due to other factors: As teachers it is

important to respect the role and work of the parents, and also to encourage parents to have their

child learn from their mistakes" (Sharma, 2017, p. 1). Olivia stands by this by stating:

Being a middle-class citizen and coming from this background for my entire life, it can

be easy to point fingers at parents for not teaching their child these skills. It is important

to recognize that we should not be degrading parents in any way. These are their parents

regardless of how they raised their children. You can let children know that you do not

agree with some of their parent's choices, but in the end, you must respect the fact that

you are teaching their child.

Stefanie also mentioned the unique case of generational poverty at her school:

> At my school, everyone in the family has attended it because it has been in the
> community for many years. Some students want out of this life, but they really do not
> know how. I make sure to let my students know every single day that they have
> potential.

The importance of supporting students.

"Unfortunately, poverty can be an obstacle constraining this development as it can prevent
children from forming social attachments or having the economic capabilities to engage
opportunities as they present themselves" (United Way, 2014, p.5). Often times, the parents of
these children are precarious workers and have less time to be involved in their child's school or
extra-curricular activities. According to the United Way, 1 in 4 workers in Windsor and Essex
County are employed in shift-work which inhibits their ability to be involved in their child's life.
This impacts their ability to succeed. (Overcoming the odds, 2015, p. 5). Alex reinforced the
importance of a positive relationship by saying:

> In my very first year of teaching at this school, I learned very quickly that the very best
> way to get through to these students is to have a positive relationship with them. This
> needs to happen before any teaching happens. Students living in poverty rely on trust,
> because the adults in their lives typically let them down. If you become a trusted source
> when they need a pair of shoes or a pencil, they might begin to take risks in their
> learning. In this environment, the kids count on the social-emotional support.

Olivia, she feels that there is a large difference in the way certain grade levels deal with poverty.
She notes that:

In the primary grades, students have no problem telling you that they had nothing to eat. They present their emotions in a more overt way, such as crying. Often, these children will not even understand why they are crying, but it is an emotional response. In the junior grades, students pride begins to take over and the students will try to hide what they are going through and the reality that they are living in poverty. They really internalize the things that they are going through and try to shut everyone else out. These behaviors also tend to present themselves in a defiant and negative way. This also happens at the intermediate level.

Alex states that:

Most teachers in this building will act as a parent to these kids before anything. I'm sure in most other buildings that is not the case, or maybe it is not needed. At this school, you are a parent, you are a trusted confidant, you are an advisor, you are a mentor, you are a guidance counselor, and most importantly, you are a best friend.

Meeting the social-emotional needs of students comes with conversations. You engage in different conversations with them from the moment they walk in the room. It is so important to have conversations with kids as people, not as students. Also offering programs that provide students with different opportunities. Olivia mentions that:

The social-emotional needs of students need to come before anything when working in a compensatory school. If the students are not feeling safe and taken care of, then they will not preform academically. If you do not meet these social-emotional needs, then there is no point of even trying to meet their academic needs.

Being a veteran teacher, Dana recognizes the social-emotional needs of her students come before

anything. She noted that over time, society has shifted their views on whether the social-

emotional needs of a human should come before the academics:

> Over time, society has grown to recognize the importance of taking care of our mental
>
> health. Movements like Bell Let's Talk, are a prime example of that. If you don't meet the
>
> social-emotional needs of students, then you won't reach your students academically.

Matthew also agrees with this by saying:

> If the social-emotional needs are not met in adults they cannot perform to their best
>
> abilities, so we cannot expect this in children. Everyone comes to school with a different
>
> set of needs and if their needs are not met, then they will not be able
>
> to perform academically.

Alyssa always stressed the importance of teaching the whole child. This approach to education

encourages the amalgamation of curriculum, school culture, parent engagement, instructional

practice, critical thinking and social and emotional wellness and well-being (ASCD,

2017). Alyssa used the 'Whole Child' approach to teaching and learning in her classroom:

> Both the social and emotional needs work in conjunction with the academic needs of
>
> students, especially in an intermediate setting. When teaching, you should be teaching the
>
> Whole Child, and approaching non-academic needs in your academic practice. They are
>
> life-skills.

Luciana states:

> In my school I see my role in two ways; literally and figuratively. I want my students to
>
> have a memory of our classroom based on the way that they felt everyday walking in.
>
> They are going to remember that I love them; but they are also going to remember that I

am strict and have boundaries. Students need to be able to walk through the doors and

count on my program to be what they need it to be.

The NCIP stated that there have been several studies that conclude that the level of commitment

that teachers put towards their students and the program that they run shows dedication to their

school. This can be shown through dedicating extra time to extra curricular activities, and by

motivating and nurturing students (Lowenstein, Friedman-Krauss, Cybele Raver, Jones, & Pess,

2015). She also expanded on this thought by saying:

At the same time, there are days where I do not get to the lessons that I have planned due

to what is happening in the personal lives of my students and their families.

Stefanie emphasized the importance of teaching kindness before any sort of curriculum:

I spent the majority of my first quarter teaching my students how to be kind. Kind to me,

to other students and to yourself. So many of my students have built up anger because the

people in their lives have upset them so many times and I want them to understand that

just because their mom or dad has done something to upset them does not mean that

every adult in their life wants that too.

Olivia expanded on the importance of teaching these intrapersonal skills by stating:

80% of my day is spent teaching my students how to be a good person.

Empathy and understanding.

"Mental health of young people plays a critical role in their development and ability to

integrate into the community" (Overcoming the odds, 2015, p.7). It is important understand

where a student is coming from before you make assumptions about why their behavior is

happening. Olivia discussed the importance of her daily schedule and routines for her students:

Incorporating TRIBES, mindfulness, classroom circles, providing scheduled time to

allow students to reflect and share what is happening to them. It is important to actually

put these events in the classroom schedule and to start the day and end the day like this.

Schools in low-income neighborhoods should cultivate a sense of community. They should be a

place that families go for support, education and resources. In order for this to occur, teachers

need to be provided with the proper tools in their own professional development. Teachers are at

the heart of this community and provide the resources that families and children need to succeed:

"school systems can undertake… teacher education programs that support new teachers to be

'agents of social change'; school structures including the creation of genuine professional

learning communities and nurturing a strong sense of community within schools; and

strengthening school-community connections including relationships with parents" (Canadian

Teachers Federation, 2009, p. 4). Matthew expands on this by stating:

Emotion and empathy from a teacher fill the voids that are not offered by the breakfast

program, or a homework club. Although these are extremely important, taking the time to

really understand where an individual student is coming from, not necessarily because of

the community they come from or the home that they live in. In a smaller school, I know

that it is something that I can do.

Luciana also mentioned that the time of year is also a determinant of

the students' behaviors. As the educator, you must be able to recognize where these behaviors are

coming from and show empathy towards the situation:

The week before Christmas, March Break, and the month of June are extremely difficult

times in the classroom when teaching in a compensatory school. This is because kids do

not want to be in the insecurity of their homes for that much time. These holidays are

extremely disappointing times for many of our students because they see what holidays

and celebrations should be, and they know in their homes that they will not be like this.

They are full of broken promises and insecurities.

 "The most powerful and effective way teachers can help students overcome the negative

influences in their environment is by developing close and caring connections with them"

(Sharma, 2017, p. 63). Stefanie agrees by saying:

> Most of my days teaching are spent making sure other needs are met first. I am constantly
>
> questioning the moods and emotions of my students. Since their home lives are so
>
> unstable, a lot of their emotions come out at me because I am the only consistent person
>
> in my students lives. For the first three months, I had to fully prove my trust to my
>
> students.

One important thing to note about compensatory education schools is that the staff is often very

long-term. From most people interviewed, a common theme was a consistent staff that has been

teaching at the school for 5-25 years. According to the Flessa, one of the important measures that

can help to mitigate poverty at an administrative level is to advocate for more effective

recruitment, selection, preparation, and placement of teachers in schools that are affected by

poverty (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2009). Stefanie mentions this about her school:

> One of the best parts of the school is the staff and administration. We are the student's
>
> family. We are supportive of each other, of the students, and of the community.

Equitable program.

The socio-economic status of the school that you teach at should not determine the quality of

teaching or the content that you teach students. The quality of program that you deliver to

students at a middle class school should be the exact same that you deliver to students in compensatory education settings. Stefanie recognizes this by saying:

> Teaching my students that they can have more opportunities than what they do at their home is something that I try to focus my teaching around. I applied for a lot of grants for my classroom and I tried to take my students on a field trip once per month. I tried to remove the students from their bubble and expose them to different opportunities. I used this as a tool to open their mind.

Dana states that it is impossible to meet the needs of all of her students because the spectrum is so broad:

> There are so many different problems and such a wide array of needs in the classroom that it feels almost impossible to meet their needs. I am aware of the importance of being equitable and I try to meet them, but I can't.

She also stated that:

> It is impossible to meet the needs of all your students every day. There were days that I missed students that didn't have their basic needs met because they did not use overt behavior to get my attention. As a teacher, you tend to go to the students who look for attention. My program is equitable to the best of my ability.

A common limitation to meeting the needs of all students is due to the size of classes in Ontario Schools: "Teachers of smaller class sizes report that they are more confident about their ability to identify and meet students learning needs" (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2009). The report by the CTF also states that with smaller class sizes, there is a greater ability to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students and parents on a regular basis: "…educational strategy that has been shown to benefit student learning, especially for disadvantaged students, is

class sized reductions" (Froese-Germain, 2009, p. 193). Alex, a rotary teacher, supported the challenges of meeting the needs of his students due to large class sizes by stating:

It is impossible to meet the needs of 600 kids. You can do your best, but it is impossible.

Some days you will leave, and you feel amazing and other days you just cannot.

Froese- Germain also noted that teachers who work with smaller class sizes feel more confident in their ability to meet the needs of their students: "Teachers of smaller class sizes feel more confident about their ability to identify and meet students' learning needs, and they express greater job satisfaction… They report that they spend more time teaching and have more interactions with parents" (Froese-Germain, 2009, p. 193). Dana comments on the idea of what enough is:

I often question myself on the idea of "what is enough"? When do we consider all of the extra time and effort spent with our students to be enough? We offer before and after school programs, homework help and nutrition programs, but what is enough?

The Ontario Curriculum is so large, and it is something that needs to be followed. Stefanie felt that although she created a program in her class that helped to meet the needs of her students, the curriculum limited her ability to reach every student where they are at.

I did the best that I could. I do not feel that I did a great job teaching them the curriculum, but I felt that I did a better job of meeting my students where they are at.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS & LIMITATIONS

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to understand the data collected. This approach helped to understand the unique perspectives of elementary school teachers who are teaching students who are living in poverty and what they are doing to mitigate its effects. While reviewing their responses and analyzing the data, I was able to understand common experiences had by teachers in low-income schools in Windsor, Ontario, then categorize them into common themes. The following themes were drawn from the interviews: 1) limited support and resources, 2) lack of resilience, 3) generational poverty, 4) the importance of a positive relationship, 5) empathy and understanding, 6) providing an equitable program. These themes were common topics of discussion when answering the research questions on how teachers are mitigating the effects of poverty in their classrooms.

In the following section, I will respond to the following research questions by sharing their interpretation of the data that was collected:

(1) How do participating teachers perceive the impacts of poverty on students in the classroom?

(2) How do teachers address the issues of poverty among students through their teaching pedagogy?

(3) How do teachers see their role to mitigate the effects of poverty on children's education in Windsor and Essex County?

(4) How can teachers acknowledge the non-academic needs of their students while still tending to their needs in the classroom?

Teachers Perspectives of Poverty in the Classroom

First and foremost, it is important to recognize that teachers understand the pervasiveness of poverty and how it affects their student's ability to be a contributing member of the classroom community. Knowing the parameters of working with vulnerable students, the teachers that were interviewed have a strong understanding of the hardships faced by these students by teaching with them daily. Other than professional development courses that were taken on their own time, teachers interviewed do not have any formal training on working with this vulnerable subsection of the community. They are viewed as outsiders, with an insider perspective. Another important point to note is that all teachers interviewed have a minimum of 5 years' experience working in their low-income school. They are all familiar with the community that they work in and understand the diverse needs of their population. While interviewing these teachers, they reflected on their experiences in the past and how their own personal teaching pedagogies support these children in their classroom.

The teachers interviewed acknowledged themselves to be supportive, sensitive, and inspiring to their students. They recognized that these traits are imperative for their students to feel safe, secure and supported in their classrooms. It also gives the students the chance to feel empowered in the classroom and in the community. Due to these traits being presented, the researcher has classified the teachers being studied as transformational leaders. Transformational leaders are defined as individuals can motivate their followers based on intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Supermane, Tahir, & Aris, 2018). Bernard Bass (1985) identified transformational leaders to be individuals who influence, inspire, motivate, and stimulate their followers. All teaches interviewed displayed these characteristics to support their students in the classroom and in the community.

Although all teachers interviewed have worked in low-income schools for an extended period, they all provide unique and insightful information on how to work with this diverse range of learners. Each teacher offers a unique perspective on how to meet the needs of their students as well as provide support for other teachers who are new to teaching in this environment. As stated before, there is no additional training to work in this vulnerable setting, so the perspectives and experiences from other teachers is vital for teacher training and support. The number one theme presented in the interviews was the limited number of support and resources available to teachers when working with these students.

Support and resources are an essential component of a successful classroom: "A major factor that ignites teacher effectiveness towards teaching in primary schools is the availability of instructional materials" (Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015, p. 127). Though physical classroom materials are often lacking, the teachers interviewed made note that the lack of support and resources from additional qualified staff and mental health professionals is a huge hindrance to their day-to-day life in the classroom.

Research Question 1

How do participating teachers perceive the impacts of poverty on students in the classroom?

Although each teacher interviewed perceives poverty in the classroom differently, there are similarities in all teachers interviewed on how they address these needs in their classroom. Both Olivia and Matthew stress the importance of not viewing the issues of poverty from a deficit standpoint. They understand that the issues of poverty can impact student success and achievement, but they feel that it's important to not let those issues impact the teaching and learning that's taking place. Olivia and Matthew also stress the importance of an open-door

policy. They believe that it's important for the students in their building to know that they have a trusting and supportive adult in their life that is there for them whenever it's needed.

Alyssa defines poverty as a problem that translates into everything they are. She sees it as an additional obstacle that students need to overcome. Similarly, Laura and Stefanie on the other hand, interpret poverty as a challenge for students in the classroom because they are often lacking the support needed at home which is instrumental for success in the classroom. They address these issues as teachable moments for students in their classroom and offer the social and emotional support needed in order to address the learning needs for their students. They also understand that poverty adds another layer to the teaching and learning that takes place in their class and it may limit the learning that's taking place on certain occasions.

Research Question 2

How do teachers address the issues of poverty among students through their teaching pedagogy?

All teachers interviewed recognized that teaching students who are living in poverty presents issues that may impact the learning that's taking place. They understand that the needs of their students may change daily and that no two issues of poverty are the same. Dana and Luciana have both been teaching in their schools for over 20 years. They both address the issues of poverty in a similar way. The first is that they will supplement the physical needs that the students may be lacking (i.e.- clothing, shoes, food, school supplies). They understand that many of these children need the necessities in life and they want children to feel supported with the basic needs when they are in their classroom. They also understand that as their teacher, it's their job to give students the tools they need to lift themselves out of poverty, and not fall victim to the "cycle". Dana is constantly intertwining the basics of financial literacy, cooking and life skills

like writing a resume into her classroom curriculum. According to Dana, "providing meals is important, but it's temporary. Teaching kids how they can plant a garden, harvest their own food, then cook a meal is a skill that will stay with them forever".

Alex addresses the issues of poverty by providing opportunities to them that they may not be able to afford outside of school. He notes that school should be a place where students come to not only feel safe, but also to experience things like being on a team sport, learning a new skill, and having the opportunity to feel like a leader. These are skills that not only are important, but they are positive things that students will look back on as they go through life. Alex states that: "They may not remember a math lesson that was taught, but if I teach them skills that brings them confidence to try something new, then maybe it will empower them when they are applying to jobs, going to post-secondary, or even teaching their own kids".

Research Question 3

How do teachers see their role to mitigate the effects of poverty on children's education in Windsor and Essex County?

Both Vanessa and Stefanie see their role as a person who provides opportunities to children living in poverty that they may not experience outside of school. Their role is to provide a safe and inclusive learning environment that affords them the opportunity that students from any demographic would receive. They believe their program provides a valuable teaching and learning opportunity for their students while giving them a chance to see what is available to them if they work really hard. Stefanie calls her library a place that "bridges the gap of access".

Alyssa recognizes that first and foremost, her role is multi-faceted. She is a figure of support, stability and acceptance in her students' lives. She is someone that her students can come to for both academic and non-academic needs. She is also their teacher, and as the teacher

it's her job to hold her students to a high standard. She sets boundaries, limits and expectations for her students to meet, just as any other classroom would have. Alyssa feels that the classroom is a place that students should be able to let go of the problems they are facing in the outside work and focus on their job of being a student. Matthew adds to this point by recognizing that his role changes based on what his students need- a parent, a friend, a mentor, or a guide. In order to lessen the effects of poverty on these students, both Matthew and Alyssa discuss the importance of teaching "the Whole Child" by meeting their social-emotional needs and tending to their academic ones.

Research Question 4

How can teachers acknowledge the non-academic needs of their students while still tending to their needs in the classroom?

According to Tony, one of the most important things that you can do as a teacher in any classroom is to allow your students to see you as a "real person". Tony said he achieves this at his school by being a coach, participating in the learning, and simply asking kids how their day is going. Being able to have a meaningful conversation with students is more important than any lesson that can be taught. Students still need to recognize the boundary between you being their teacher and their confidant, but in order to meet the needs of them on a more personal level, you should be able to have a conversation with them. Olivia understands that unless the non-academic needs of her students are met, she will not be able to teach any curriculum. In the end, some of these kids need an opportunity to be heard. They want someone to listen to them and understand what they are going through. Laura agrees with this statement and notes that when students are not able to share the things that are happening in their life, it often comes out as a

negative behavior. Alyssa supports the idea that unless the non-academic needs are met, there cannot be any learning.

Limitations

Various limitations presented themselves throughout the duration of this study. First, is that this study is on a volunteer basis. Therefore, an elementary teacher who has had experience working with students living in low-income families will not be able to share their knowledge and expertise on this topic unless they volunteer to participate in this study. To add to the uncertainty of volunteering, the data collection process took place during Provincial job-action. This limited the number of participants that signed up to participate in this research due to the Work-to-Rule campaign. Many teachers felt uncomfortable with volunteering their time and experience during this uncertain time. Another factor that presented itself during the data collection was the global pandemic, COVID-19. Data collected in March was greatly impacted by the high-stress and uncertainty of the pandemic. This impacted the data collected due to the additional emotions presented during this time. The teachers interviewed were at various stages of their careers. This affected their answers based on the experiences that they have had throughout their careers. The sample size for this research was be small and the sample sonly included teachers who are working in Windsor and Essex County. As a researcher, and someone passionate about this topic, I bring a personal bias to the analysis. Finally, the teachers interviewed for this study all classify as Middle-Class, Caucasian adults who take an outsider's perspectives on the topic of poverty.

Recommendations

Based on the perspectives of teachers who are working in schools affected by poverty, the researcher suggests teachers, administrators and school staff to consider the following recommendations.

Formal Training for Teachers

Each teacher interviewed stressed the fact that working with this vulnerable population in the community is challenging. They addressed the fact that although they have many years of experience working with these students, there is no formal training on how to address their needs and where to locate resources. Teacher education is instrumental in the success for their students and also important when ensuring confidence: "School-level strategies to support low-income students should include providing teachers and principals with the ongoing professional development and resources necessary to support the development of effective teaching and learning" (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2009, p. 5). When teachers feel supported in the classroom, they will be able to better support the diverse range of needs presented by their students. Teachers and schools are aware of the need to adapt teaching strategies for this vulnerable community and should be provided with formal training and resources to support this community.

Training at the Pre-Service Level

One fact that was consistently stated amongst all teachers interviewed was that there was no specific training given to them as pre-service teachers. This means that when in Teachers College, there are no additional courses that are available to them that can provide experience when with working with vulnerable populations. The Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor does offer Service Learning courses which are mandatory. These courses can be selected based on interests of the teachers and cater to a wide variety of topics in education. Only

two Service Learning courses have been designed to allow teachers to work with vulnerable and marginalized groups of students during their practicums. These courses are relatively new and are to be chosen based on the interests of the teacher. Not all Service Learning courses work with students living in poverty; therefore, only the teachers who select these specific courses will have the experience.

Having the experience of working with vulnerable populations during the two-year Bachelor of Education course can provide teachers with many positive experiences prior to having their own classroom. One of the most important being that teachers are working with a mentor who has had years of experience working in Compensatory Education. This is valuable time that cannot be learned from a textbook. These veteran teachers hold so much knowledge and expertise on the services available, programs to offer support within the School Board and practical lessons when working with vulnerable students. Being exposed to this at an early stage of the teaching profession will help for future success in the field. Having a mentor at this stage of the profession can also help to provide support while working in these classrooms.

Empowering Rather than Enabling

An important note that was taken from the teachers who were interviewed was to empower students to get themselves out of poverty, rather than enabling them with handouts. Often when teaching students who are living in low-income families, they are viewed to have a deficit or are lacking something. These children are lacking some important necessities and it is important that these needs are met before anything. Though it is important to ensure that these students are having all of their basic needs met, they should not be given handouts as a supplement for living in a low-income family. When people are viewed as having a deficit, it is often thought that they need to be compensated in other ways. Teachers must remember, that schools and school boards

have many programs and tools in place to ensure that every child's needs are being met. There are breakfast and snack programs, homework help, after school programs and so much more that are available to these students.

As educators, it is important to remember that the primary goal of the profession is to teach students. Educators must empower these students and give them the tools to be able to provide for themselves. Teaching student's life skills such as cooking, financial literacy, making a resume, and fixing things are so valuable when thinking about leaving the cycle of poverty. Students should learn these important concepts so when they are no longer in the classroom with their teacher, they can use the life skills that they gained. Giving out snacks and other basic needs only go so far. In fact, they only help during the 10 months of the year that students are in school. Teaching them how to take care of themselves is going to last a lifetime. Regardless of if they are in kindergarten or grade 8, educators must teach students how to care for themselves. Teaching kids where to go on the evenings, weekends and summer months when teachers are not there to give them the things they need is more important than any lesson that they are taught.

Teachers can also do their part to empower the parents in their classroom and give them the tools to help their children as well. Access to resources and community supports is a vital part of supporting families and giving them support to lift themselves out of poverty. It is important to empower parents as well. Windsor and Essex County is home to so many non-profit community agencies and supports for families. There are places to go and supports to call. The school should be a place where families can learn how to access these resources and learn the information they need to gain support.

When families learn how to contact these supports themselves and access the support that our community provides themselves, they are learning to empower themselves. They are

educating themselves on what is available in our community. The information that they gain will

last a lifetime. This is how educators can help to empower their students and families.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Poverty is a pervasive issue that impacts a child's ability to learn and to communicate. Educators have the challenging task of making learning possible for children living in poverty while still addressing the on-going social and emotional needs that they may face, along with supporting them with any physical needs that may not be addressed. Teachers role in mitigating the effects of poverty on their students is detrimental to their outcome in school and their outcome later in life. The current aim of this study was to understand the complex perspectives, pedagogies and strategies used by educators who are working in low-income schools to lessen the effects of poverty for their students.

As mentioned previously, the purpose of this study is to understand the perspectives of teachers in Windsor and Essex County on how they mitigate poverty in their elementary classroom. I do not know of any other study that investigates this topic with a specific focus on teachers in elementary schools in Windsor and Essex County. This study aims to bring awareness to the pervasiveness of poverty in Windsor and Essex County, and how other teachers can support their students. A qualitative case study was used in order to understand the diverse experiences of teachers from different low-income schools in the community. The participants consisted of 10 elementary school teachers from Windsor and Essex County. The volunteering teachers' years of service range from 5 years to 30 years and they come from various grade levels in elementary schools (Primary, Junior, Intermediate, and Prep Coverage). These two factors allowed me to collect rich and meaningful data from the participants because they have all experienced poverty differently throughout their careers.

Through a thematic analysis of the data, six themes were created to organize the data: 1) limited support and resources, 2) lack of resilience, 3) generational poverty, 4) the importance of a positive relationship, 5) empathy and understanding, 6) providing an equitable program. The themes present shared experiences and understanding on the topic of poverty in the classroom while still commenting on the unique perspectives that they have. The themes taken from this research will help the future practice of teachers work with and understand the complex issue of poverty.

Child poverty rates are on the rise in Canada, and especially in Windsor and Essex County. With 1 in 4 children already living in low-income households, there is an increased chance of working with students in your classroom who are deemed "low-income". Knowing the pervasiveness of poverty and the vulnerabilities that it creates for students, the importance of providing specialized training and professional development for teachers in Windsor and Essex County is imperative for student success and achievement, but also for teacher.

Suggestions for Future Research

Interviewing teachers across multiple schoolboards and various age levels would have been beneficial in gathering teachers' perspectives on mitigating the effects of poverty for their students. It would also help other teachers who are working with this population strengthen their understanding for working with this population. Poverty is pervasive all throughout Windsor and Essex County at all age levels so it would have been nice to see if the perspectives and experiences change across various grade levels.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Definitions of Key Terms

Compensatory Education Schools: Schools specifically designed to overcome deficits associated with external circumstances. Its goal is to offer supplemental programs to help students who are at-risk succeed (Haywood, 1982).

At-Risk: Students who live in poverty, who are not exposed to stimulating environments, those who suffer from disabilities, ethnic backgrounds or minorities, drug exposure or risky situations (Pizzo, 2015).

Appendix B: Consent to Participate in Research

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: Mitigating the Effects of Poverty on Students in Elementary School in Winsor and Essex County.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Jillian Pizzo from the Faculty of Education and Academic Development** at the University of Windsor**. The results from this study will contribute to the completion of a Master's Thesis.**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact **Jillian Pizzo by sending an email to pizzoj@uwindsor.ca. You can also contact Dr. Clinton Beckford at 519-253-3000 ext. 3804 or by sending na email to clinton@uwindsor.ca.**

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of poverty on children in elementary schools and to see how teachers in Windsor and Essex county are mitigating its effects.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a one-on-one interview with the researcher, Jillian Pizzo. The interview will take approximately 1 hour to complete and will be completed at a time that is most convenient for each participant.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Participants may feel uncomfortable answering questions about his or her personal experiences during the course of their experience working with students living in poverty. If participants feel uncomfortable answering any questions, they have the right to not answer many of the questions causing feelings of discomfort. Participants also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. If participants choose to withdraw from this study, any data collected will be eliminated from the study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The potential benefit to participants in this study is an opportunity for guided reflection regarding teaching experiences and suggestions for working with students living in poverty. This study will bring a local perspective to the issue of poverty in an elementary school setting and will serve as a benefit for teachers, administrators and any frontline staff who work with this population of students.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants who volunteer for this study will not receive any compensation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. You will not be asked to identify yourself in the audio recording. All data that is collected will be kept in a secure place will only be accessible to the investigators listed above. All data will be destroyed after it have been transcribed/analysed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You have the right to withdraw your participation from this study at any point up until the data collection is complete. There is no penalty or consequence for the withdrawal and the data that you have contributed will be removed from the study immediately. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

A summary of the research findings will be available to participants after the Master's Thesis has been successfully defended. If you are interested in receiving this summary please indicate and provide your email address below.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study **Mitigating the Effects of Poverty on Students in Elementary Schools in Windsor and Essex County** as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix C: Letter of Information for Consent

LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: Mitigating the Effects of Poverty in Elementary Schools in Windsor and Essex County

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Jillian Pizzo** from the **Faculty of Education and Academic Development** at the University of Windsor**. The results of this study will contribute to the completion of a Master's Thesis.**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact **Jillian Pizzo** by sending an email to **pizzoj@uwindsor.ca.** You can also contact **Dr. Clinton Beckford at 519-253-3000 ext. 3804** or by sending an email to **clinton@uwindsor.ca.**

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges experienced by teachers when teaching this marginalized group of students and what strategies teachers are using to lessen the effects on poverty on their students in Windsor and Essex County.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to individually participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, Jillian Pizzo, to discuss your personal and professional views about poverty in the classroom. The interview is expected to last approximately 45-60 minutes and will take place at a location that is convenient to the participants and the researcher

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks and/or discomforts as a result of participating in this study. Participation in this study is on a volunteer basis and if participants feel uncomfortable with answering questions, they have the right to not answer the question that causes discomfort. If at any point participants feel at-risk, they have the right to withdraw without consequences. All data from this study will be removed from the study if a participant choose to withdraw yourself.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The potential benefit to participants for participating in this study is to share experiences and allow other teachers to gain a local perspective on how you are mitigating the effects that poverty brings to students in Windsor and Essex County.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no form of compensation given for participation in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. You will not be asked to identify yourself in the audio recording. All data that is collected will be kept in a secure place and will only be accessible to the investigators listed above. All data will be destroyed after it has been transcribed/analysed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You have the right to withdraw your participation from this study at any point up until the data collection is complete. There is no consequence for withdrawal and the data that you have contributed will be removed from the study immediately. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

A summary of the research findings will be available to participants after the Master's Thesis has been successfully defended. If you are interested in receiving this summary please indicate and provide your email address below.

Date when results are available: **December 14th, 2019** *(pending REB approval)*

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix D: Consent for Audio Taping

CONSENT FOR AUDIO TAPING

Research Subject Name: Mitigating the Effects of Poverty in Elementary Schools in Windsor and Essex County.

Title of the Project:

I consent to the audio-recording of the one-on-one interviews.

I understand these are voluntary procedures and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting that the taping be stopped. I also understand that my name will not be revealed to anyone and that the recording will be kept confidential. Recordings are saved by number only and store on a passcode protected computer.

The destruction of the audio recording will be completed after transcription and verification.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and that the audio recording will be for professional use only.

_____   _____

(Research Subject)   (Dat

e)

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Sample Interview Questions (Qualitative Data Collection)

Please do not identify yourself by name, student number, etc. during this interview. You will be audio recorded during this session to ensure accurate data collection. All information is necessary to the research study, and it will be kept strictly confidential. Audio recordings will be erased after all data has been transcribed.

If you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please recognize your right to not respond to the questions that cause feelings of discomfort. Please remember you have the right, as a participant, to withdraw from the study, without consequence, up until this data collection session is complete.

1. Do you believe that the issue of poverty has an impact on your students in the classroom?

    a. In what terms? (Socially, emotionally, physically, cognitively)

2. How do you see your role to mitigate the effects of poverty on children's education?

3. Do you see yourself as an academic support or a social and emotional support for these children?

a. Is one more valued than the other?

4. How do you acknowledge the non-academic needs of your students?

    a. Do the non-academic needs work in conjunction with academic needs or are they important on their own?

5. Do you feel that your program meets the needs of all of your students?

    a. Is it equitable?

6. Does your school/ school board support these students?

    a. Do they offer any interventions? (i.e.- after school programs, additional classroom supports, meal programs, additional parent engagement) If so, can you describe them. Are the successful?

    b. Can you offer any suggestions to extend these supports?

7. Do you know of any community supports for these students?

    a. Do you utilize any of these supports? Why or why not?

Appendix F: Recruitment Email

Permission to Recruit for Interviews

Dear Administrators,

I am writing to request permission to email the teachers in your school in order to recruit them to participate in my research study. Please see the attached "Letter of Information" as well as the email I intended to have sent out.

If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Dr. Beckford my Faculty Advisor.

Thank-you.

Email to be sent to recruit for interviews.

Dear Teachers,

Jillian Pizzo will be completing a research study as part of her Graduate Program (M.Ed). She is seeking teachers in Compensatory Education Schools for one-on-one interviews. The study surrounds Mitigating the Effects of Poverty in Elementary Schools in Windsor, Ontario. If you are interested in participating, please review the attached "Letter of Information" and respond to

this email with your name and email address. By responding to this email, you are giving your

Principal permission to give your email address to the researcher.

Thank-you.

VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Jillian Rose Pizzo

PLACE OF BIRTH: Windsor, Ontario

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1994

EDUCATION: St. Thomas of Villanova Secondary School, Ontario Secondary Diploma., LaSalle, ON, 2012

University of Windsor, Concurrent B.A./B.Ed./E.C.E. Windsor, ON, 2017

University of Windsor, M.Ed., Windsor, ON, 2020