

THE EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS IN LOW-INCOME NEW YORK CITY MIDDLE
SCHOOLS NAVIGATING CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION AND DECISIONS FOR
HOMELESS STUDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Peta G. Henry

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers across two low-income public middle schools in New York City, specifically toward homeless students. Using purposeful and criterion sampling to select participants, the study examined the experiences of 12 certified classroom teachers who were aware of students experiencing homelessness. The theories guiding this study were Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. Research questions focused on how classroom teachers described their experiences with homeless students and examined their instructional decisions and perceptions of how curriculum serves this group. Data collection methods included preliminary document reviews, personal interviews, written lived experiences, and artifacts. Moustakas' (1994) reduction methods of analysis were primarily used to interpret collected data to ascertain the essence of participants' lived experiences. The findings revealed five themes: challenges building trust, academic instructional interventions and considerations, promoting resilience and motivation, socio-emotional impact and support, and curriculum pitfalls and revisions. These findings indicated that teachers serving homeless students navigate through unique personal and professional challenges. Recommendations based on the findings include adopting a more holistic approach to serving homeless students, increased support from school and district administration in these teachers' pedagogical practices, in-class support staff to mitigate the stressors of serving a high number of homeless students, and giving teachers a say in designing more relevant and equitable curricula for homeless students.

Keywords: classroom teachers, homelessness, students, New York City public schools, McKinney-Vento Act, curriculum, instruction, hierarchy of needs, ecological systems theory

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the dreams I had when I was a little girl—ones where I would see myself in a clear moment that I could be proud of. This dissertation brings me one step closer to fulfilling my vision board. I know that my vision would not have come to fruition were it not also a part of the vision *God* has planned for my life, and I cannot help thinking of a verse I read recently in Esther 4:14, which reads, “And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?” (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). What might seem finally fulfilled dream is perhaps always something *God* had planned and had ordained for my life.

To my *powerhouse of a mother*, Sophia Mae Smith, who, since I was a little girl, has been my biggest supporter and the backbone and driving force of who I am today, and whom I hope to still become—thank you. There has never been a moment in the last 28 years that I could not lean on you for love, support, understanding, and prayer. *Thank you, mommy*. I love you. This is for *you*.

To my father, Dr. Bonitto (Ben) Henry, who is now six years deceased, but inspired me as a child, paving the way for an education that laid important foundations for the kind of scholar I always wanted to be—thank you. I am certain my love of reading, researching, and writing comes from you. I hope you are proud of me. Until we meet again...*thank you*.

To my *life partner*, Joshua Rivera, for the constant encouragement, love, warmth, and motivation given to me throughout this journey. You have seen me go through the roller coaster that was sometimes this journey the past few years but you have always steadied my mind by believing in me. This is for you—for being the first one I trusted to read Chapter One before it even came to fruition, and for celebrating me along the way whenever I reached every little milestone. *Thank you*. You are the blessing *God* knew I needed to get through this.

To my brothers *Leonardo and Trevor*; to my god-sister, *Akosua*, to my sister, *Tiffani*, to my nieces and nephew (the J-Crew: *Janiece, Janelle, and Jasiah*), to my goddaughter *Madison*, to all of my few but very close friends (*you know who you all are*), to my stand-in second mothers and fathers, to my colleagues, to my sister-in-law(s), to other extended friends and family—thank you for being understanding during this journey, and for *never* making me feel guilty about the time I had to put into this work over the last few years. Thank you for the words of encouragement when needed, and for knowing that I was simply trying to fulfill my purpose. *This is for all of you.*

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First, I thank God for this journey to *becoming*. I began my postgraduate studies in the Summer of 2019 with the hopes of earning a Doctor of Education (Ph.D.) in Curriculum and Instruction. It had always been part of my plan to earn a terminal degree, but I had to get to a place where I fully trusted God and myself to *begin*. I was a full-time student taking courses every Summer, Fall, and Spring semester—all while teaching full time and navigating various personal, family, and professional relationships. It was never easy, but over these years, several people have inspired me personally, spiritually, professionally, and academically throughout my educational journey to *becoming*. This dissertation is a testament to my perseverance and commitment to fulfill my purpose as was designed by God, but also a testament to their unwavering support, love, prayer, encouragement, and commitment to being understanding of how much of my time and effort this journey would take. I want to thank each of you for the role you played in ensuring I fulfilled this very important part of my purpose in life.

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doing was worth it and meaningful, reminded me to keep balance, allowed me a reprieve, worked around my schedule, sometimes sat with me in silence as I worked just to steady my mind, and have been a God-given wonderful blessing to my life. I could not have done it without you. Thank you for your unwavering support as I pursued my dreams, and know without a doubt that I will forever do and be the same to you. *Thank you. I love you.*

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I want to also express my gratitude and appreciation to the 12 classroom teachers serving this city's homeless students that participated in this study. I thank you for setting aside your valuable time to participate in and inadvertently impart knowledge, ideas, and personal truths not previously heard. Thank you for your voice, and for trusting me. You all were an invaluable part

of this, and you all provided me with your time for the sake of research, and I hope you understand that I quite literally would not have been able to do it without you. I hope this research honors your voices and experiences as educators. Hopefully, your shared lived experiences and instructional decisions are a part of what informs the effective changes needed to improve the education of homeless students through supporting those that serve them intimately in the classroom: *you*. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge any other homeless students and especially the teachers that serve them. I know you both face unique challenges. Navigate the relationship with each other in the microsystem of the classroom through trust and empathy, allowing those experiences to better shape who you both are as students and as educators. May God bless you.

“For with God, nothing shall be impossible” (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017, Luke 1:37).

This dissertation is a testament to God’s Word, for I truly believe that after conquering such a beast (the research and this manuscript), it was made possible by a steadfast belief that God would carry me through.

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List of Abbreviations

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

Council of Economic Advisors (CEA)

Education for Homeless Youth and Children (EHCY)

English Language Arts (ELA)

English as a New Language (ENL)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness (ICPH)

Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT)

McKinney-Vento Act (MVA)

National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)

National Coalition for Homelessness (NCH)

New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE)

State Educational Agencies (SEA)

United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

On any given day in the United States, over half a million Americans are identified as homeless (CEA, 2019; Khurshid & Gadnis, 2019; USICH, 2020). Homelessness is one of the least addressed yet most difficult to track global crises (Wright et al., 2019; Gewirtz O' Brien et al., 2021) in existence because of its complexity and tendency to be hidden (Anderson et al., 2016; Kim, 2020; Klitzman, 2018). Homelessness has persisted for centuries, and despite the evolution of humanity there seems to be no safety net or policy strong enough to eradicate this complex problem, as there are a multitude of intrapersonal barriers that homeless individuals encounter across multiple systems (Aviles, 2017; Ruiz, 1998; Sample & Ferguson, 2019; Wright et al., 2019). Unfortunately, poverty and income inequalities increase the number of homeless people, as well as ongoing misguided and faulty policies (Cleveland, 2020; Herring et al., 2019). As the number of people affected by homelessness continues to rise each year, the number of children homelessness impacts is also becoming more frightening. Cutuli and Herbers (2019) noted that over 300,000 children were recorded among the almost 160,000 families living in homeless shelters annually. It is thus evident that there is an increasing number of students under the age of 18 who are homeless or facing housing insecurity (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Henry et al., 2013; USICH, 2020). Due to a lack of resources and access, these students are served primarily in public schools and alternative education centers (Ingram et al., 2017; Iwundu et al., 2021), as well as through other community-based organizations (Miller et al., 2015). Under the McKinney-Vento Act (MVA, 1987; 2015), homeless students are afforded certain protections to ensure they have access to public education and transportation services. While homelessness is harmful to anyone unfortunate enough to experience this phenomenon, it is generally agreed that

children who experience homelessness are more vulnerable than adults who experience homelessness (Masten et al., 2015; Morgan, 2018; Straaten et al., 2018); homeless children have fewer opportunities and means to support themselves, and housing insecurity severely affects their education, school attendance, and academic achievement (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Fry et al., 2017; Morgan, 2018). Even though the McKinney-Vento Act for Homeless Education and its programs were created to help these students and provide educational access, stability, and success for them, the reality is that homeless students still suffer because they are often overlooked, invisible (Goldfischer, 2018; Kim, 2013, 2020; Klitzman, 2018), and can often blend in seamlessly with their peers even though they receive support (Ingram et al., 2017; Juchniewicz, 2012; Morgan, 2018). As such, curricular, instructional, and general decisions in the classroom rarely account for the inclusion of homeless students, and research that focuses on educators' experiences with homeless students is minimal (Lafavor et al., 2020; Ryan, 2018; Wright et al., 2019)

In this chapter, key federal legislation governing homeless education, the challenges homeless students face, and what educators and school communities have been tasked with in the face of the increasing number of homeless students in public school classrooms are provided. The problem is introduced in this chapter, along with the research questions guiding this study. The purpose, significance, and motivation to conduct this qualitative study are explored, and the most commonly used terms are defined. The legislative history and the social and theoretical contexts of student homelessness and homeless education in public schools are addressed, with reference to Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs motivation theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. Statistics from national reports are provided to support the statements and to reiterate the study's significance. At the end of this chapter, the necessity for research and

change in how educational leaders and administrators make considerations for educators serving homeless students in the classroom context is clarified.

Background

It is important to note that homelessness in the U.S. was generally considered to be a temporary situation primarily caused by economic or natural disasters (Rahman et al., 2015). It became abundantly clear by the 1980s (Herring et al., 2019) that homelessness was an increasing problem that needed to be addressed. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that homelessness became widely written about through government reports and newspaper articles (Grant et al., 2013; Rahman et al., 2015). Notably, it was also in the 1980s that homelessness became visually dominant in the New York landscape (Goldfischer, 2018). Today, a search on the topic of homelessness returns thousands of results, even as more research is needed on the education of homeless students, and those that serve them.

Historical and Legislative Context: Homeless Students in Public School Classrooms

As this study addresses the experiences of classroom teachers in public schools who educate homeless children, it is important to note when the education of homeless students became a reality that the U.S. government began to take seriously. Brush et al. (2016) noted that in the 1980s, homelessness swept across the nation due to “mental health deinstitutionalization, economic recession, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, and reductions in social spending” (p. 1046). In 1984, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published its first national profile on homelessness, defining the magnitude of the problem in its estimation that over 254,000 people had been homeless across the U.S. in 1983 (Brush et al., 2016; Cleveland, 2020; NCH, 2006). Even then, efforts were still primarily local (Rahman et al., 2015), as the Reagan administration did not deem government response or interventions

necessary (Beier & Ocobock, 2014; Brush et al., 2016). For a long period in U.S. history, homeless individuals were seen as vagrants, and homelessness was often criminalized (Beier & Ocobock, 2014). While there were several programs in 1986 (NCH, 2006; Rahman et al., 2015) aimed at providing some relief for those experiencing homelessness, there were no programmatic or federal policy actions targeting homelessness until the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA, 1987) was signed into legislation (NCH, 2006). The MVA included several tenets and rights, including education (Carter, 2018; Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018). This federal legislation is the single most important Act because a major focus of the policy is to uphold the right to equal educational opportunity for school-aged children and youth experiencing homelessness or other housing insecurity (Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018). Currently, it remains the only comprehensive reaction to homelessness in the U.S. (Canfield et al., 2016; Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017).

As such, the MVA (1987, 2015) is the primary historical context and reason for the increase in homeless students enrolled in U.S. public schools today. The MVA includes important supports for homeless students and their families and has undergone several amendments as the problems surrounding the education of homeless children and youth continue to be more complicated. Researchers assert that as the number of students facing homelessness in public schools continues to increase, the MVA's educational provisions are important in improving students' educational outcomes and experiences (Clemens et al., 2017; Crook, 2015; Miller, 2012; Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017; Sulkowski & Michael, 2020). The MVA removed several barriers that historically prevented homeless students from receiving a free public school education and provided them with two significant rights: (a) to be able to stay in the school they attended when previously housed or the one in which they were last enrolled and, (b) to be enrolled in a school without the records normally needed for enrollment (Morgan, 2018; Pavlakis

& Duffield, 2017). The legislation also required schools to track academic outcomes for homeless students, thus making schools responsible for setting goals that are deliberately designed to keep homeless students in school and on track academically (Crook, 2015; Ingram et al., 2017; Morgan, 2018). The bulk of this responsibility falls on teachers, despite the minimal research on the work they do with these students or their experiences serving them in the classroom context. MVA legislation suggests that there be clear consideration for the needs of public school homeless students as well as consideration of the role their teachers play in their lives (Morgan, 2018; Moore, 2013; Wright et al., 2019, 2020).

Presently, MVA liaisons have reported that it has been more and more difficult to identify homeless students because not all school staff receive the adequate training necessary to identify and support homeless students and their families (Ingram et al., 2017; Park et al., 2019; Ryan, 2018). This implies that the number of homeless students in U.S. public school classrooms may be much higher than what has been reported (Cleveland, 2020; Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Ingram et al., 2017; Sulkowski & Michael, 2020). If the number is indeed much higher than what is often reported, then this means that teachers who work more intimately with this vulnerable group of students are affected as well (Morgan, 2018; Wright et al., 2019, 2020).

Being the only historical legislation to address homelessness and homeless education does not mean that the MVA is without its flaws. Crook (2015) noted that there are weaknesses in the MVA and its subsequent underlying programs that prevent it from fully supporting the education of homeless students. Crook (2015) argues that these weaknesses lie primarily in the lack of accountability in providing quality education to homeless students in terms of properly identifying (Ingram et al., 2017), protecting, and accommodating them in educational systems (Morgan, 2018), as well as policies and practices in classroom instruction (Ausikaitis et al.,

2015; Moore, 2013). In addition to removing barriers to education, the MVA implemented the Education of Children and Youth (EHCY) Program, which provides grants to state educational agencies aimed at specifically helping homeless students succeed and also mandates state coordinators of homelessness (Pavlakakis & Duffield, 2017). However, whether educators serving this particular population of students feel they are adequately supported in removing barriers to their learning and instruction remains unclear. It is important to understand the needs of teachers who serve homeless students, especially since the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 called for more effective supports to be made available for homeless students.

Research on homeless students has primarily focused on topics such as the trajectories of their academic outcomes (Low et al., 2017; Masten et al., 2015; Manfra, 2019), patterns in attendance and matriculation (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Canfield et al., 2016; Uretsky & Stone, 2016), residential mobility (Voight et al., 2020), access to health care and other resources (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Griffin et al., 2019), social and emotional challenges (Griffin et al., 2019), experiences with various facets of academia and society (Underwood, 2016), teacher perceptions (Kim, 2013, 2020), psychosocial impacts of student homelessness on teachers and students (Fry et al., 2017), comparisons between homeless students and their housed peers (Low et al., 2017), overall well-being, MVA interventions (Clemens et al., 2017; Crook, 2015), teaching strategies (Moore, 2013), and more recently, interventions to change preservice teachers' beliefs toward homeless children (Kim, 2013, 2020). There is minimal research on the experiences of classroom teachers when dealing specifically with this marginalized group in low-income, high-poverty public middle schools.

Social Context: Educating Homeless Students

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH, 2017), a chronically homeless individual is estimated to cost the American taxpayer an average of \$35, 578 per year, though the actual number may be much higher. Homelessness exists in relation to socioeconomic disadvantages (Cleveland, 2020), and as such, it is of primary social and economic concern. Herring et al. (2019) noted that many U.S. cities have laws that punish the life-sustaining behaviors of homeless individuals, which further perpetuates the cycle of poverty and disadvantages for this group. In like manner, Steen (2018) called homelessness one of the “most severe forms of disadvantage and social exclusion that a person can experience” (p. 167). Belcher and Singer (1988) noted that homelessness is caused by three types of social problems, including situational crises, societal structures, and distorted forms of capitalism, which serve to increase social and economic inequities (Carter, 2018; Cleveland, 2020; Steen, 2018).

It is no surprise that homeless students, regardless of the type of homelessness experienced, are generally found among low-income and poor families who face an increasing level of economic vulnerability (Canfield et al., 2016; Herring et al., 2019). In 2020, more students were homeless than ever before (USICH, 2020; Walker, 2020), which implies that teachers are faced with greater challenges in the classroom. Such challenges include lack of classroom engagement and low academic performance (Cowen, 2017; Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Masten et al., 2015), as well as difficulty concentrating, psychological and cognitive problems (Fry et al., 2017), and learning disabilities (Moore, 2013). All of these can lead to chronic absenteeism (Aratani & Cooper, 2015); academic failure (Cowen, 2017), school disengagement, and ultimately, dropping out of school. When these challenges are left unchecked or unaddressed by schools and educators (Havlik et al., 2020), the burden of homelessness on society and the economy simply continues to increase, which results in students who more than likely go on to

experience homelessness as adults (ICPH, 2020) and be further penalized by the system (Herring et al., 2019).

Additionally, while the MVA's EHCY Program is helpful, Chow et al. (2015) noted that it lacks "guidelines for teacher responsibilities, supports for teachers, and emphasize not only children's academic but also social and emotional needs" (p. 643). Homelessness is both a social and human problem (Herring et al., 2019; Morgan, 2018; Rafferty, 1997; Underwood, 2016), and this is made evident by the reality that homeless children often face issues of stigmatization (Ingram et al., 2017), insensitivity (Kim, 2013), and even rejection by classmates and teachers (Chow et al., 2015; Ingram et al., 2017; Morgan, 2018). Students who are homeless may also have diminished cognitive ability due to the effects of toxic stress (Fry et al., 2017), and may develop physical, mental, social, and academic difficulties that come with their housing insecurity (Armstrong et al., 2018; Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Griffin et al., 2019). Negative living conditions accelerate various chronic and acute risk factors affecting cognitive and other functioning pertinent to academic success (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Fry et al., 2017; Underwood, 2016). However, educators can play an important role in the lives of homeless children in their schools and classroom when it comes to their academic success (Havlik et al., 2020; Lafavor et al., 2020; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Swick, 1996), thereby helping to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness itself.

The longer an individual remains homeless, the more the cost of homelessness to those who are homeless, to the communities and schools of which they are a part, and to the economy increases (Carter, 2018; Steen, 2018). It is beneficial to society that schools help mitigate the negative realities these students face and improve their academic outcomes (Chow et al., 2015; Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018; Rafferty, 1997). Homeless children tend to spend the majority of

their time in school, and it is the place where they receive not only academic support but social and emotional services and support as well. Therefore, public school classrooms become a place of refuge where students experiencing homelessness can potentially anchor themselves and develop both socio-emotional (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Oppong Asante, 2019) and academic competence (Manfra, 2019; Masten et al., 2015). This inadvertently encourages them to engage in society and become contributing citizens who no longer suffer at the hands of poverty, homelessness, and long-term unemployment (Carter, 2018; Herring et al., 2019; Steen, 2018). Homelessness creates a myriad of barriers that stand in the way of students staying on track academically and graduating, but it also affects the health and social aspects of these students (Marcal, 2017; Straaten et al., 2018). As such, educating homeless students remains a social and public health concern in schools and communities across the U.S. (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Morgan, 2018). Homelessness creates social and economic costs that negatively impact students, their families, communities, and the entire country (Cleveland, 2020). The effective education of homeless students is critical, as it helps decrease the cycle of poverty and homelessness plaguing society.

Theoretical Context: Considerations When Teaching Homeless Students

Research on educating students experiencing homelessness has shown that their basic socio-emotional development (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019), academic resilience (Masten et al., 2015), academic achievement (Cowen, 2017; Manfra, 2019), and levels of motivation (Fry et al., 2017) are affected by their housing conditions and lack of basic needs (Maslow, 1970; Underwood, 2016), which in turn creates both learning and teaching challenges (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). Maslow's (1970) theories on motivation and specifically, his hierarchy of needs theory is important for educators to understand when

instructing homeless students. Because students who are homeless lack many basic needs, this inadvertently prevents them from reaching their highest academic and social potential (Bucker et al., 2018; Labella et al., 2019; Manfra, 2019) and achieving self-efficacy (Daniels, 1995; Mulrenan et al., 2018; Nott & Vuchinich, 2016; Rojas, 2015). As such, educators must consider how to navigate the realities these students face (Griffin et al., 2019; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018). Students who lack basic needs such as housing cannot be expected to have the same level of motivation or achievement as their housed peers without proper instructional supports (Morgan, 2018). According to Maslow (1970), lack of basic needs is a form of crippling, of loss of capacities, and of lesser ability to do and to achieve. This presents additional challenges in the classroom for teachers serving these students. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems of human development theory is crucial to this study because the school and classroom are a part of the microsystem, which Bronfenbrenner argued to be the most important. Referring to this concept as the *engine of development*, Bronfenbrenner noted that there exist direct and indirect links to "power settings through which participants in the original setting can influence the allocation of resources and the making of decisions that are responsive to the needs of the developing person and the efforts of those who act in his behalf" (p. 256). Educators can act as important positive forces in the microsystem of the homeless students sitting in their classrooms and inadvertently change the trajectory of their academic development if the right instructional decisions are made. Educators who are sensitive to the feelings of homeless children (Kim, 2013; Moore, 2013; Park et al., 2019) and first understand what these students are working against can begin to create a climate of acceptance and understanding (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018) and also make instructional decisions that benefit and motivate homeless students (Moore, 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Rogers & Shafer, 2018; Swick, 1996).

Situation to Self

My motivation for conducting this study was both personal and educational because of my own experiences, challenges, and observations as an educator in a high-poverty, low-income middle school in New York City. Of the four philosophical assumptions discussed by Creswell and Poth (2018), I brought mostly ontological and methodological assumptions to this study, but epistemological and axiological values are also important in any research study. The epistemological assumption requires that researchers get as close as possible to the participants being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Therefore, epistemologically, I aimed to lessen the objective separateness (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1988) between the teacher participants and myself. Since I taught in a similar low-income New York City public school district that serves homeless students, I did have some important context that I had hoped would help me to better understand what the participants were saying. The axiological assumptions that I brought to the study were defined by my previous and current experiences. I brought into this research six years of working in high-poverty, low-income neighborhoods, and schools, both as a teacher and as a mentor to at-risk students. I am an immigrant daughter who moved to a low-income neighborhood in NYC from a low-income neighborhood in Jamaica. The value and importance of access to education for poverty-stricken students has never been lost on me, and I have always revered the educators who took the time to be accommodating and understanding of students who had issues and lived realities that were out of those students' control. Therefore, I was aware of how this positioned me in relation to the context of this research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My ontological assumptions came from the fact that I intended to conduct the study and report multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of educators and their experiences navigating

instruction in the classroom for students they knew were experiencing homelessness. I was interested in the experiences and therefore the reality and perspectives of teachers instructing and making decisions for homeless students in public school classrooms in low-income schools, and how they manage those challenges. I hoped to essentially report the overall findings of the study, educator experiences, and their perspectives as themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a teacher, I had an assumption that student homelessness would be quite obvious to teachers and other school personnel. It was not until my school hired a community outreach coordinator for students and families who were facing housing insecurity, living in shelters, or in other kinds of unstable living conditions, that I was made privy to the reality of the invisibility of student homelessness in the classroom. When the pandemic forced teachers to first adopt a hybrid and later a completely online teaching model, I became even more aware of how homelessness affected students and those that aspired to serve them in the current educational system. I also realized that I had been teaching many homeless students over the years who lived in local community shelters, garages of family members' houses, city parks, etc. This was a shocking revelation for me. It inspired me to examine the existing research on student homelessness, which is when I realized that while there was an overwhelming amount of research on homelessness and its negative effects on people, there was little research that specially targeted student homelessness in low-income public zone schools. There was even less research that considered the experiences of the teachers in these schools when it comes to effectively accommodating the needs of students who are experiencing housing insecurity. Additionally, I discovered that a qualitative methodology would be necessary since inductive logic would be used and the findings would be largely shaped by the responses of the participants. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to

gather the information that allowed me to examine the multiple realities of the participants in this study, and I was committed to doing so.

Creswell (2018) asserted that qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meaning people ascribe to social or human problems. Student homelessness and teacher responses to this marginalized group fits the bill since my research questions were primarily about teachers' experiences, support systems, beliefs, and their instructional decisions when faced with the challenge of educating these students. Creswell's (2018) description of a constructivist worldview, and similarly, a transformative worldview, best aligned with my topic because of how the issue of homelessness can shape classrooms, teachers, and this marginalized group of students. More specifically, social constructivism was applicable since I was seeking to understand the world in which these educators live and work and to examine their varied and multiple meanings of experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In a constructivist worldview, meanings are negotiated both socially and historically, and the way that historical and cultural norms permeate people's lives is considered (Creswell, 2018). A transformative worldview also came into play because this research topic focused on the needs of individuals in society that may be marginalized or disenfranchised (Gewirtz O'Brien et al., 2021; Creswell, 2018; Oppong Asante, 2019). Homeless students are often overlooked or altogether invisible (Kim, 2020; Klitzman, 2018) in schools or classrooms, especially if identification is difficult or is not shared with teachers (Ingram et al., 2017). Future research on this topic should focus on creating change through classroom and curriculum interventions and providing more in-class support for teachers, which would align with a transformative worldview in which advocacy and participatory nature could potentially work. Ultimately, this research study was aimed at helping educators, including myself, better understand, serve, and teach this

marginalized group of students through an examination of actual educator experiences. The social constructivism paradigm allowed me to examine the complex and subjective nature of the participants' views and experiences while setting aside my own preconceptions and personal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Problem Statement

The problem is that the number of homeless students in public schools is steadily increasing (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Morgan, 2018; USICH, 2020) and that this increase creates challenges for the teachers that serve these students intimately in the classroom setting where there is a lack of evidence-based practices (Crutchfield, 2018; NCHE, 2020; Teall, 2018). Due to this growing problem aforementioned, it is important that schools, districts, and administrators understand and consider teachers' points of view and consider teachers' own lived experiences when supporting the learning process for this marginalized group of students in public school classrooms. This problem is especially staggering in the state of New York, with the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) noting that as of 2020, homelessness in New York is the second-highest in the entire country, second only to California. Homelessness in New York City has reached its highest levels since the Great Depression. In 2019, over 153,209 New York public school students experienced homelessness, with 114,659 of those students being children enrolled in NYC public schools (USICH, 2020). The latest policy report from the New York State Department of Education (NYSED, 2019) revealed data indicating that one in every 10 NYC public school students sitting in NYC classrooms led by public school teachers were homeless. The problem worsens each year and yet research on how teachers are dealing with and making decisions about these marginalized students is limited, which hinders the next steps in understanding and supporting classroom teachers who are serving

homeless students. Scholars call for more research on teacher-focused studies (Canfield et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2015; Smart, 2018) when promoting resilience among these students (Masten et al., 2015) and how teachers support them in the classroom (Chow et al., 2015, Ingram et al., 2017; Morgan, 2018; Moore, 2013; Swick, 1996). Other researchers have stressed that blanket interventions for homeless students do not work and that the McKinney-Vento Act legislation does not cover teacher responsibilities in the classroom environment itself (Canfield et al., 2016; Crook, 2015).

Some of the existing research on the education of homeless students provides strategies (Moore, 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011) and suggestions (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018) for serving and making homeless students feel supported (Griffin et al., 2019) and welcomed (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). However, the research does not demonstrate the more intimate roles teachers play inside the classroom. In fact, in identifying gaps in the research, Wright et al. (2019, 2020) noted that while significant work has explored various variables related to academic resilience in homeless children, the role of [classroom] teachers have been largely absent from this research base. To date, there are no studies that focus on the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers in low-income NYC public schools who serve homeless students, despite reports showing NYC to have one of the fastest rising number of enrolled homeless students in its public schools (NYSED, 2019; USICH, 2020). Presently, the gap in the literature shows that much of the existing research neglects the experiences of NYC teachers in public middle school classrooms serving an ever-increasing number of homeless students, even though the educator's point of view and lived experiences teaching these students is essential to better understand the degree of preparation and professional learning necessary. This transcendental phenomenological qualitative study is

designed to give a voice to the experiences and instructional decisions of countless NYC teachers in the city's low-income public middle schools and how they support the identified and enrolled homeless students in their classrooms despite the challenges faced in day-to-day instruction and resource availability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across two low-income public middle schools in New York City. Students experiencing homelessness are generally defined as individuals who “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (ESSA, 2015, p. 323). Though many variables are affecting homeless students, the two primary theories that guided this study are Maslow's (1970) theory of motivation as shown in his hierarchy of needs pyramid, and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model. These theories show how homelessness affects and inhibits various crucial aspects of these students' lives and thus affects the way they interact with various systems. These systems include the microsystem of the classroom when it comes to learning and engagement, and why educators teaching homeless students face many challenges and obstacles when promoting academic resilience (Masten et al., 2015; Moore, 2013) among this group. This study's purpose was to shed light on the experiences and instructional decisions of educators related specifically to homeless students in their classrooms.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is clearly shown through empirical, practical, and theoretical aspects. I address the practicality of this research, whereby teachers' voices about their lived experiences serving this population are essential, yet lacking in the current literature.

The empirical and theoretical significance are also discussed in this section since both speak to the research gap as well. It also showcases this research study's attempt to add new discourse within the literature on homeless students and education.

Empirical Significance

Studies related to student homelessness have generally focused on the experiences of the students themselves, the resources or strategies that schools should employ to help these students (Ingram et al., 2017; Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011), and federal legislation that impact and guide the way that homeless education is meant to serve and protect homeless individuals (Carter, 2018; Crook, 2015; ESSA, 2015; MVA, 1987, 2015; Sullivan-Walker et al., 2017). For example, in examining the literature on student homelessness, studies on its effects on the physical (Nott & Vuchinich, 2016), emotional (Chow et al., 2015; Labella et al., 2019), social (Griffin et al., 2019; Labella et al., 2019), and mental health (Armstrong et al., 2018; Fry et al., 2017; Marcal, 2017) of students abound. Studies on the effects of student homelessness on academic performance (Manfra, 2019; Masten et al., 2015; Rojas, 2015), differences between housed versus unhoused students (Low et al., 2017), the role of low socioeconomic status, and the cycle of poverty (Dietrichson et al., 2017; Underwood, 2016), teacher perceptions of student homelessness (Kim, 2013), the McKinney-Vento Act for homeless education (Crook, 2015), academic resilience (Clemens et al., 2017; Masten et al., 2015), and risk factors (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019) for these students are also numerous. However, what the existing literature on the education of homeless students (Chow et al., 2015; Morgan, 2018; Wright et al., 2019), on teacher perceptions of these students (Kim, 2013; Park et al., 2019), and on suggestions for teachers when dealing with this population (Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011) show is that it is necessary to understand the educator's point of view and lived

experiences with teaching students experiencing homelessness (Chow et al., 2015; Smart, 2018). This is where the gap in the literature reveals itself, and where the significance of this study finds its ground because there are no studies that focus on the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers in low-income public middle schools in NYC with students who are homeless. Conducting this study will add to the existing literature on student homelessness by offering insight from the experiences and perspectives of classroom teachers in low-income schools serving in a city whose enrolled homeless student numbers are the second-highest in the country (USICH, 2020). Research shows that students who are homeless are more likely to demonstrate decreased classroom engagement and social skills (Brumley et al., 2015; Fantuzzo et al., 2013), and yet studies on the experiences of teachers dealing with this challenging group in the classroom context are severely lacking. This is concerning because existing literature on student homelessness and improving the academic outcomes and socio-emotional experiences of homeless students enrolled in schools all point to the important role of the classroom teacher in making this possible (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Kim, 2013; Moore, 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Morgan, 2018; Swick, 1996; Wright et al., 2019). What remains to be known is the lived experiences of educators in relation to instructional decisions when teaching in the immediate classroom context. Teachers, educational leaders, and researchers in states beyond New York may also find this study helpful in finding future empirical gaps in the literature on educating homeless students.

Practical Significance

A study like this has never been conducted with a focus on classroom teachers in low-income public middle school classrooms. The location is significant because NYC public schools have been home to more than 114,000 homeless students, most of whom attend high-poverty or

low-income public schools (NCH, 2019, 2020; Walker, 2020). I opted to situate my study in this particular city and specifically in Districts A and B because they predominantly serve low-SES students, many of whom face housing insecurity and are legally homeless according to the MVA's definition (1987, 2015). This study's design will shed light on the experiences and instructional decisions of educators as they relate specifically to identified homeless students in their classrooms and will allow school leaders, instructional leaders, and other classroom teachers to examine and ultimately change the way they approach instructional and curriculum decisions regarding this group of students (Kim, 2020). Giving educational leaders a firmer grasp on where to begin in terms of professional development training and support that can target the challenges of educators dealing with homeless students in the classroom is one of the key outcomes this study's design hopes to achieve. Classroom teachers are faced with the incredible challenge of trying to keep homeless students on pace despite the clear risks these students face (NCHE, 2017), so examining the experiences of teachers who serve many of these students is essential to creating change. Furthermore, local educational programs and various service agencies that provide support for homeless students and the educators that serve them might also find this research study enlightening.

Theoretical Significance

Within the theoretical context aforementioned, this study is designed to show the crucial role teachers play in theories of motivation when it comes to homeless students whose basic needs as described by Maslow (1970) are not consistently met. This inadvertently creates additional challenges when promoting academic resilience and making decisions that speak to what educators know from theories, but that also consider the reality these students face. The classroom is a part of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and this study's design and

purpose aim to show how important the role of the classroom teacher is in the development (Daniels, 1995), motivation (Nott & Vuchinich, 2016), and resilience (Rojas, 2015) of their students. Homeless students in public school classrooms cannot be held to the same expectations as their housed peers (Underwood, 2016) — not without educators who are supported in improving the academic outcomes for this vulnerable group (Morgan, 2018). When it is understood that these students' basic needs (Maslow, 1970) are not being met and teachers and educational leaders begin to recognize the power that the classroom has as a microsystem that students navigate each day, this might change not only the perceptions of teachers and educational leaders but also their actions and decisions. Ultimately, the theoretical significance of this study came from the hope that this research has an impact on transforming the way that schools support the academic success of these students by first understanding the struggles, successes, decisions, and overall experiences of those that serve them more intimately in their education: the classroom teachers.

Research Questions

Since the purpose of this study was to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with homeless students across two low-income public middle schools in NYC, the following research questions were developed.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of NYC public middle school teachers with homeless students in their classrooms? It is generally agreed across the research that homeless students come to schools with a myriad of challenges (Chow et al., 2015; Cowen, 2017; Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Masten et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Wright et al., 2019). These challenges include lack of basic physiological and other needs (Maslow, 1970) such as

housing, food, and safety (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Underwood, 2016), frequent moves (Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018), low access to healthcare (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019), lack of access to academically supportive environments outside of school (Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Swick, 1996), mental and socio-emotional health issues (Armstrong et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2019; Marcal, 2017), low classroom engagement (Fantuzzo et al., 2013), behavioral issues (Chow et al., 2015), and developmental and readiness gaps (Manfra, 2019; Masten et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2019). All of these challenges brought on by homelessness and lack of basic needs and services (Maslow, 1970) manifests in the classroom via behavioral, social, and emotional ways that play out in the microsystems of the school and classroom, which inadvertently impacts the experiences that teachers have with homeless students. However, though the literature discusses challenges and strategies to address them, there is no focus on the experiences and subsequent challenges the *teachers* face. Most recently, Kim's (2020) research navigated a multiple case study which revealed how limited teacher conversations about homelessness are. Therefore, this central question was extremely relevant to this research study.

Sub-Questions

Sub-Question 1. How do educators across two low-income public middle schools in NYC describe the instructional decisions they make in the classroom context when teaching and promoting academic resilience among students experiencing homelessness? Understanding the instructional decisions classroom teachers make when it comes to students who are homeless was important. This is because students who are experiencing homelessness face a myriad of barriers to education, such as chronic absence (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Rogers & Shafer, 2018), transience in schooling (Bucket et al., 2018; Morgan, 2018), constant illnesses (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019), speech problems (Fry et al., 2017; Rogers & Shafer, 2018), lack of space to

study (Moore, 2013; Rogers & Shafer, 2018), and high rates of mobility (Cowen, 2017; Masten et al., 2015), which lead to disruption in their schooling (Clemens et al., 2017; Cowen, 2017; Underwood, 2016). This often means that they may have to repeat a grade level or receive a response to intervention teaching (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). While some studies focus on social and emotional teacher responses to student homelessness (Chow et al., 2015), teaching strategies for homeless students (Moore, 2013), and some instructional and general considerations (Moore, 2013; Murphy & Tobin; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018), they do not explicitly examine the lived experiences of teachers carrying out instructional decisions or their attempts to promote academic resilience with these students. Therefore, having this sub-question included in the study was imperative because it added to the existing research by examining how teachers themselves felt about particular strategies or suggestions, and what worked or did not work for them. Most of all, this question speaks to the *why* in these educators' instructional decisions.

Sub-Question 2. How do educators across two low-income NYC public middle schools describe their perceptions of curriculum guidance, inclusiveness, and instructional support accommodations when teaching homeless students? This question was significant because of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) passed in 2015. This Act notes that teachers must use the same curriculum for homeless students that is used for other students, but the lessons must be differentiated (Kim, 2020; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018). Homeless students are more likely to have trouble keeping up academically with the school curriculum because their basic needs (Maslow, 1970) are not being met (Daniels, 1992; 1995; Underwood, 2016). Lack of basic needs at the physiological level prevents students from reaching the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy (1970), which include self-esteem and self-actualization, both of which are crucial when trying to engage with learning in a meaningful way. Whatever prevents students from

learning has to be addressed. While scholars agree that teachers can play a critical role in the lives of homeless students (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Morgan, 2018; Swick, 1996; Wright et al., 2019), there is no specific research on whether curriculum supports teachers in their instructional decisions and understanding of homeless students in the classroom context.

Definitions

The following definitions are important to this study:

1. *Academic resilience*: Morales and Trotman (2004) defined academic resilience as educational achievement outcome anomalies that occur in certain groups of students when they have been exposed to statistical risk factors.
2. *Classroom teacher or educator*: Teachers who work with students as a whole class in a classroom, in small groups in a resource room, or one-on-one in a regular classroom. This does not include student teachers, teachers' aides, or paraprofessionals (OECD Glossary, 2002).
3. *Homelessness*: The state of lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or loss of housing due to economic hardship (MVA, 1987, 2015).
4. *Homeless student*: A student who is (a) sharing the housing of other people due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; (b) living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative accommodation; (c) living in emergency or transitional shelters; (d) abandoned in hospitals or awaiting foster care placement; (e) having a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; or (f) living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings (Uretsky & Stone, 2016).

5. *Low-income or high-poverty schools*: Public schools where more than 75 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (NCES, 2020).

Summary

Foundational information for this phenomenological study may be found in this chapter. I have provided ample background information on homelessness in the United States, the limitations it poses for children, and an overview of the MVA's conception and its relation to the role of public schools in educating homeless students. Background information on the legislative, historical, social, and theoretical contexts of homeless students and the role of educators is also provided. My own experience as a public school teacher in a low-income NYC public middle school where many students are legally homeless motivated this study. The problem I was seeking to understand through examining the experiences of classroom teachers is clearly defined and is supported in this chapter, which addresses how these teachers are dealing with and making instructional decisions about homeless students. Existing literature on homeless education largely does not demonstrate the lived experiences of classroom teachers with homeless students, even while noting the important roles teachers play (Chow et al., 2015; Crutchfield, 2018; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Wright et al., 2019; Swick, 1996) in these students' lives in the microsystem that is the classroom (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The literature also does not address specific strategies for these educators to try (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011) when accommodating for the challenges that come with a lack of basic needs (Maslow, 1970). Lack of research in this area hinders the next steps in understanding and supporting teachers in the classroom. Current research fails to consider the experiences and instructional decisions of teachers who serve homeless students in the classroom context, and also fails to connect teachers' experiences to challenges faced when teaching these students.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across two low-income public middle schools in NYC.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter focuses on the existing literature related to homeless students and homeless education in the classroom context, with teacher roles and perceptions in mind. It also illustrates the theoretical framework or lens from which this study is viewed, focusing primarily on Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model as they relate to the phenomenon. In doing so, the difficulties that transfer into the classroom specific to homeless students and the plethora of challenges faced by classroom teachers when serving these students are discussed. Student homelessness requires constant attention because of how deeply this lack of the basic need of housing affects individuals; in this case, how it affects teachers' experiences in the classroom with these students is brought to the forefront. For the sake of specificity, Uretsky and Stone's (2016) definition of homelessness as a multitude of possibilities is used, which denotes examples of homelessness as the following:

- (a) sharing the housing of other people due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; (b) living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative accommodation; (c) living in emergency or transitional shelters; (d) abandoned in hospitals or awaiting foster care placement; (e) having a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; (f) or living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings. (p. 92)

Therefore, this literature review is subdivided according to the respective subject matter on this phenomenon and overviews the theoretical framework and related literature on the topic while

making it clear that more research is needed to address the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers serving homeless students.

Theoretical Framework

The existing research literature on homelessness and homeless students in educational settings has primarily used two theories to ground the significance of the studies: Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs, and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. Both theories are crucial in understanding the lived experiences of educators serving homeless students in the classroom setting. As such, these are also the framing theories and lenses for this study.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Before discussing the impact of homelessness on children in school and classroom settings, and the inadvertent impact this has on teachers' experiences, it is important to understand how personal needs affect behavior and classroom engagement in homeless students. Homeless students are always trying to satisfy basic needs essential to survival (Crutchfield, 2018; Smart, 2018; Underwood, 2016). First introduced in Maslow's paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation" in 1943, Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954; 1970) posits that individuals develop as a result of satisfying five basic needs that progress from bottom to top on the hierarchy as follows: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. The very first level, which this theory deems as the most prominent of all needs, is the physiological and biological needs tied to survival; these include food, shelter, clothing, exercise, warmth, sleep, protection, and basic health care. The second level that needs to be satisfied is an individual's need for safety; a key part of this need includes feelings of security, order, law, limits, and stability. An individual's need for love, and a feeling of belonging among others is the third level. The fourth needs level that Maslow (1970) discussed is an individual's need to fulfill a

sense of self-esteem; this includes the individual's need for achievement in all areas of life including mastery, independence, and status. The fifth and final needs level that an individual should then seek to achieve is the sense of self-actualization, in which they can have peak experiences. Essentially, the theory maintains the belief that if the lower-level needs are unsatisfied or adversely affected in an individual, then their thoughts and actions become dominated by the physiological and biological needs, causing all other needs to simply become nonexistent or be pushed into the background.

For students who are homeless, basic needs often go unmet (Hernandez, 2020; Manfra, 2019; Morgan, 2018; Underwood, 2016). Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs becomes especially relevant for this population because teachers expect students will come to class prepared to function appropriately (Fry et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Rodger et al., 2020; Smart, 2018), engage with learning (Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2019), and be ready and motivated to understand instructional materials and behaviors that lead to academic success (Daniels, 1992; Ingram et al., 2017; Kim, 2013; Moore, 2013). Ultimately, these baseline expectations are unrealistic for students who are homeless because their primary needs are not being met (Daniels, 1992; Hernandez, 2020; Labella et al., 2019; Rodger et al., 2020; Smart, 2018; Underwood, 2016). Instead, homeless students deal with stressors such as school changes, difficulty enrolling in new schools, school absences, loss of possessions, and separation from close friends and family (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Shinn et al., 2015; Straaten et al., 2018). Being unable to adequately fulfill their basic needs only exacerbates stressors for homeless students (Rodger et al., 2020), which affects the way their teachers not only view them (Kim, 2013, 2020; Park et al., 2019) but teach them in the classroom setting (Bucker et al., 2018; Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Ryan, 2018; Smart, 2018). Housing, safety, and food are necessities

(Maslow, 1970; Morgan, 2018; Underwood, 2016). Schools provide both safety and food for homeless students (Daniels, 1992; Ingram et al., 2017; Rodger et al., 2020) and supplementary ways to reach Maslow's (1970) third, fourth, and fifth levels through support for socio-emotional (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019), mental (Armstrong et al., 2018; Rodger et al., 2020), academic (Dietrichson et al., 2017; Low et al., 2017; Masten et al., 2015; Moore, 2013), and personal development (Daniels, 1992; 1995; Griffin et al., 2019; Labella et al., 2019; Nott & Vuchinich, 2016).

The reality is that “what homeless students need the most is a home” (Underwood, 2016, p. 76). In fact, much of the research on homelessness, homeless education, barriers created by homelessness, the academic achievement of homeless students, and the overall experiences of homeless students inside and outside of educational settings use or mention Maslow's (1954; 1970) hierarchy of needs theory (Armstrong et al., 2018; Hernandez, 2020; Havlik et al., 2020; Low et al., 2017; Smart, 2018). Ultimately, it makes sense that homeless students tend to pose more difficulties in schools and classrooms, especially when it comes to academic resilience (Dietrichson et al., 2017; Ingram et al., 2017; Masten et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Rojas, 2015), since lack of basic needs is a form of crippling, of loss of capacities, and of lesser ability to do and to achieve (Maslow, 1970). Maslow's hierarchy of needs is applied and perhaps even extended specifically to fit this study because how teachers describe their experiences and instructional decisions with homeless students will reveal the extent to which they are mindful about how homelessness impacts these students in the classroom. For example, a teacher's overall experience with homeless students in the classroom might be negative if they have misconceptions about the students (Kim, 2013, 2020), do not keep in mind how lack of basic needs affects them, and how lack of basic needs prevents them from being academically resilient

to reach higher levels (Maslow, 1970). On the other hand, a teacher who understands what homeless students go through might have a very different experience—one that is informed by their understanding of how lack of the first two levels inhibits students' abilities (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Underwood, 2016). An understanding of Maslow's hierarchy of needs will shape how teachers make instructional decisions for homeless students and will help when interpreting their responses to interview questions. It will also serve as a lens from which to view the way that schools have extended support to teachers in helping them serve these students, according to the teachers' perspectives. Ultimately, when homeless students' needs are not met, teachers face various challenges when teaching and making decisions about these students (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018), which will further be discussed in the related literature.

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory model contends that human development is influenced by different types of environmental systems, where relations and associations between each environment can affect individuals in important ways. In this theoretical perspective, the developing individual interacts with the changing properties of their environments, and the relations between these environments affect them in important ways. Essentially, the theory emphasizes the evolving interactions between the developing person and the various micro and macro environments they navigate. The original model (chronosystem was added much later) consists of the ecological microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, which Bronfenbrenner contends are all relevant to human development. Bronfenbrenner argued that the microsystem is the most important, and he referred to it as the engine of development. The microsystem deals with immediate environments such as the home

or school; this allows for proximal processes to be maintained through face-to-face interactions, but also through provisions made to the individual or by inhibiting particular responses. The mesosystem on the other hand refers to the interactions between the microsystemic settings and variables that affect the child's development, and in which the individuals still actively participate. Finally, the exosystem and macrosystem are the larger environmental systems that have the power to influence what happens to the individual. The exosystem refers to the location of a home, school environment, and resources, and society and policy-making overall that can inadvertently affect the child's development. Since all of the ecological systems are interdependent, an individual can even be affected by a system in which they have no immediate interactions. The theory implies a dynamic relationship, and the reality that these ecological systems can have profound impacts on human development, directly or indirectly, as reciprocal activities take place.

More specific to this study, the microsystem, which deals with the home, community, school, and classroom, is important. Everything that happens in the classroom, from interactions to experiences by both students and teachers, can be connected to this systems theory. The reality is that student learning and engagement that takes place in the classroom is not only impacted by what happens in the school building, but also at home and in the community. In fact, in their study of housing interventions for homeless students, Cutuli and Herbers (2019) noted that the main theory and findings in the science of developmental resilience among students “emphasize that positive and negative outcomes are the product of complex interplay among dynamic systems at multiple levels of the individual and her context (e.g., family, housing, school, neighborhood, local and federal policy) over time and in the context of development” (p. 1664). This means that whatever happens inside the classroom between homeless students and their

teachers is inseparable from the systems that are interplaying and therefore contributes to the experiences that teachers have with these students in the classroom. Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted that there exist both direct and indirect links to “power settings through which participants in the original setting can influence the allocation of resources and the making of decisions that are responsive to the needs of the developing person and the efforts of those who act in his behalf” (p. 256). Furthermore, other studies confirmed this (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Griffin et al., 2019; Marcal, 2017), noting that the interacting environments that homeless students navigate are uniquely chaotic (Underwood, 2016) since these students face frequent moves (Uretsky & Stone, 2016), family structure changes (Labella et al., 2019), low access to healthcare (including mental health) services (Armstrong et al., 2018; Marcal, 2017), household and neighborhood disorder, lack of access to academically supportive environments outside of school (Moore, 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Swick, 1996), parenting distress (Kessler et al., 2018), and an overall lack of crucial services. Within all this there is the teacher, in an immediate power setting with the homeless student, navigating a system inside the classroom that is nonetheless affected by many systems outside of it. This study’s theoretical context inadvertently applies Bronfenbrenner’s model in a way that reinforces the reality that as reciprocal activities take place in the various places and spaces homeless students navigate in their daily lives, namely the classroom, ecological systems outside of that microsystem have profound impacts on the students’ physiological and psychological well-being (Armstrong et al., 2018; Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Sullivan-Walker et al., 2017), as well as how these students engage or interact (mesosystemic) with academic spaces and of course, their teachers.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) stressed the importance of a person’s perception of, rather than the objective truth of, the role he or she plays and the relations he or she has with others within

the microsystem, and the research questions seek to examine these classroom teachers' perceptions of their experiences engaging with and teaching homeless students. The central research question focuses on how teachers describe their lived experiences with homeless students in the classroom context. The teachers in this study are those in low-income, high-poverty public middle schools. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model allows for their experiences to be viewed through a lens that will enable an interpretation of the way that teaching in a high-poverty school in low-income NYC urban neighborhoods (macro and exosystem) affects resources available to these schools, the services schools as microsystems are able to provide to the homeless students they serve and the teachers who teach them, and inadvertently how teachers experience relationships with homeless students in the microsystem and power settings of the classroom when making instructional decisions. This ties back to Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs, and paired with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, a unique lens is created from which an investigator can later view participants' responses and experiences.

Related Literature

Being the single existing U.S. legislation that has provided access to education for homeless students (Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018; Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017), the McKinney-Vento Act is important in framing available literature on student homelessness. The existing literature shows that in all the ways homeless students are affected, their academic achievement inadvertently always suffers as well (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Canfield et al., 2016; Cowen, 2017; Masten et al., 2015), which in turn creates challenges for teachers (Chow et al., 2015; Moore, 2013). As such, the related literature reveals the importance of teachers in the lives of these students (Chow et al., 2015; Morgan, 2018; Ryan, 2018; Smart, 2018; Wright et al., 2020),

especially in classrooms and schools where teachers play a most intimate role in their interactions with these students regarding instructional decisions (Hallet & Skrla, 2017; Kim, 2020; Ingram et al., 2017; Smart, 2018; Wright et al., 2020). In focusing on research that showcases the challenges these students face, as well as research on teacher strategies and perceptions (Chow et al., 2015; Ingram et al., 2017; Kim, 2013, 2020; Morgan, 2018; Park et al., 2019), the related literature aims to show the importance of the current research and reveals an important gap in the existing literature pertinent to this study.

Federal Response to Student Homelessness

More than 30 years ago, the MVA became the “first piece of federal legislation to directly address the wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness” (Pavlakakis & Duffield, 2017, p. 806). This law was passed after years of inaction on the part of the government (Grant et al., 2013; Pavlakakis & Duffield, 2017; Rahman et al., 2015). Since then, the ongoing primary federal response to student homelessness has continued to be the MVA, which remains the primary source that is used to legally define, identify, and protect homeless children and youth enrolled in educational settings, and especially in public schools (Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018; Pavlakakis & Duffield, 2017).

The MVA and School Expectations

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act defined homelessness as individuals who “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (M-V:725(2)(A), 2015). With its latest reauthorization created in 2015 under the ESSA that allows for more supports to be given to homeless students, the MVA remains the single most important federal policy directing school practice in the context of homelessness (Crook, 2015; Miller, 2011; Morgan, 2018). Under the MVA (1987; 2015), homeless students are entitled to free, public

education (Crook, 2015; Havlik et al., 2020; Morgan, 2018; Rahman et al., 2015; Underwood, 2016). Additionally, under the MVA, the following rights are given to the student experiencing homelessness as noted by Morgan (2018):

- If it is in their best interest, homeless students have the right to stay in the school they attended when permanently housed or the one in which they were last enrolled.
- A school is required to enroll homeless students if it is in the students' best interest, even without the records normally needed for enrollment.
- Transportation must be provided to and from a school. Parents can request this transportation, or if it is for unaccompanied youth, the liaison every local educational agency is required to have can make the request.
- All programs and services for which homeless students are eligible must be made available to these students.
- Unaccompanied youth, parents, and guardians can dispute an eligibility, school selection, or enrollment decision. (p. 218)

As such, the MVA allows for homeless students to remain in both public and private schools regardless of housing status, and addresses three main goals: increased student access to school, student success in school, and student attendance at school (Crook, 2015; Crutchfield, 2018; Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017; Ryan, 2018). The MVA also provides a list of compliance expectations for schools and school districts that are meant to ensure that each school “provides homeless students with services and supports to address their unique educational, social, and economic conditions” (Rahman et al., 2015, p. 695).

The Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY)

Additionally, the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY), which is an outcome of the MVA, provides grants to state educational agencies (SEA) to ensure that homeless students have equal access to the same free and appropriate public education as their peers (Rahman et al., 2015; Ryan, 2018; Morgan, 2018). Through these EHCY programs, the MVA fundamentally shapes school practice in contexts of student homelessness (Crook, 2015; Miller, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Teall, 2018). The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE, 2019) posited that the purpose of the EHCY program and legislation is to ensure students experiencing homelessness have access to the education and other services they need in order to meet state academic standards. Essentially, this legislation has required that states and schools respond to the challenges posed by student homelessness by holding schools accountable for implementing a set of standard requirements to ensure the success of these students (Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018; Rahman et al., 2015). Since school districts are required by these legislations to support homeless students and afford them the same privileges as their non-homeless peers, the MVA is widely viewed as the primary legislation that has played a central role in expanding the rights and educational opportunities of students experiencing homelessness, which the EHCY program makes possible (Morgan, 2018; Rahman et al., 2015). Furthermore, in addition to the EHCY, Ryan (2018) noted schools that receive Title One funds meant to be used to provide additional academic and learning supports to help low-achieving and at-risk children must also include homeless children. These funds are to be used to ensure homeless students receive transportation services, and to provide additional academic and learning supports to help low-achieving and at-risk children with an emphasis on literacy and mathematic skills (Crook, 2015; Rogers & Shafer, 2018; Ryan, 2018; Teall, 2018). Homeless students are in the at-risk category as per MVA.

Legislation and the Role of Teachers

The MVA was designed to protect homeless students and improve their chances of not only access to education but their probability of academic success. As such, the law requires that schools not only create goals for these students but that they also ensure that these goals are met (Morgan, 2018; NCHE, 2019; MVA, 2015). Crook (2015) and Morgan (2018) both argued that for this legislation to fulfill its overall purpose and be effective, it must be properly implemented at state and local levels; however, the literature on the MVA and its programs ultimately suggests that while these legislations are instrumental when considering student homelessness and the role of states and schools, they lack any mention of the more intimate roles teachers play in implementing or upholding MVA expectations in the classroom (Crook, 2015; Kim, 2020; Morgan, 2018), even while insisting that schools develop an academic achievement plan for students experiencing homelessness (Crook, 2015; Havlik et al., 2020; Ingram et al., 2017; Morgan, 2018). Echoing Crook (2015), but being far more specific, Morgan (2018) contended that since the MVA still fails to provide homeless students with all the services they need, "It is paramount for teachers to respond appropriately. Teachers, counselors, school leaders, and other staff can make a huge difference in the lives of homeless youth" (p. 218). It is clear that current legislation, while helpful, leaves out the crucial appointment of roles and regulations to those interacting more closely with homeless students, such as teachers (Morgan 2018; Wright et al., 2020). After all, the true challenge comes not only from getting homeless students inside schools and classrooms, but ensuring that they succeed. At the frontlines are the teachers who serve homeless students in the classroom context (Moore, 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Inside the classroom, teachers have to make instructional decisions about homeless students daily (Chow et al., 2015; Kim, 2020; Moore, 2013; Rogers & Shafer, 2018; Wright et al., 2020). This study is

designed to begin to understand the gap in the literature that is missing these teachers' voices and experiences with homeless students. As such, this study will shed some light on the role that these teachers play in ensuring that schools keep up with MVA expectations, but might also reveal where schools fall short in supporting teachers and therefore fail to adequately serve homeless students.

Academic Success for Homeless Students: Individualized Education Plans & Supports

The literature is clear that schools must work to implement the measures regarding homeless students in the ESSA as per MVA legislation and actively work with students to help them stay in school and succeed academically (Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018). This means that schools must create a plan in which they address the following for each homeless student who fits the MVA's criteria for homelessness:

- Connect students with liaisons who will be responsible for helping them throughout their academic career in cases of dropout or re-enrollment, and be responsible for connecting them to helpful resources (Crook, 2015; Ingram et al., 2017).
- Set a graduation goal for students (Ingram et al., 2017; Uretsky & Stone, 2016).
- Use data to drive instruction (Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013).
- Provide individualized, one-on-one learning as much as possible (Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018).
- Provide an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) as necessary so that students do not miss out on additional supportive instruction (ICPH, 2016; Ingram et al., 2017).
- Ensure that homeless students with learning and other disabilities have an IEP and receive all the services they need (ICPH, 2016).

- Ensure that homeless students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) receive services and support (ICPH, 2016).
- Ensure that counseling and mental health support and services are provided to homeless students (Armstrong et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2019; Rodger et al., 2020; Marcal, 2017).

While plans for each homeless student will vary based on their situation and needs, every educator needs to be made aware so that proper steps can be taken in schools and especially in classrooms (Havlik et al., 2020; Ingram et al., 2017; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). Participants' responses to interview questions connected to research sub-question one will perhaps provide some more information about what the reality is like for teachers in low-income public schools.

New York's Homeless Students and Implementation of the MVA

The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH, 2020) noted that since the 2010-2011 school year, over 172,000 students in New York City public schools have experienced homelessness, with the ratio becoming alarmingly high. Furthermore, as of August 2020, the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH, 2020) reported that over 57,660 people slept in New York City's homeless shelters, with over 19,006 of these individuals being children. This does not account for those living doubled-up, or even those living on the streets or other temporary makeshift housing across the city. Routhier (2017) contended that more than half of New York City's homeless children are living in doubled-up living situations, making them legally homeless as per the MVA definition. According to Teall (2018), "Until all homeless children in NYC are housed, their education remains critical as a human rights issue" (p. 2). It is a human rights issue that affects NYC schools and classrooms and requires community, school districts, and in-school leaders to ensure that they are being responsive to the needs of students

experiencing homelessness. The primary law that governs homeless students' educational rights in NYC is the federal legislation described in a prior section, the part of the MVA that focuses on educational rights and access. The MVA (1987; 2015) and the ESSA (2015) both require that NYC schools ensure the academic success of every student, and that homeless students get not only the educational support they need, but that they are also assigned an academic success or individualized education plan as needed (ICPH, 2016; Ingram et al., 2017) to ensure that they achieve their goals and stay in school. Every NYC school district is expected to include MVA stipulations of proper allocation of resources for homeless students, be in compliance with state and federal law, meet local educational agency (LEA) requirements, appoint LEA liaisons in each district, and undergo annual review and revisions (MVA, 1987, 2015; NYSED, 2019; Teall, 2018). Additionally, as part of compliance, NYC schools must ensure that transportation is provided to homeless students and that these students do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities (MVA, 1987, 2015; NYSED, 2019).

The New York State Education Department (NYSED, 2019) reminded all school district leaders of the rights of the homeless student attending NYC schools, stating that as per federal and New York Education Law, every homeless child or youth has the right to:

- Choose between their school district of location (i.e., the school where their temporary living arrangement is located) and their school of origin.
- Be immediately enrolled in school without proof of residency, immunizations, school records, or other documents normally needed for enrollment, even if they have missed the application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness.
- Receive transportation to school and extra-curricular or academic activities, including an after-school activity, at the school for the duration of homelessness and for the remainder

of the school year if they move into permanent housing and continue to attend the same school.

- Receive credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed at a prior school.
- Receive access to all of the school's programs, activities, and services to the same extent as they are provided to resident students.
- Enroll in the school chosen by their parent or person in parental relation, even while the family or youth and school district resolve disagreements about enrollment.

The state's education laws and rights given to homeless students are directly in compliance with the MVA and ESSA. Like the MVA, the previous list contains no specific provisions made by the NSYED for in-class mandatory support for homeless students. Rather, NYSED simply lists the general rights to access and transportation that should be afforded to homeless students enrolled in the state's public and private schools. These laws and rights also speak to the reality that there has been a steady increase in New York's number of homeless students enrolled in the state's schools in the last decade (ICPH, 2019; NYSED, 2019). More relevant to this study, the ICPH (2016) noted that New York City has the third-highest number of homeless students and that 81% of New York's homeless students live in urban school districts. While Teall (2018) specifically focused on the rights to education for homeless students in NYC, there is currently no existing research dealing with NYC public school teachers' experiences specifically as related to their instructional decisions toward homeless students, as well as their perceptions of curriculum or instructional supports.

Notably, even with state-wide attempts to implement the MVA, ICPH (2016) claimed that only 14% of New York's school districts received McKinney-Vento sub-grants to assist with homeless students, a fact that reveals the shortcomings of both federal and state responses to

student homelessness. However, in 2019, the NYSED awarded more than \$5 million in grants authorized by the MVA, which was a marked improvement. Nevertheless, since many students in New York City cycle in and out of homelessness throughout their academic careers (ICPH, 2020; Teall, 2018), ensuring that they get all the support they need is important, even beyond MVA compliance (Crook, 2015). Schools must compensate for any shortcomings in federal laws and rights listed for homeless students to reach even more realistic human rights standards (Crook, 2015; Daniel, 1992; Teall, 2018). This suggests that the MVA and ESSA are only surface approaches to the deeper work that needs to happen in schools, and especially in classrooms when it comes to homeless students (Teall, 2018). This research study also sought to examine the participants' perceptions of professional development and support experiences offered by their schools and administration regarding student homelessness. Their responses add to the existing literature on whether schools are or are not working to compensate for these shortcomings through professional development workshops and support for classroom teachers and students.

Challenges for Homeless Students in School Contexts

If one is to understand the experiences faced by teachers when teaching and making decisions about homeless students in the classroom context, it is important to understand the challenges homeless students face in the classroom. The literature shows that there are major differences evident between homeless and non-homeless students, such as stability (Griffin et al., 2019), nutrition, happiness, family support (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Labella et al., 2019), identity, personal strengths and self-efficacy (Daniels, 1995), mental health (Armstrong et al., 2018; Rodger et al., 2020), risk avoidance (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019), and academic achievement (Manfra, 2019; Masten et al., 2015; Nott & Vuchinich, 2016; Rojas, 2015; Underwood, 2016). In

fact, research shows that academic, mental, and health risks increase at the time of homelessness (Bücker et al., 2018). Risks for reading achievement and slower growth in math achievement are also evident (Cowen, 2017; Manfra, 2019; Masten et al., 2015) since homelessness is disruptive to achievement due to negative living conditions accelerating various chronic and acute risk factors that affect cognitive and other functioning (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Fry et al., 2017; Straaten et al., 2018). These risk factors place the students in question significantly behind their peers as they try to balance school life with the many risks that come with homelessness (Crutchfield, 2018; Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Labella et al., 2019).

It comes as no surprise that homeless students in schools are facing added stressors (Straaten et al., 2018; Shinn et al., 2015). Qualitative studies in the literature emphasize various challenges, namely chronic and acute risks students and their families face in homelessness (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Labella et al., 2019). Homelessness comes with adverse conditions such as school changes, difficulty enrolling in new schools (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018), school absences, loss of possessions (Underwood, 2016), separation from close friends and family (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Labella et al., 2019), and other stressors (Shinn et al., 2015; Straaten et al., 2018). All these stressors affect how homeless students function in a classroom or other educational settings (Daniels 1992; 1995), and can therefore impact teacher experiences and influence the decisions teachers make toward this vulnerable group (Kim, 2020). However, it must be noted that not all homeless students in classrooms are without resilience; some students can develop academic resilience with proper support and connectedness from their teachers and peers (Griffin et al., 2019; Masten et al., 2015; Rojas, 2015; Straaten et al., 2018). Unfortunately, one of the challenges homeless students sometimes face in schools is their teachers' lack of awareness (Kim, 2013, 2020; Moore, 2013; Morgan,

2018) about their situation or the services and liaisons with which homeless students may be connected (Ingram et al., 2017).

Furthermore, pertinent to this study, which focuses on teachers dealing with middle school homeless students in their public school classrooms, the current research shows that students in grades K-8 who are homeless or highly mobile are more prone to being at risk for poor educational functioning (Cowen, 2017; Manfra, 2019; Masten et al., 2015), and tend to have lower GPAs or test scores (Uretsky & Stone, 2016), and higher rates of absenteeism relative to the general population and even other low-income but housed student populations (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Low et al., 2017; Uretsky & Stone, 2016). This is because homeless students experience numerous challenges such as inconsistent caregiver support and a lack of academic resources beyond the classroom or school, both of which are detrimental to academic achievement and engagement (Uretsky & Stone, 2016; Griffin et al., 2019; Manfra, 2019). In addition to these barriers, some classroom teachers face the unsettling reality of not knowing whether a student in their classroom is homeless unless schools are following MVA protocol and have liaisons in place that make it their duty to identify enrolled students as homeless, and inform teachers and staff so that they can properly support these students. Ultimately, the reality is that teachers experience a myriad of problems, seen and unseen, when engaging with homeless students in the classroom, who already come in with low academic readiness, and require a considerable number of modifications and support (Fry et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2019; Low et al., 2017).

Schools: Their Role in Consistency, Safety, and Resilience for Homeless Students

Much of the existing literature on homeless education covers the responsibilities of schools toward students through the MVA and its programs (Crook, 2015; Pavlakis & Duffield,

2017). However, a recurring theme is the perceived attitude of homeless students toward school and its role in their lives (Rogers & Shafer, 2018). When children experience homelessness it undoubtedly affects their roles as students (Aviles, 2017; Cowen, 2017; Crutchfield, 2018; Masten et al., 2015; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Underwood, 2016), how they begin to view or rely on schools (Gupton, 2017; Morgan, 2018; Underwood, 2016), their resilience and self-efficacy (Mulrenan et al., 2018; Rojas, 2015), their personal development (Daniels, 1995; Nott & Vuchinich, 2016), and even the teacher-student connections (Kim, 2013) they need to maintain resilience (Mulrenan et al., 2018) and successful continuation of their studies (Griffin et al., 2019; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Ryan, 2018).

Schools: Consistency and Safe Spaces

One of the realities that has become even more apparent during the COVID pandemic (Iwundu et al., 2021; Sulkowski & Michael, 2020; Walker, 2020) is how much homeless and other at-risk and highly-mobile students rely on schools (despite the flaws previously acknowledged) as safe spaces (Iwundu et al., 2021; Rodger et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020; Voight et al., 2020) that provide not only access to education (Morgan, 2018), but also essential services (Crutchfield, 2018; Hernandez, 2020; Sullivan-Walker et al., 2017; Underwood, 2016), counseling (Marcal, 2017; Straaten et al., 2018), food, shelter, and more (Iwundu et al., 2021; Gewirtz O'Brien et al., 2021; Hallet & Freas, 2017; Bucker et al., 2018; Moore, 2013). Essentially, schools are a lifeline for homeless students (Ingram et al., 2017). Teachers, classroom settings, school policies, and school personnel or institutional support all help homeless students (Kim, 2020; Hallett & Skrla, 2017; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018; Ryan, 2018). For many homeless students, schools are the one place they can simply be children without the additional stressors they usually face outside of that microsystem (Sullivan-Walker et

al., 2017). Finding a safe space and caring teachers and other staff at schools can empower homeless students (Chow et al., 2015; Kim, 2020; Moore, 2013; Rafferty, 1997; Underwood, 2016). This makes sense since some homeless students view education as a source of hope for their future (Hallet & Freas, 2017; Morgan, 2018; Underwood, 2016). This is in line with Miller's (2009), who noted, "Schools can provide children with physical care, space, stability, security, autonomy, positive social interactions, competency, and creativity" (p. 225). The NCHE (2016) echoed this by noting the crucial role schools play in protecting the safety of students experiencing homelessness beyond just food and shelter (Ingram et al., 2017). For example, under the MVA (1987; 2015), schools must protect confidential information about these students and their families. Furthermore, schools that communicate with care and sensitivity (Ingram et al., 2017; Kim, 2013, 2020) and build collaborations with community service providers, advocates, and families (Crutchfield, 2018; Hernandez, 2020; Labella et al., 2019; Park et al., 2019), have a better chance of being the consistent and safe space that homeless students need to succeed inside schools (Gupton, 2017; Morgan, 2018; Underwood, 2016) while also surviving outside of these institutions (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Shinn et al., 2015) in stressful situations (Armstrong et al., 2018). It is no wonder that when both the physical realities of home and school disappear and become nonexistent simultaneously, children feel unanchored (Rafferty, 1997; Sulkowski & Michael, 2020; Walker, 2020). Homeless students lack adequate shelter and nutrition, medical care, transportation, parental assistance, and stable environments (Brumley et al., 2015; Canfield et al., 2016). Through schools, as well as homeless education liaison support (Crook, 2015; Ingram et al., 2017), these students receive some of what they need to mitigate the stresses that come from trying to find shelter, food, educational materials (Moore, 2013; Ryan, 2018), mental health support (Fry et al., 2017; Marcal, 2017), and

school personnel who are dedicated to meeting their needs through case management and intervention strategies (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Daniels, 1995; Rafferty, 1997; Swick, 1996). Overall, despite its flaws, schools offer a sense of stability to homeless students that they struggle with elsewhere (Rodger et al., 2020). Ultimately, since public schools are required to identify the homeless students they serve, they are also required to serve them to the best of their ability and tend to their well-being.

The Difficult Task of Promoting Personal and Academic Resilience Among the Homeless

Simply by experiencing homelessness, students are surrounded by risks. Although schools cannot completely obliterate these risks for homeless students, they do mitigate the risks (Griffin et al., 2019; Gupton, 2017; Rodger et al., 2020; Underwood, 2016) both directly and indirectly (Crutchfield, 2018; Hallett & Skrla, 2017; Morgan, 2018; Smart, 2018). After all, well-being is linked to the resilience maintained (academic or otherwise) by homeless and highly mobile students (Bucker et al., 2018; Clemens et al., 2017). The literature examining risk and resilience among homeless students has shown that the environments these students navigate often affect their motivation and competence (Daniels, 1995; Ford, 1992; Fry et al., 2017), which inadvertently affects resilience (Rojas, 2015). Academic resilience is the academic success built up despite risk factors that students face in any area of their lives (Cowen, 2017; Masten et al., 2015). In the context of this study, academic resilience is affected by various risk factors and interactions and is sometimes difficult to maintain among homeless or highly mobile students (Rojas, 2015; Gupton, 2017; Masten et al., 2015). This is because academic, mental, and health risks increase at the time of homelessness (Armstrong et al., 2018; Bucker et al., 2018) when students are more vulnerable (Rodger et al., 2020). However, schools can promote interpersonal and academic resilience for homeless students (Gupton, 2017; Underwood, 2016), especially

when they communicate effectively with parents (Kessler et al., 2018; Labella et al., 2019) and actively work to help students in need (Ausikaitis et al., 2015; Hernandez, 2020). In-school civic engagement (Voight et al., 2020) and in-class academic or peer intervention strategies (Clemens et al., 2017; Griffin et al., 2019; Moore, 2013) are among the most popular types of support that schools offer to homeless students. More recently, however, in-school mental health interventions (Armstrong et al., 2018; Labella et al., 2019) to promote resilience and personal development among homeless students have also emerged. Religious beliefs have also been discussed by some homeless adolescents as a factor in their resilience in a prior study (Oppong Asante, 2019). Chronic and acute risk factors (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Nott & Vuchinich, 2016) place homeless students significantly behind their peers in terms of resilience, but schools attempt to combat that by offering remediation tutoring, school materials and clothes, support services such as counselors, after-school or extended day summer programs that provide basic needs and recreation, transportation, and programs for continuity and stability (Crook, 2015; Crutchfield, 2018; Morgan, 2018; Rafferty, 1997; Rogers & Shafer, 2018; Thielking et al., 2017). When homeless students lose all of these supports in situations such as the current pandemic (Walker, 2020), it puts them at a further disadvantage and reduces resilience. The reality is that one simply cannot reach competence and a growth mindset without fulfilling existence needs (Maslow, 1970), or being resilient (Mulrenan et al., 2018), both of which schools and teachers do attempt to fulfill. With positive school support, homeless students can do well despite their experiences of adversity and the physical, financial, social, emotional, and mental disadvantages that come with poverty and homelessness (Kessler et al., 2018; Masten et al., 2015; Rojas, 2015; Straaten et al., 2018).

Despite challenges, much of the current research implies that schools and districts must still find ways to promote interpersonal and academic resilience (Masten et al., 2018; Oppong Asante, 2019; Rojas, 2015) for homeless students (Walker, 2020) and combat the cumulative risks that develop as a result of poverty and homelessness (Labella et al., 2019; Nott & Vuchinich, 2016; Thielking et al., 2017). The literature is clear regarding how beneficial schools are in providing interventions and support to homeless students that extend across practical, academic, mental, and socio-emotional aspects (Crook, 2015; Labella et al., 2019; Marcal, 2017; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018) to mitigate risks and improve resilience (Oppong Asante, 2019). However, as Ryan (2018) noted, “Although there are several factors affecting each child’s education experience, the classroom teacher spends the most significant time with the students, thus he or she must be properly prepared to aid those who are homeless” (p. 8). This present study considers the teacher’s role and experiences in the ongoing conversation about educating homeless students, serving them, and inadvertently helping them to maintain resilience. It is also crucial to note that even during the COVID pandemic when the physical building and supports offered in school were not available, classroom teachers were pushed even more to maintain relationships with homeless students by doing outreach, checking in on these students, and working harder than ever to serve the nation’s homeless children and their families (Iwundu et al., 2021; Gewirtz O’Brien et al., 2021; Walker, 2020). Although when I planned this study I could not have anticipated a global pandemic and a switch to remote and virtual environments for most of the nation’s and in particular, New York City’s public schools, it is important to point out that this reiterates the point that the classroom teacher’s role (virtual or otherwise) is essential to understand when serving homeless students (Iwundu et al., 2021; Gewirtz O’Brien et

al., 2021; Smart, 2018; Wright et al., 2020)—and that this change might have inadvertently affected participants' experiences as they described them in this study.

Teacher Perceptions of Homeless Students

At some point in their careers, teachers will instruct students who are highly mobile or homeless (ICPH, 2016; Moore, 2013). The existing literature shows that teachers tend to make assumptions that associate homeless students with behavioral problems (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Fantuzzo et al., 2013), low academic outcomes (Aratani & Cooper; Kim, 2013; Lafavor et al., 2020; Moore, 2013), and residential and familial instability (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Cutuli & Herbers, 2019). As such, many teachers tend to have lower expectations for these students (Kim, 2013, 2020; Lafavor et al., 2020; Moore, 2013) or do not discuss them much at all (Kim, 2020). The perception of homeless students as having lesser ability to do and achieve has persisted, and the power of teacher perception is therefore important to note here in the present study's context. When students lack basic needs (Maslow, 1970; Underwood, 2016) this affects the manner in which not only their well-being (Bucker et al., 2018) but their subsequent abilities are viewed by teachers. Researchers have noted that teachers' preexisting beliefs about the students they teach can affect their experiences with those students (Chow et al., 2015; Smart, 2018; Wright et al., 2019, 2020). Slightly more research has begun to emerge on teacher perceptions of homeless students, especially since the dramatic increase of student homelessness in the last two decades (Miller, 2011; Morgan, 2018; Underwood, 2016). More recently, research has focused on the perceptions and beliefs of preservice teachers toward homeless children and students (Kim, 2013; Park et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2019).

Some studies conducted on teacher perceptions of homeless students posit that most teachers seem to initially have deficit perspectives and beliefs about these students (Kim, 2013,

2020; Wright et al., 2019; Park et al., 2019), but that they must address any misconceptions they have toward this marginalized population (Kim, 2013, 2020; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018). To change teachers' perceptions, some researchers (Kim, 2013; Park et al., 2019) have conducted studies that allow teachers or preservice teachers to have service-learning or field experiences with homeless individuals or students, or allow them to have conversations about homelessness in the schools and classrooms in which they work (Haghanikar & Hooper, 2021; Kim, 2020). In doing so, these researchers hoped that the participants would develop a new level of understanding and sensitivity to homeless students they encounter inside and outside of their classrooms (Havlik et al., 2020; Kim, 2013; Park et al., 2019) since stereotypical beliefs and assumptions held by teachers toward homeless students often comes from lack of experience with marginalized groups (Gewirtz O'Brien et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2019). However, as Kim (2013) noted, the awareness gained from service-learning does not guarantee that classroom teachers will sensitively teach homeless children.

The hope is that teacher perceptions of homeless students will change in a positive direction (Kim, 2013, 2020) and that increased diversity in teacher education will prove to be a promising way to address misconceptions and better prepare teachers to serve this marginalized group of students (Kim, 2013, 2020; Park et al., 2019; Morgan, 2018; Wright et al., 2018). Research shows that teachers' beliefs influence how they design classroom environments (Moore, 2013), structure learning environments (Rogers & Shafer, 2018), and perceive and respond to homeless students (Kim, 2020; Park et al., 2019). This is because a teacher's beliefs are closely linked to his or her strategies for coping with challenges in the classroom (Moore, 2013; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). In other words, if a teacher's perception of homeless students is negative and misinformed, such as not knowing how a lack of basic needs (Maslow, 1970) may

affect the classroom environment, or not considering the challenges faced by homeless students because of the way that the invisibility of this epidemic (Juchniewicz, 2012; Klitzman, 2018; Kim, 2020) affects their academic engagement and output (Cowen, 2017; Masten et al., 2015; Rojas, 2015; Uretsky & Stone, 2016), then their instructional decisions and experiences with this group of students in the classroom might be less positive (Chow et al., 2015; Kim, 2013). In discussing teacher perceptions of homeless students, some researchers contend that the important role of teachers in identifying and supporting homeless students (Thielking et al., 2017) is largely absent from the existing literature (Morgan, 2018; Smart, 2018; Wright et al., 2018). Other researchers have argued that student-teacher relationships are a leading predictor of later school success for at-risk students (Griffin et al., 2019; Smart, 2018; Wright et al., 2018). By acknowledging that there is limited research related to teachers' perceptions of homeless students in the school or classroom setting, it may be inferred that more research is needed on not only teacher perceptions of homeless students but on teacher experiences with homeless students, as well as their instructional decisions regarding these students (Smart, 2018). While studies on teacher perceptions of homeless students have increased, the experiences of teachers who instruct homeless students, and subsequently, information about their instructional decisions, is largely missing from the literature. Even though Smart (2018) examined the lived experience of educators who work with homeless adolescents in a Pacific Northwest public school, none of his research focused on low-income middle school teachers, teachers' instructional decisions when promoting academic resilience, or their perceptions of inclusiveness in the curriculum. However, Smart added key findings to the existing literature regarding how educators' perceptions and classroom experiences with homeless students affected their teaching, engagement strategies, emotional state, and student relationships. After perception comes experience; this study begins

to fill this gap by providing an understanding of how homelessness in the classroom impacts not only students, but those who teach them. With this knowledge, educators and policymakers may begin to understand how they can provide professional development training to shift teacher perceptions and beliefs that guide their instructional decisions and attitudes toward homeless students in the classroom (Kim, 2013, 2020).

Best Practices and Strategies for Teachers of Homeless Students

Ingram et al. (2017) noted there is a significant gap in the perceptions of what should be done when serving homeless students, what is working, and what current practice within schools and classrooms entails. While Rogers and Shafer (2018) are correct that there is limited research that discusses general teacher practices to support students who are homeless, within the past decade, some studies have emerged about effective teaching strategies for serving homeless students, as well as available resources for managing the effects associated with student homelessness (Griffin et al., 2019; Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). Additionally, while studies on teacher training on sensitivity toward homeless students are beginning to surface, it is not typically part of the teacher education curriculum (Kim, 2013, 2020; Park et al., 2019; Rogers & Shafer, 2018; Wright et al., 2018). It is important to note that the strategies discussed in the following sections all rely on not just school policy and practices to uphold the expectations, but also on the teachers in the classroom (Havlik et al., 2020; Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018; Wright et al., 2018). This further speaks to the importance of this study and the necessity of understanding what goes on in the classroom when it comes to instructional decisions (and strategies) for homeless students. The fact that the limited studies conducted on examining strategies for homeless students focus primarily on the role of teachers (Chow et al., 2015; Kim, 2020; Moore,

2013; Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Ryan, 2018) is proof that more studies are needed on these educators' experiences with homeless students in the classroom context. Schools and districts might find it difficult to determine if these evidence-based practices work and whether teachers can confirm their effectiveness based on first-hand experiences with this marginalized group without research that focuses on teachers' experiences. The strategies, suggestions, and resources that follow are important to understanding the experiences of the participants in the study, the challenges they face serving homeless students, and whether or not these educators require more support from school leaders.

Initial Strategies to Support Transitions

When homeless students enter the microsystem that is their school and classroom, there are certain steps that teachers can take to ascertain ease of access and comfortability for these students. The following section discusses various suggestions made throughout the existing literature. It also discusses some connections to the present study.

Create a Welcoming Environment. Teachers and all school personnel must create a welcoming and supportive environment for homeless students (Ingram et al., 2017; Kim, 2020; Morgan, 2018; Rogers et al., 2018; Swick, 1996). Rodger et al. (2020) contended that teachers' understanding of vulnerable student trauma is essential in creating classroom environments and learning experiences that are safe and welcoming. Schoolwide, this means "Schools should be willing to restructure schedules, social organization, and functions in order to best meet the needs of students who have no idea of place" (Murphy & Tobin, 2011, p. 35). In the classroom, this means developing a positive classroom culture (Morgan, 2018; Swick, 1996), and according to Rogers and Shafer (2018), includes teachers shifting classroom practices such as procedures, expectations, and relationship building to better assist and accommodate homeless students. This

speaks to the idea of the classroom as an important aspect of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Chow et al., 2015; Rogers & Shafer, 2018) that students navigate. For example, in making a classroom environment more welcoming for homeless students, researchers suggest that teachers always have school supplies available in their classroom (Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Rogers & Shafer, 2018; Ryan, 2018). What homeless students lack in basic needs (Maslow, 1970) should never become the focus in the classroom microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Since the classroom as a microsystem is meant to focus on learning and fostering support and community, homeless students should always feel that the classroom is a safe, supportive place to learn and decompress (Ingram et al., 2017; Morgan, 2018; Rodger et al., 2020; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). Moore (2013) noted that since many homeless students lack structure, they “need to feel the security of an organized, predictable classroom and school schedule, so providing a well-established, daily routine gives a sense of stability and helps children feel that the classroom is a calm, peaceful place to learn” (p. 6). This is echoed on a school-wide basis by other researchers (Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018; Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017), who urged educators to create fair school policies and procedures that do not inadvertently punish homeless students disproportionately. If homeless students are indeed to succeed and enjoy learning despite their living situations, they must first view the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of school and the classroom as a safe haven where their anxiety and distress are alleviated (Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). Moore (2013) provided the following strategies and suggestions to help teachers improve the classroom environment and culture for homeless students:

- Examine the student’s record for grades, attendance, and background information.

- Spend some individual time in the first couple of days to encourage students, ensure they are adjusting well, and that they understand your willingness to help.
- Offer tutoring or review time before or after school or at lunch.
- Watch for indications that the student is struggling to adjust academically, socially, or psychologically.
- Create referral procedures for new students who have difficulty adjusting.
- Form a “new student” group. Set up a mentoring or peer buddy program. Offer a welcome bag or backpack with school supplies and snacks.
- Keep snacks in the classroom for students who are so hungry they fall asleep.
- Respect students’ right to privacy. Everyone does not need to know about their living arrangements. Ensure that students do not feel singled out because of their living circumstances. (p. 7)

These strategies and suggestions are presented with the understanding that it is important to provide a welcoming and supportive environment that allows homeless students to have both concrete and emotional support since both are important to their ability to stay in school and perform well academically (Ingram et al., 2017; Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018).

Establish Relationship. Once a welcoming environment and routines have been established, the next step for teachers is to develop a positive and understanding relationship between themselves and homeless students (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Kim, 2013, 2020; Hallett & Skrla, 2017; Morgan, 2018; Ryan, 2018; Smart, 2018). As such, teachers can begin to act as co-contributors to the well-being of homeless students by providing holistic academic and emotional support (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Rogers & Shafer, 2018)

to establish a relationship. An effective way in which classroom teachers can begin to establish a relationship is by assessing the needs and strengths of the homeless students they serve (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018). By showing homeless students that they have nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed of (Bucker et al., 2018; Kim, 2013, 2020; Park et al., 2019; Morgan, 2018), teachers can create a pathway for students to be more likely to share personal feelings and concerns (Daniels, 1992). Establishing relationships through mentorship (Moore, 2013) and peer interventions (Griffin et al., 2019) is also suggested.

Ongoing Strategies to Support Student Success

Even more pertinent to informing the background of this study are the suggestions, strategies, and resources for teachers when it comes to maintaining academic supports in the classroom for homeless students. This kind of support is important because while some homeless students perform well in school, others struggle with weak levels of classroom engagement (Cowen, 2017; Dietrichson et al., 2017), poor performance on standardized tests, low grades in academic classes (Bucker et al., 2018; Masten et al., 2015), and school dropout (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Pavlakis, 2017). One of the primary preliminary academic supports to improve engagement is providing students with the needed learning materials for doing all school work and homework (Dietrichson et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). Since homeless students have many odds working against them, teachers must adapt and become more aware (Kim, 2020; Morgan, 2018). It is important to note that this support works best when the entire school policy and practices change to accommodate a more holistic support (Aviles, 2017; Rogers & Shafer, 2018) for these marginalized students. Teachers who have traditionally held to certain beliefs about what determines academic success need to be open to shifting their pedagogical beliefs and practices. When it comes to navigating instruction and academic

supports for homeless students, the literature focuses on the following tenets: flexibility in types of assessments or assignments given to students (Moore, 2013; Rogers & Shafer, 2018), addressing remedial needs through one-to-one or individualized instruction (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011), additional school-based after-school support such as tutoring (Morgan, 2018; Swick, 1996), cooperative learning (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Rogers & Shafer, 2018), and differentiation (Bondie et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2014, 2015).

Flexibility in Assignments. Being flexible with assignments requires no major pedagogical shift, but rather compassion and understanding from teachers (Kim, 2013, 2020; Moore, 2013; Park et al., 2019). Moore (2013) noted, “Some tasks, such as projects requiring materials that students cannot afford, might be difficult or impossible for homeless students to complete [...]” (p. 10). Instead, teachers should offer several alternatives from which all students can choose (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Ryan, 2018). Offering students choices based on student ability is common practice among differentiation efforts (Tomlinson, 2014), and since lack of housing and other basic needs affects homeless students’ ability (Maslow, 1970; Underwood, 2016), the same consideration should be made for them. Differentiation, which will subsequently be discussed in more detail as a strategy, is beneficial for all students (Tomlinson, 2014), homeless students included. One of the most practical strategies discussed in the literature is that teachers should break down assignments into smaller pieces and ensure that the lessons they teach open and close on the same day since teachers cannot be sure when they will see homeless students again (Morgan, 2018; Uretsky & Stone, 2016). Allowing ongoing opportunities for homeless students to earn extra credit and complete missing work is also suggested (Moore, 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Swick, 1996). However, Murphy and Tobin

(2011) warned that teachers should not lower expectations for homeless students even while being flexible and thoughtful in their instructional decision making because this too, is dangerous and a hindrance when trying to help homeless students develop resilience (Oppong Asante, 2019) and achieve academic success.

Individualized or One-to-One Instruction. The suggestion that teachers use one-to-one instruction or individualized instruction when working with homeless students (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Swick, 1996) is not without its drawbacks. For example, Swick (1996) suggested that teachers practice individualized instruction so that the learning problems of homeless students are addressed early in the school year, and Murphy and Tobin (2011) agreed that individualized instruction appears to help these highly vulnerable students. However, it is very difficult for classroom teachers to be expected to provide consistent, uninterrupted, individualized instruction to homeless students (Rogers & Shafer, 2018). This is because teachers tend to see homeless students sporadically (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018), which is directly related to the challenge of consistent enrollment that these students face (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Crook, 2015; Havlik et al., 2020; Morgan, 2018).

Tutoring. Sporadic attendance affects after-school support and tutoring from teachers for homeless students (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Swick, 1996), as well as in-class academic or peer intervention strategies (Griffin et al., 2019). Swick (1996) suggested that the best strategy is for teachers to provide after-school tutoring, easier access to school resources, and provisions for needed study materials to homeless students as often as possible through in-school and even community-wide tutoring efforts (Moore, 2013; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). This requires

collaborative efforts between the school and the classroom teachers who are trying to support homeless students (Kim, 2020; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Ryan, 2018).

Cooperative Learning. Cooperative learning encourages homeless students to develop certain necessary academic and social skills that help them to master content (Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Rogers & Shafer, 2018), while also giving them opportunities to interact with their classmates who come from diverse economic and social backgrounds (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Morgan, 2018; Swick, 1996). However, Morgan (2018) warned against the potential dangers of teachers reinforcing cooperative learning for homeless students in the classroom, stating that “This method needs to be implemented carefully [because] homeless students fear the stigma associated with homelessness. And when they interact with their classmates, their peers may react inappropriately when they notice certain qualities” (p. 219). What the literature fails to acknowledge is that in high-poverty, low-income schools, such as the ones of focus in this study, as well as schools that do not receive McKinney-Vento sub-grants or other funding (ICPH, 2016; Teall, 2018), teachers do not have that many resources from which to draw to support homeless students. This can serve as a source of frustration for many teachers. For example, the literature consistently refers to the use of local student homelessness liaisons (Crook, 2015; Crutchfield, 2018; Havlik et al., 2020; Ingram et al., 2017; Morgan, 2018), but the reality is that in some schools, this simply is not being implemented, or if it is, teachers are not aware of it (Ingram et al., 2017). This is why scholars insist on more stringent implementation of the MVA requirements in schools (Aviles, 2017; Crook, 2015; Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017).

Differentiation. Tomlinson (1999; 2014) and Bondie (2019) ascertained that differentiated instruction is beneficial for teaching students with a wide range of abilities and needs and argued that students benefit from instruction that matches their individual readiness

levels, interests, and learning profiles. Differentiation essentially means that a teacher is tailoring instruction to meet individual needs by responding to variance among learners in the classroom in a way that is student-centered and most relevant, even to those in poverty or who are experiencing homelessness—in an empathetic way (Bondie, 2019; Kim, 2013, 2020; Park et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2014). In Tomlinson's (2014, 2015) socio-constructivist approach to differentiation where content, process, product, and affect/learning environment is made accessible to all students, teachers can perhaps find ways to make the important modifications they need to effectively instruct homeless students in the classroom. According to Tomlinson (2014), teachers must be aware that students vary in their readiness, interests, and learning profiles in order to facilitate deeper learning through activities that are differentiated but have a clear outcome and still lead toward grade-level mastery for each student. Homeless students vary in academic readiness just as their peers (Bucker et al., 2018; Cowen, 2017; Masten et al., 2015). Tomlinson's (2014) suggestions bolster Moore (2013) and Morgan's (2018) warning that teachers should not completely change the curriculum for homeless students, but rather make it accessible while still holding homeless students in the classroom to the same high expectations. The curriculum "should be responsive to the learning needs of the spectrum of students that make up the classes, with the goal of supporting each student in accessing and succeeding with learning" (Tomlinson, 2015, p. 205). It is a difficult task for teachers serving homeless students who bring so many challenges and often low academic readiness (Masten et al., 2015; Manfra, 2019; Rojas, 2015) because of lack of basic needs (Maslow, 1970). However, some form of differentiation in instruction based on the curriculum must be implemented that considers homeless students in the classroom (Smart, 2018). Classroom teachers are expected to differentiate for special education students or students with disabilities, and gifted students (Tomlinson, 2014), and with inclusive

education becoming an important aspect of education reform (Westwood, 2016), teachers must continue to find ways to be inclusive of homeless students when carrying out curriculum instruction (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018). Educators who truly attempt to differentiate instruction for students adapt curriculum elements, content, process, product, and learning environment according to students' varying abilities and levels of learning (Tomlinson, 2014). The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), which includes provisions for homeless students, is a subtle indication of places where Tomlinson's (2014, 2015) approach to instruction is relevant since it leads to all students learning, engaging with the content, and understanding what is being taught. This study sought to also understand as a sub-question, teachers' perceptions of inclusiveness in the curriculum toward homeless students and whether they feel supported in terms of resources or professional development geared for teaching homeless students. Additionally, since the key part of teachers' lived experiences are connected to instructional decisions toward homeless students and whether they are successful or unsuccessful, some background on differentiation is necessary to include, a multicultural education approach may be applicable (Banks, 1995, 1999; Haghanikar & Hooper, 2021). Homeless students are not often viewed in the classroom the same way as special education students are viewed, but being homeless should be considered as a special case because like students with disabilities, homelessness creates a myriad of problems that affect students academically, socially, and emotionally (Low et al., 2017; Manfra, 2019; Uretsky & Stone, 2016). Foscarinis and McCarthy (2000) warned, "Lack of sensitivity by teachers and school administrators to the needs of homeless children and youth can result in lack of success or poor attendance" (p. 155). That sensitivity has to extend to curriculum and instruction (Bondie, 2019; Kim, 2020). This research study's design, through examination of teachers' experiences in the classroom, hoped to also

inadvertently shed light on teachers' own sensitivity to homeless students in their classroom, specifically through the instructional decisions they make regarding this marginalized group.

Resources for Teachers Serving Homeless Students

Studies dedicated to resources for teachers educating homeless students in the classroom context are lacking in the current literature (Rogers & Shafer, 2018; Smart, 2018). As discussed previously, the role of teachers in homeless education is missing in the body of research (Smart, 2018; Wright et al., 2018; Ryan, 2018), even though teachers deal directly with disadvantaged students each day (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Ingram et al., 2017; Kim, 2020; Wright et al., 2019; Morgan, 2018; Moore, 2013). The two primary in-person contact resources for teachers include the local homeless education liaisons and, if necessary, the McKinney-Vento state coordinator. Under the MVA, every school district must appoint a local homeless education liaison to serve as the key homeless education contact in the district (Aviles, 2017; NCHE, 2016). Teachers can collaborate with their local liaisons to ensure the academic success of the homeless students they teach, and also to properly identify and support the homeless students in their classrooms (Aviles, 2017; Morgan, 2018; NCHE, 2016; Ryan, 2018; Teall, 2018). The NCHE (2016) also suggests that teachers and other instructional support personnel work together to ensure that students experiencing homelessness are aware of all the supports available to them, a suggestion echoed by Ingram et al. (2017). There are also local education agencies that teachers may contact if they need more clarification or help with homeless students and MVA and ESSA regulations (Crook, 2015; Pavlakis & Duffield, 2017). Organizational websites such as NAEH, NCES, NCHE, and NCH are all associated with homelessness and provide a wealth of information for teachers; however, practical classroom suggestions are unfortunately missing. The evidence-based strategies previously mentioned are what the limited literature espouses

(Murphy & Tobin, 2011), yet more research needs to be conducted to examine how well they are working.

While not the direct focus of this study, the rich descriptions of teachers' experiences may shed light on how classroom teachers are applying these practices and resources for teaching homeless students. If some teachers are not using these practices, how this affects their experiences navigating instruction and how they view academic success among homeless students may also be revealed. As posited by Chow et al. (2015), teachers' lived experiences are connected to the types of relationships exhibited in the classroom between them and students, and in this case, homeless students. This concept is reiterated by Ryan (2018) and Griffin et al. (2019). More specifically, Wright et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative research study using semi-structured personal interviews to understand pre-service teachers' "self-reported attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and self-identified skills for working with young homeless children in schools" (p. 298). The findings of this study shed light on how teachers view and understand the homeless students that they teach. Most importantly, this study connected teacher experiences to their pre-existing beliefs and perceptions about homeless students and how being homeless affects these students' experiences in schools and classrooms (Wright et al., 2019). Future research was suggested on how these beliefs translate into pre-service teachers' experiences once they begin full-time careers in the classroom setting (Wright et al., 2019). Teacher strategies and their pre-existing beliefs and perceptions about homeless students are connected and the way they conduct teaching homeless students depends on their own beliefs and understanding of that group (Kim, 2020; Park et al., 2019; Ryan, 2018; Smart, 2018). There is a clear gap in the literature regarding the educator's point of view when instructing marginalized populations such as students affected by homelessness (Ryan, 2018; Smart; Wright et al., 2018; Wright et al.,

2019). Any classroom where a teacher has to serve and teach homeless students is a rigorous, challenging environment (Chow et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Rogers & Shafer, 2018; Smart, 2018), and while the existing literature has many suggestions and strategies to aid teachers, until their voices are heard specifically concerning their experiences and instructional decisions with homeless students, then the picture of student homelessness and all the people it impacts remains incomplete.

Curriculum Considerations for Homeless Students

There are many inequities that the public school education system brings to light, and curriculum is one of them. The curriculum has always held the power to perpetuate and reinforce structured inequality. Apple (2015) noted that the history of curriculum reforms is “driven not only by technical considerations but also profoundly by cultural, political, and economic projects and by ideological and valuative visions of what schools should do and whom they should serve” (p. 1079) and that there is a clear historical relationship between curriculum and cultural and social power. Homeless students are a marginalized group and hold no position of power or representation in the traditional curriculum (Kim, 2020). The existing literature on curriculum reform specific to homeless students in the classroom is limited; however, teachers have been asked to differentiate for students based on mixed ability for over a decade (Bondie, 2019; Tomlinson, 2014, 2015; Westwood, 2016). Homeless students interpret and understand information in different ways than their peers (Cowen, 2017; Griffin et al., 2019; Masten et al., 2015; Moore, 2013). As such, homeless students require a relevant curriculum that “recognizes their needs in the learning process, by offering a safe and respectful environment where they can explore and interpret difficult issues. Some teachers find ways to address those issues with slight alterations to the regular curriculum” (Moore, 2013, p. 11). This echoes Tomlinson (2014, 2015),

who called for a relevant but rigorous curriculum in which teachers meet the needs of all their students who come in with different abilities and points of entry when learning and engaging with the curriculum material. The theoretical basis of this research study speaks to students' abilities being affected by lack of basic needs (Maslow, 1970), and also by systems and spaces beyond the microsystem of the classroom (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Morgan (2018) agreed with Moore (2013), noting that homeless students benefit from the same curriculum available to other students, but that teachers need to find flexible ways to cover curriculum and instruction in order to make modifications and perhaps even exceptions where necessary for those who are homeless but learning in their classrooms. Moore offered the following strategies for teachers seeking to improve curriculum for homeless students:

- Allow a variety of methods and topic options for student assignments.
- Broaden the diversity of families depicted in the books and materials in the classroom to include homeless, foster, and other mobile family and youth situations.
- Consider doing a unit on foster care during May (National Foster Care Month) or on hunger and homelessness in November (National Homeless Youth Awareness Month and National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week). (p. 11)

The key theme in these suggestions is representation and equity of access (Moore, 2013; Smart, 2018; Tomlinson, 2014, 2015), which matters in curriculum (Apple, 2015; Bondie, 2019).

Homeless students need to feel that they are represented in the curriculum to which they are exposed so that they do not feel excluded or stigmatized, or worse, invisible (Juchniewicz, 2012; Kim, 2013, 2020; Klitzman, 2018; Morgan, 2018; Underwood, 2016). The existing literature shows that classroom teachers are well-positioned to observe and respond to student needs in the

classroom in various ways, but definitely through instruction. This study sought to understand teachers' perceptions of curriculum accommodations and instructional supports for homeless students as described in the research sub-questions, and makes no assumptions about what these teachers in low-income schools will reveal about curriculum and homeless students in the classroom.

Summary

A significant gap in the literature exists as it relates to the present study's topic. The literature review provided an overview of the McKinney-Vento Act and associated federal legislations toward student homelessness. It also served as a primary overview of the literature that exists on the topic of student homelessness in relation to the challenges these students bring to the classroom setting, teacher perceptions of homeless students, suggested strategies and resources for teachers working with homeless students, and curriculum considerations for homeless students. Each sub-section of the related literature review was connected to the present study and emphasized the necessity for more research on the experiences of classroom teachers and the instructional decisions they make toward homeless students specifically. While researchers have explored challenges homeless students face in schools (Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2019; Labella et al., 2019; Manfra, 2019), discussed suggested strategies for teachers serving homeless students (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Rogers & Shafer, 2018), and considered the perceptions of educators toward homeless students (Chow et al., 2015; Havlik et al., 2020; Kim, 2013, 2020; Moore, 2013; Park et al., 2019; Smart, 2018; Wright et al., 2018), the purpose of conducting the present study was to begin to fill the gap revealed in the related literature by focusing on the lived experiences of classroom teachers serving homeless students. This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study aims to give

a voice to educators serving homeless students by developing a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across two low-income public middle schools in NYC. It also seeks to add to the limited literature on the curriculum aspect of homeless education by examining classroom teachers' perceptions of curriculum inclusiveness and administrative support.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across two low-income public middle schools in NYC. In this research, classroom teachers included educators serving students primarily in the classroom context, either as a whole class in a classroom, in small groups in a resource room, or one-on-one in a regular classroom. Based on federal legislation, homelessness is defined as the state of lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence due to loss of housing or economic hardship (MVA, 1987, 2015). However, homeless students include a variety of possibilities as described and defined by Uretsky and Stone (2016) per the general MVA definition. Due to the nature of student homelessness, the theories that guided interpretations in this study are Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory; both of which help to show that homelessness affects students' levels of motivation (Cowen, 2017; Cutuli & Herbers, 2019), resilience (Masten et al., 2015; Oppong Asante, 2019), abilities (Griffin et al., 2019; Underwood, 2016), engagement (Fantuzzo et al., 2013), achievement (Manfra, 2019). These theories also provided an understanding that the microsystem of public schools and specifically classrooms play a role in shaping these students (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018), even as it makes classroom teachers' jobs more challenging (Chow et al., 2015; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). The participants provided lived experience written descriptions based on a prompt (Appendix E), agreed to personal interviews as a means of primary data collection for the study, and some provided any artifacts that spoke to their experiences as well. Data collected was then reviewed and analyzed to address the central and sub-research

questions. Included in this chapter are descriptions of this transcendental phenomenological study's design, the research questions, the setting, the participants, the procedures, and my role as the researcher. I also provide and discuss the guiding questions for the interviews with the classroom teachers, specific questions that were used in the interview, and the lived experience writing prompt that was used. The process of eliminating any personal bias on my part using Moustakas' (1994) epoché or bracketing method, establishing trustworthiness to increase the study's potential credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, as well as ethical considerations for the study and participants are also discussed.

Design

A phenomenological study was used for this qualitative research. In particular, a transcendental phenomenological study design was used (Moustakas, 1994; Yee, 2018). Creswell (2018) noted that qualitative research collects and analyzes non-numerical data to explore and ultimately understand particular concepts, opinions, or experiences; additionally, Creswell and Poth (2018) posited that qualitative methods are excellent choices for those seeking to explore or focus on a social or human problem. The problem is that teachers in low-income NYC public schools have an increasing number of homeless students (NCES, 2017) entering their classrooms that results in additional challenges for these educators who serve these students closely in the classroom setting where there is a lack of evidence-based practices. Therefore, it made sense for this study to be conducted qualitatively, especially since current research neglects the experiences of these teachers (Smart, 2018; Wright et al., 2018). As such, this phenomenological study sought to give these educators a voice by developing a composite description (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) of their lived experiences. This method was applicable here because phenomenology investigates and describes phenomena or concepts as they are

consciously experienced (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Yee, 2018). A phenomenological design was best for this study since it was an interpretive process that allowed me as the researcher to examine a common meaning among the lived experiences of several individuals in a heterogeneous group through collecting stories about the concept or phenomenon and then examining them for common themes among the lived experiences of several individuals (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The goal of a phenomenological research study is usually to develop a kind of composite description of the experiences faced by the heterogeneous group, and this may be accomplished through a hermeneutical, epoché or bracketing, or transcendental phenomenology study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Notably, transcendental phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl based on a philosophical approach focused on examining and seeking to understand human experience by transcending surface interpretation in order to uncover the essence of the social phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). This was the intent of this research study's design when examining the experiences and instructional decisions of these classroom teachers with and toward homeless students. Furthermore, according to Moustakas, a transcendental phenomenological approach is ideal for studying small groups and this study's design seeks to acquire and analyze data from a small group of teachers who generally experience the same kind of event (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yee, 2018) with homeless students in their classrooms. A transcendental phenomenological approach was the best fit for this study because I wanted to understand how at least 12-15 teachers across two low-income schools described their experiences in the classroom with homeless students and how they perceived the way they fared in making instructional decisions in the classroom specifically for this marginalized group. This method worked because the nature of the study meant that the participants had to be carefully selected so that their perspectives

could then be examined as themes to determine the common meaning they ascribed to the problem or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Furthermore, a transcendental phenomenological approach allows for everything to be “perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). As a human science (van Manen, 1997), transcendental phenomenology attempts to grasp the essential nature of the social world, unencumbered by assumptions, prejudices, and scientific theories (Moustakas, 1994), which clarifies the assumptions upon which all human understandings are grounded (van Manen, 1997). Therefore, as the human instrument in transcendental phenomenology, the researcher sets aside all prejudgments about the phenomenon as much as possible and uses systematic procedures in rigorous data analysis steps as described by Moustakas (1994) in his transcendental-phenomenological reduction design process to achieve a textural-structural synthesis about the teachers’ experiences. Synthesis allows the researcher to reach an accurate, convincing, and blended portrayal of the phenomenon or concept (Moustakas, 1994). As such, this study’s design allowed me as the researcher to collect and analyze personal interviews, written lived experience descriptions, and use inductive or deductive logic to make inferences about teachers’ experiences with the phenomenon. A transcendental phenomenology research design focused the study around the rich, textural, and structural descriptions from participants in a way that quantitative methods could not (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). After all, transcendental phenomenology is the “guiding framework for conducting human science research” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).

Additionally, there was a personal interest in knowing how teachers would describe their experiences with support or non-support in the school curriculum and other professional development resources to help them adapt to the way homeless students learn and function, and

if the teachers perceived their experiences with these students as either positive and successful or negative and unsuccessful. Using a phenomenological research design allowed for participants to describe their perceptions of their own experiences (Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). With this design, I was able to examine a common object of human experience faced by these classroom teachers after setting aside my own biases and judgments as a teacher in a low-income zone school, focusing solely on the description of the experiences of the participants rather than on my experiences as the researcher (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). As such, the approach involved collecting data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) as best as possible during a pandemic, and maintaining a clear establishment of the voices of the participants in the final report (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, the reflexivity of the researcher (Yee, 2018), deep descriptions to support interpretations of the problem, and a clear indication of how it contributed to existing research literature, as well as how it could create change (Creswell, 2013; 2018) were also important aspects of this approach. Ultimately, this design was the most useful and the best choice for describing the phenomenon using the participants' experiences, perceptions, and voices, which in this case were those of NYC teachers dealing with homeless students in the classroom context.

Research Questions

Central Question

What are the experiences of NYC public middle school teachers with homeless students in their classrooms?

Sub-Questions

Sub-question 1. How do educators across two low-income public middle schools in NYC describe the instructional decisions they make in the classroom context when teaching and promoting academic resilience among students experiencing homelessness?

Sub-question 2. How do educators across two low-income NYC public middle schools describe their perceptions of the degree of inclusiveness in the curriculum in terms of instructional support accommodations, differentiation, or guidance when teaching homeless students?

Setting

This study was conducted at two sites, which were individual low-income, high-poverty public schools located in Saxon county in New York City: Henry C. Cruz Middle School (HCCMS), and Lowe Diego Middle School (LDMS). The county name is a pseudonym for an actual county in New York City, and the school names are pseudonyms for actual low-income public middle schools as well. The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) consists of 32 community school districts, and there are six school districts in Saxon county, with over 332 public schools run by the NYCDOE. HCCMS and LDMS are located in District A and District B. Low-income public schools in NYC were the prime selection for this study because they have a high number of homeless students, with the last academic year seeing over 114,000 enrolled public school students experiencing homelessness (NYSED, 2019). According to ICPH (2019), over 220,000 NYC public school students have experienced poverty since the 2010-2011 school year, and the number continues to increase. These particular school sites were selected based on available data about student homelessness in the Saxon County school districts. Teachers in District A and District B were selected because schools in these districts have high numbers of homeless students, are located in areas that have many public housing units and

homeless shelters and programs, and primarily serve low-income students and families (NCES, 2017), many of whom live in temporary housing or shelters, or are otherwise legally homeless as defined by the MVA (1987, 2015). In the 2015-2016 school year, over 4,300 homeless students attended school in District A, and over 1,800 students lived in shelters; District B has the highest percentage of students homeless across all NYCDOE school districts (ICPH, 2019). HCCMS and LDMS are middle schools that are both in areas with a high number of family shelter units, including hotels and cluster sites that have since been transformed into temporary housing, and teachers in these schools have as many as one in every five students who are homeless in their classrooms (ICPH, 2019). Furthermore, in each school, over 90% of students are eligible for free lunch, which according to the NCES (2017) means each school is classified as an extremely low-income or high-poverty school. Therefore, the rationale for their use in this study was clear, as they related to the research questions and increased the likelihood of teachers having experiences with homeless students in the classroom context.

Participants

After IRB approval, I sought to recruit participants. When selecting the participants for this study, I used purposeful sampling, which involved choosing both the site and the participants for data collection based on how they could inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was appropriate for my transcendental phenomenology approach because purposeful sampling is best used in qualitative research designs where participants must be chosen based on identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2013). I wanted to ensure that participants were especially knowledgeable about and had experienced the phenomenon of interest and could therefore speak to their conscious lived experiences (Creswell

& Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Each participant selected was a classroom teacher in a low-income public middle school who was currently teaching enrolled students who they undoubtedly knew were experiencing homelessness.

The study included 12 classroom teachers employed across low-income, high-poverty NYCDOE public schools in District A and B in Saxon County. Creswell (1998) recommended between five to 25 participants for phenomenological studies, but later noted that phenomenological studies have been conducted with as few as one participant or up to 325 participants (Creswell, 2013). Even later, Creswell (2018) suggested phenomenological studies include anywhere between three to 10 participants depending on the target population. However, due to the nature of this study, it was best to keep the participant number on the lower end of the spectrum because participants were sampled deliberately, and in qualitative studies, a small sample size is usually enough to provide a full understanding of the phenomenon under study (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). As per Liberty University requirements, a minimum of 12 participants is ideal. This was important to consider, especially since the essential criterion for selecting research participants was ensuring that each participant had experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2018) and was made fully aware of their students' housing status by the schools in which they were employed. Maximum variation purposive sampling (Creswell, 2018) was used to ensure that the participants represented a heterogeneous and diverse group, which allowed me to capture a wide range of perspectives related to the phenomenon under study. Although the ideal number of participants expected was 12-15, maximum variation purposive sampling continued until data saturation was reached. Since the essence of the phenomenon was increasingly clear from the textural and structural descriptions from the 12 participants, additional participants were not recruited since the required number of

participants depended on when saturation was reached (Creswell, 2018). I did not anticipate too large a sample because as Mason (2010) noted, “Qualitative samples must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time if the sample is too large data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous” (p. 2).

Nevertheless, I conducted personal open-ended interviews with each participant, all of whom were asked to select pseudonyms. There were no participants under the age of 18 years old, and all teachers in the study were full-time employees in school districts A or B. Participants were both male and female, and of varying self-identified ethnicities.

To begin with, I contacted each school district’s superintendent and also the principals of both schools wherever the superintendents deemed necessary in order to gain permission (see Appendix M) to contact the teaching employees of HCCMS and LDMS (See Appendix C). After this, and only after obtaining IRB approval to begin recruiting participants and collecting data, I sent out a recruitment email to teaching-based employees in both schools and districts with an invitation to participate in the study. In the email (Appendix A), I explained that I had permission from the district superintendents to conduct research within the school districts related to teacher experiences educating homeless students in the public school classroom. The email had an example of the study’s stamped consent form (See Appendix D), the main details of the study, compensation details, my contact information, and a link to the initial Demographic Screening Questions (Appendix J). I also stressed that participants must meet the requirements outlined in the consent form. Attached to the email, there was also a recruitment flyer (Appendix A) that recipients were asked to forward to any other potential teaching-based employees that they thought would be interested in participating in the study. These recruitment flyers were also printed and posted in various low-income school neighborhoods with permission from the

principals, and other places of business or education. They were also shared by principals, friends, family, and others who posted it on their social media to get the information out to educators across the two districts.

Upon hearing back and reviewing to ensure prospective participants met the criteria, I contacted all eligible participants via their preferred email with a short description of the study, a reminder to sign the IRB-approved stamped informed consent form electronically, and a short demographic survey (Appendix K). Notable, all responses from participants to these demographic forms were kept confidential, and no one else had access to them but me. This second demographic survey (Appendix K) was for confirmed and eligible participants only and was used to gather information on participant age, gender, self-identified ethnicity, years teaching in a low-income school, and so on. Essentially, it identified brief but relevant elements of the participants' backgrounds in order to inform the interpretive process (Creswell, 2018). This demographic survey was filled out by participants prior to the interviews via an emailed link to an electronic Microsoft survey form. As per Moustakas' (1994) and Creswell's (2018) recommendations, participants must be able to report specific experiences within the phenomenon and must be willing to participate in a one-and-a-half-hour maximum length interview. I made sure to discuss specific details with participants to ascertain that they had a clear understanding of the expectations for the study, such as their willingness to express their thoughts about their experiences only with the homeless students in their classrooms, both verbally in interviews and once in writing in response to a prompt. Participants were not allowed to use any students' real names in their writing prompts and were directed to use a pseudonym for any students mentioned in their writing (See Appendix E).

Procedures

None of the data collection for this study was carried out until I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix F). To begin with, permission was obtained from district superintendents, as well as the principals of HCCMS and LDMS if deemed necessary, so that I could invite school employees to participate in the research. As noted previously, after a mass email with information about the study with an attached screening survey link, recruitment flyer, and consent form was sent and teachers responded with interest in participating, I selected up to 15 classroom teachers who best fit the criteria listed in the consent form and who all have experiences educating homeless students in the public school classroom. More than 12 were selected initially to account for participants who might later change their minds. All prospective participants were then contacted via email or phone (depending on the preferred contact method they listed on the screening survey) with a more detailed description of the study and an IRB stamped copy of the informed consent form reminding them that they could change their mind at any point, in order to give participants enough time to make a final decision. I ultimately confirmed several classroom teachers who volunteered to participate across both schools and districts, for the desired total of 12 participants, although this number was subject to change. I met with the participants for in-depth interviews in a setting familiar to them (Creswell, 2018) depending on their availability; some interviews were done virtually due to COVID-19 protocols and participant requests and concerns about safety. I also gathered information from the ICPH reports on the way that each school district sought to implement the McKinney-Vento Act and support their enrolled homeless students in order to have background information to guide my meetings with the teachers serving these students.

When conducting data collection, I used the transcendental phenomenological approach described by Moustakas (1994) and used epoché to bracket out any personal bias I have as a

teacher who works with at-risk student populations. For example, to help me set aside my personal bias and experiences, I made sure not to engage in conversations with the participants about my own experiences as an NYC public school teacher in a low-income school that also serves many homeless students. Instead, I maintained objectivity, and focused only on allowing their voices to be heard in their own words during the interviews (Moustakas, 1994; Yee, 2018). I also did not add, take away, or make any assumptions about any of the participants' thoughts when interpreting their responses to the interview questions, or to the open-ended writing prompt about an experience they could recall with a homeless student and related instruction in the classroom context. Instead, I always sought clarification directly from the participants.

Notably, after IRB approval, I had the interview questions reviewed by an expert methodologist to ascertain their relevance to the research central and sub-questions. In addition, asked my questions to a classroom teacher who fit the criteria and met the same criteria as potential participants (but who did participate in the study) in order to ensure that the questions were understandable for potential participants. This allowed me to obtain feedback on how to clarify so that the questions were clear and left no room for errors or misinterpretation by the interviewees. When that was completed, data collection via interviews initially included asking broad questions of the participants about what they have experienced related to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). I then moved from broad questions to more specific ones, as can be inferred from the central research and sub-questions in this study. The central and guiding research questions in this study complied with this specification. With the permission of the participants indicated on each informed consent form, I recorded interviews using a digital recorder if in-person, or an online recording feature if conducted virtually via Zoom. I then transcribed all the interviews and subsequently analyzed them (Creswell 2013, 2018; Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas,

1994). It is important to note that per Moustakas (1994), I analyzed data during the data collection phase as well. I made sure to keep field notes during the interviews and also wrote post-interview reflections after each interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants' written lived experience descriptions or paragraphs were treated as a separate data source during the collection process; participants were asked to describe (using pseudonyms) a key experience they had with a homeless student when teaching inside their classroom; they were reminded to not include any identifying factors when describing their experiences with students. Additionally, as another supplementary data source, information was collected on each school's approach to inclusive education for homeless students to juxtapose this information against teachers' responses in the interviews regarding research sub-questions 2 and 3. The combination of these methods and data sources in the collection phase helped to ensure that saturation during data collection was reached (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This process ultimately helped me to develop a clear understanding of the phenomenon in question and to better ascertain themes and patterns in participant experiences and descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1999; Yee, 2018) in the data analysis phase subsequently described.

The Researcher's Role

As the human instrument in this study, I had to first reflect on the personal meaning and significance of my research topic (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, my role included obtaining all required permissions to conduct the study, selecting the location in which the research was conducted, the two NYCDOE school sites chosen, and determining whether volunteer participants fit the criteria in terms of their experience with the phenomenon under study and other inclusion and exclusion criteria. More importantly, I had to consider my own reflexivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2017) in acknowledging the intersecting relationships between the

participants and myself so that I did not make decisions that biased the study. It was up to me as the primary investigator to make certain decisions about the study when it came to choosing participants, data collection, and data analysis, so reflexivity was a primary concern for me. Bias was minimized through the process of *epoché* or bracketing, and the fact that I was not personally involved with any of the participants in the study, nor was I serving in a classroom with, or acting as instructional mentor or coach to any of the participants in the study. In short, I held no kind of professional power relationship over any of the study participants, and they all volunteered of their own volition. I am employed in District A, but there was no existence of any close or personal relationship between myself and the participants across the two districts. During data collection, I chose to go into the familiar settings of the participants or to instead conduct interviews via Zoom or other virtual platforms if participants were unable to interview in person due to the ongoing global pandemic. Due to the ongoing pandemic, all 12 participants opted to participate in virtual interviews where they were in familiar settings such as their home, the library, or their schools.

As the investigator, I tried to make each participant as comfortable as possible during the interview process. Additionally, prior to beginning the interviews, I thanked participants and made sure to clarify the study and my intentions, answered any lingering questions they might have had, explained thoroughly the study's process to each participant, and explained that I would be debriefing with them after the study is completed. I also explained the need for informed consent forms and the intended purpose and use of the information that would be collected, as well as assuring participants that no personally identifying information will be used or published during or after the study's completion. In my role as a human instrument, it was also my job to create the personal interview questions (See Appendix G) for all the participants,

including developing the question for the writing prompt regarding an experience that stood out to them in relation to the phenomenon. Admittedly, I did have a few assumptions for the study, and for that reason, I chose not to conduct the study with any classroom teachers that I have personally taught with or shared information with about the few students that I taught who experienced homelessness in the past. This was made easier by the fact that all the students I had taught who experienced homelessness graduated more than two years ago. Nevertheless, Creswell and Poth (2018) caution that sharing one's own experiences with the research participants may impact the data, so this step was very important for me in order to minimize bias. Consequently, I set aside these personal experiences and bracketed them in an essay in my reflexive journal (Moustakas, 1994) as they related to my experiences with those past students in the classroom setting.

I conducted data collection using transcendental phenomenology methods (Moustakas, 1994) to increase credibility and validity. To ensure additional accuracy before conducting the research, I contacted the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH), which is a New York-based organization that inadvertently served as a content specialist source for this research. The ICPH has collected numerous data and reports on student homelessness in the districts where both study sites are located. I contacted the liaison at ICPH via email, explained that I was doing research, attached the IRB approval letter as proof, and ensured the liaison that I would be using pseudonyms for the school sites or districts. My request to the ICPH was for the most up-to-date information available pertaining to student homelessness data across Districts A and B. I received a prompt response in less than 24 hours, and the liaison also confirmed that they did have the most up-to-date supplemental information for specific city councils and school districts that I inquired about as well. ICPH researches trending topics in MVA implementation

and student or family homelessness in NYC; up-to-date reports from them helped provide context and relevant information for this study. Finally, it was also my job as the human instrument in this research to ensure that ethical considerations were upheld at all times during the study and that participant confidentiality (Appendix H) was protected at all times.

Data Collection

After obtaining IRB approval and permission from the school districts' superintendents and the principals, teaching-based employees across both schools in Districts A and B were emailed in order to pool potential participants. In selecting participants who met the criteria, I used purposeful sampling to select the 12+ classroom teachers to interview for this study. All participants were fully-informed volunteers. As a method of obtaining consent for study participation, the purpose and its intended use were explained to each participant verbally and in writing, and any additional questions they had were answered. Furthermore, they were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation at any time. Overall, I used various forms of data collection: a survey with some demographic questions; preliminary document review, which focused on a review of data from the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH) on the selected school districts and information on the way that each school seeks to implement MVA (1987; 2015) and implement inclusive education methods to support their enrolled homeless students; personal interviews conducted in a setting indigenous to the participants; the reflection responses to the writing prompts completed by the participants to supplement primary data sources; field notes from the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018); and any potential artifacts that some participants provided to inform the study. Using these procedures, I was able to properly relay what all 12 classroom teachers experienced

with the phenomenon, which then allowed me to implement and achieve triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Document Review: Preliminary Data

The collection of documents served only as preliminary informative data and was not analyzed during data analysis since they were not meant to represent the lived experiences of the participants, but rather to inform the environment or exosystem and subsequent microsystems they work in and navigate (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, to further understand what classroom teachers in these specific schools and sites confront and why there is such a high number of homeless students attending the schools in which they are employed, I used information in the form of ICPH reports on the two school districts as well as the areas surrounding the schools in which the participants teach. ICPH is a New York City-based policy research organization focused on family and child homelessness. This organization has reports on District A and District B and its schools concerning student homelessness, low-income housing, and temporary housing or shelters in the areas. Through a review of these documents, I was able to obtain a better understanding of the types of students these classroom teachers are exposed to in the public schools in each area. Furthermore, the various forms of data collection described, including these documents, as well as information on how the schools implement the MVA allowed for triangulation to be achieved in order to validate data. According to Creswell (2013, 2018), document analysis includes analyzing public documents such as memos, minutes, records, and archival materials. The reports and records from ICPH that I reviewed regarding schools and districts and implementation of MVA fit the criteria.

Semi-structured Personal Interviews

The primary methods of data collection were semi-structured, in-depth, one-to-one, audio-recorded personal interviews. According to Creswell (2018), appropriate interviews for qualitative studies happen face-to-face or via telephone interviews with participants. The special circumstances created by the pandemic meant that interviews happened remotely. These interviews included semi-structured, unstructured, and open-ended, general, and focused questions to understand the central phenomenon in the study by eliciting the participants' views and opinions (Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) noted that interviews generally attempt to answer two broad questions: What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? and What contexts or situations have typically influenced your experiences of the phenomenon? (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). All the questions in the interviews were meaningful and substantial in answering the overarching research questions. I intended for each interview process to last no more than 1.5 hours, with the additional half-hour being allotted to the pre- and post-interview process; this was a good decision because no single interview went over 90 minutes and most were 60 minutes. At the beginning of the interview, I disclosed to each participant that I would be audio recording the interview solely for the purpose of later transcribing the interview verbatim for ease of analysis, and that recorded interviews would not be shared with their respective administrators or district superintendents in any way. Consent forms were reviewed again briefly before beginning any of the interviews. Because of the structure of the open-ended and focused questions, the answers for all of the questions were intended to directly correspond with the research questions as they related to each NYC classroom teacher's experiences and instructional decisions in the middle school classroom toward homeless students. Questions were adjusted during the actual interviews whenever necessary to clarify (Creswell, 2018), and follow-up questions were asked only based on

participants' responses as per Moustakas' (1994) note that only what people consciously experience is known for certain by them and that the researcher should perceive everything freshly and from the perspective of the participants. Nevertheless, each of the following questions was developed in support of the central research question and research sub-questions for this study:

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we have never met, and include how long you have been teaching in NYC public schools, the grade levels and subjects you currently teach, and how you first became involved in teaching, and any other information you would like to share.
2. How would you describe the main needs of the homeless students you encounter (whose situation you are aware of) in your classroom (both in-person and/or virtually)? Please be specific about these needs.
3. How would you describe the microsystem of your school and classroom as a place that considers the needs of homeless students both before and during the pandemic?
4. In your role as a classroom teacher, what behaviors or academic outcomes do you most often associate student homelessness with, and why? (i.e., if a student is homeless, then they most likely also are/have _____).
5. How would you describe the primary result teaching homeless students has had on your perception of teaching in low-income NYC schools and on your pedagogical practices in the classroom?
6. What types of experiences have you had in the classroom (both virtually and/or in-person) with students who experienced homelessness?

7. What would you say is the most challenging part of being a teacher who serves homeless students?
8. What would you say is the most rewarding part of being a teacher who serves homeless students?
9. What do you think your students who are homeless struggle with the most in your virtual or in-person (brick-and-mortar) classroom?
10. How do you respond to the struggles these students face and what they need? (i.e., engagement, learning, focus, on-task behaviors, etc.)
11. Describe the instructional strategies, if any, that you have tried in order to promote resilience or engagement among students experiencing homelessness whom you find do struggle with focus or keeping up academically with the rest of their non-homeless peers? (Discuss what worked, and what did not).
12. Describe any moments if/where you had to make difficult instructional decisions regarding students in your classroom who are homeless.
13. Describe, if any, the special considerations you give to homeless students related to due dates, completion of work before and even during the pandemic, grading, work submitted, attendance, disciplinary actions, etc. based on their needs.
14. Describe the current curriculum used for your content area in relation to instructional stipulations or modifications for classroom teachers dealing with homeless students.
15. Describe any services or programs in place at your school (that you are aware of) that cater to students facing housing insecurity/homelessness.
16. Describe any flexibility you are allowed in curriculum and/or instruction when it comes to serving/teaching homeless students in your classroom (virtual or in-person).

17. Please tell me your thoughts on whether or not you feel your experiences with homeless students in the classroom would be different if you were not in a low-income/high-poverty NYC public school?
18. Finally, is there anything else you would like to add about your experience in the classroom with homeless students?

Question one was a non-threatening question that served as an icebreaker since the first question in personal interviews should be designed to get the interviewee talking as discussed in interview protocols by Creswell (2018) and McGrath et al. (2018). Both questions one and two served to set the tone of the interview, and helped in building rapport between the interviewer and the participant (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015); however, question two also began the transition into the focus of the study by asking participants for their general view of student homelessness in New York City and what they thought these students lacked (Maslow, 1970). Questions two, three, and four all helped to begin to frame the focus of the study, using the McGrath et al. (2018) tip to familiarize the participant with the subject of the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It also helped me as the researcher to understand how participants viewed homeless students in their classrooms and the basic needs (Maslow, 1970) that they recognized in these students; this also showed what teachers knew about the socio-economic situations and status of the students in their classrooms. Mizerek and Hinz (2004) suggested that sometimes students are directly referred to in their school as homeless students (Crook, 2015), and it is made clear to teachers that a student is homeless, but other times, educators have to learn on their own if students are homeless (Ingram et al., 2017; Underwood, 2016). Therefore, questions two, three, and four's purpose was also to understand how the participants described student homelessness from their perspective, and what they associated students who are homeless with

based on their experiences or observations of these students in the classroom setting (Lafavor et al., 2020; Moore, 2013; Wright et al., 2018). It also set the tone because educators who are aware that they have homeless students or students facing insecurity are more prone to make proactive instructional decisions that benefit these students but also mitigate negative outcomes or experiences (Canfield et al., 2016; Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018). This line of questioning made sense because Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended the researcher begin from a few broad questions, and then transition into an exploration of the phenomenon under study as soon as possible. Similarly, McGrath et al. (2018) noted that interviews should not be conceived as informal chats with interviewees and to remember that they are data collection instruments; therefore, extensive getting to know you questions after initial icebreaker questions for comfortability are not recommended (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Questions five through ten directly related to the central research question of the study and informed sub-question one as well. The purpose of these questions was to understand how the participant described his or her experiences and instructional decisions with and toward homeless students in the classroom, and to highlight the participants' voices. These questions were crucial to developing a composite description of the phenomenon under study, as they addressed the gap in the literature that this research focused on, and because the literature suggests that teachers play an important role in the lives of these students (Chow et al., 2015; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Turner, 2018; Wright et al., 2018). The voice of NYC classroom teachers in low-income public middle schools in high-poverty districts had yet to be heard related to their experiences with and instructional decisions specifically toward homeless students inside the classroom, and their perceptions of teaching in these schools with a high number of homeless students (Question 5). Both Creswell (2018) and McGrath et al. (2018)

noted that qualitative research interviews are preferable when the researcher strives to understand the interviewee's subjective perspective of a phenomenon rather than generating generalizable understandings of large groups of people (Moustakas, 1994). Questions seven and eight, for example, allowed the participant to describe his or her personal experiences in the classroom with students experiencing homelessness, how they responded to these students, and what they as teachers found most challenging or perhaps even most rewarding. These questions were inspired by research conducted by Chow et al. (2015) and call for more research on teacher experiences with homeless students (Smart, 2018). By having classroom teachers in these public schools tell their first-hand experiences, educational leaders in the NYCDOE and perhaps nationwide will begin to understand how to best support these teachers, and gain insight into strategies that do or do not work (Hallett & Skrla, 2017; Ingram et al., 2017; Smart, 2018; Teall, 2018). This set of questions is what Bolderston (2012) and McGrath et al. (2018) call the main interview questions. The gap in the literature is what guided the content of these questions, in addition to the existing literature on teacher perceptions (Kim, 2013, 2020; Park et al., 2019) of student homelessness and prior research on the experiences of homeless students (Fry et al., 2017).

Questions nine through 14 were also relevant to sub-questions one and two of the research questions. They were especially significant because a large part of the MVA (1987, 2015) requires that schools be responsible for tracking and improving the academic success of homeless students and enabling them to stay on track (Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018); however, it neglects to recognize that teachers become the primary individuals responsible for these students' academic success (Clemens et al., 2017; Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018; Wright et al., 2019). These questions are also important because of the ESSA (2015), which required more be

done to ensure the success of enrolled homeless students. These interview questions also addressed a key part of the gap in the literature, which failed to include the experiences and instructional decisions of NYC teachers in low-income public schools who are constantly dealing with this vulnerable and marginalized group of students in their classrooms (Teall, 2018). The questions were framed so that each response from each participant was subjective (McGrath et al., 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Yee, 2018), which allowed them to reflect through another lens about their own decisions and further examine why their experiences with homeless students in the classroom were as they previously described in response to the earlier questions.

Questions 15 and 16 spoke to teachers' knowledge of resources provided by their schools for homeless students, and their perceptions of instructional flexibility in the curriculum when serving these students in particular. Question 17 was a single planned follow-up question or probe that was non-invasive and wound down the interview since it was an opinion question and participants were free to make comments without judgment (Bolderston, 2012). Question 18 was a useful final question that allowed the participant to add to existing responses (Bolderston, 2012; Creswell, 2018) and serves as the closing question (Patton, 2015). Field notes were kept for all interviews in order to document contextual information (Phillipi & Lauderdale, 2017). Notably, to allow for the reality that teachers' lived experiences serving and teaching homeless students in the classroom might be both virtual and in-person in brick and mortar settings, some of the questions were meant to reflect that reality brought on by the pandemic (Iwundu et al., 2021; Gewirtz O'Brien et al., 2021; Sulkowski & Michael, 2020; Walker, 2020). Finally, for Giorgi (1985), the operative word in phenomenological research is describe, and most of the interview questions asked participants to do just that.

Lived Experience Descriptions

According to Vagle (2014), lived experiences are the ways in which people live in relation to a phenomenon, and as such, are of excellent use in phenomenological research. After the interview, using pseudonyms, each participant completed a focused lived experience description reflection writing response using the same prompt (Appendix E):

Think about an experience with a specific student whom you knew was homeless, and was enrolled in your class. Describe your experience and relationship with the student in the classroom, your perception of their well-being, their engagement in class, their attendance, or anything else that stood out to you about your relationship, experience, and instructional decisions toward this student. For example, did you make any special accommodations or provide any individualized instruction? Be as detailed as possible and contribute as much information as you feel comfortable sharing. All information will be kept confidential and a pseudonym will be used in place of your name and the name of your school and school district.

Participants were notified that they would be emailed the prompt immediately after the interview, so that they could have enough time to reflect on their experiences and instructional practices. Once I stopped recording each interview, I explained the prompt and emailed it immediately to participants once they confirmed that they understood the expectations. They were asked to submit their typed response electronically and were reminded to use their assigned pseudonyms. Phenomenological research deals with the lived experience of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994); as such, having participants write a response to this prompt was necessary to supplement the primary data source, which was the interview. The lived experience prompt allowed participants an opportunity to hone in on a specific experience with a homeless student in the classroom context, and relay their experiences unencumbered by the

structure of the personal interview questions. Additionally, the prompt for the lived experience description was important to the central research question in this study.

Artifacts

This supplementary data source was not something that I anticipated all participants being able to provide. As per Smart (2018), I invited participants to provide any other form of data they deemed relevant in order to aid in my understanding of their lived experiences and instructional decisions toward homeless students. Examples provided by some participants included essays written by homeless students (with no identifying information), posters, lesson plans, unit plans, after-school program posters, and curriculum examples. Though limited, this data source provided another opportunity for me to view the participants' lived experiences of teaching students affected by homelessness (Smart, 2018).

Data Analysis

As mentioned previously, documents from ICPH were preliminary data and were not analyzed here since they did not reflect participants' lived experiences. However, aside from the preliminary data sources, the study included three forms of data collection in order to achieve triangulation. Before collecting data and conducting any form of analysis, I used bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) in order to identify and remove existing bias about the phenomenon being studied since I had some of my own ideas about what it was like to teach homeless students. To do so, I completed a bracketing essay (Appendix L) in which I acknowledged my assumptions and understandings of teaching homeless students. Bracketing first helped to demonstrate and ensure the validation of the data collection and subsequent data analysis process in this study (Moustakas, 1994). I also made sure to consistently neutralize my personal biases and preconceptions throughout the research process. A crucial part of this meant

that I used some of the steps from Moustakas' (1994) method of data analysis, as well as Giorgi's (1985) method in order to synthesize the three forms of data to determine a valid and trustworthy set of results in my findings section; coding and theming methods from Saldaña (2015) were also be used. As soon as possible during the data collection process, I began data analysis simultaneously (Moustakas, 1994) in the form of field notes, where I applied the Huberman and Miles (1994) method of jotting down ideas in the margins or a notebook. The Giorgi (1985) method, which includes re-reading and re-reading transcribed interviews and listening to the recorded interviews to get a better sense of the participant's experience was also used; this method is also described thoroughly in Moustakas' (1994) approach. Methods that were used in preliminary data analysis also included transcribing individual interviews verbatim, member-checking for accuracy, and using three forms of data analysis and triangulation to ensure that data saturation was reached. More specifically, I used phenomenological coding and theming. Data was organized from the transcribed interviews and field notes into themes in order to get a general sense of the whole statement, which eventually led me to identify the development of significant statements and clusters of meaning to later compose a complete description of the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This process included highlighting significant statements, or what Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2018) call horizontalization. In combining the three data sources, I was able to interpret the data better (Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Stage 1

The first stage began with listing and preliminary grouping (Moustakas, 1994) using open coding, which according to Creswell (2013) is "coding the data for its major categories of information" (p. 86). I then used narrative and axial coding wherever necessary; axial coding

helped me to determine which codes from the transcribed interviews and notes were more dominant or less dominant in order to organize everything thematically in the next stage. This also involved examining the texts to extract words, phrases, or sentences that stood out as describing the experience or phenomenon under study (Saldaña, 2015). This reflects horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). The coded data showing the meaning units were placed into larger units or categories that were based on themes until saturation was achieved. This was done for the interviews with field notes and also for the lived experience written responses.

Stage 2

This initial step allowed me to then enter the second stage of clustering and labeling themes (Moustakas, 1994). This involved identifying major themes across the transcribed interviews and the lived experience descriptions written and submitted by the participants. This is called theming the data, and Saldaña (2015) noted, "A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent [patterned] experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature of the basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (pp. 175–176). Qualitative researchers must identify themes to get a holistic view of the data through "patterns of description that repetitively recur as important aspects of a participant's description of his or her experience" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 35). During this stage, I used my field notes and preliminary information from ICPH documents meticulously when helping to identify and interpret emergent themes.

Stage 3

The third and final stage of data analysis involved several steps, such as searching for clusters and unique relationships within the emergent themes found from theming the data (Saldaña, 2015) and conducting a final review of each participant transcript (Moustakas, 1994). I

then conducted a broader examination of the context of the lived experience by using the common themes and meaning units to develop individual and composite structural and textural descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This came from the interviews and written lived experience responses collected, a few artifacts, as well as through the use of imaginative variation when necessary (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Doing this led me to what Moustakas (1994) calls synthesis, which involves connecting the textural and structural meanings and essences to construct a composite description of the findings. Synthesis is the final stage in phenomenological data analysis. Notably, I did not plan to use the assistance of any qualitative analysis software in my data analysis; instead, I chose to carefully analyze all of the data manually and use synthesis methods as described by Creswell (2018) and Moustakas (1994). I did not end up using any Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) software in the data analysis process. This stage allowed me to combine transformed statements into a few consistent thematic statements (Giorgi, 1985) without disregarding any data. In synthesizing the data, also connected the findings to theory wherever applicable, and validated the findings by returning to the study participants to ask how the universal description compared with their personal experiences with homeless students in the classroom context. All participants were emailed the codes and corresponding themes to review as well. In carrying out data analysis in this way, I was able to synthesize the information from all the data collected in order to form a composite description of the experiences of this heterogeneous group of educators regarding the concept or phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

According to Polit and Beck (2014), trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in the research data, the interpretation, and the methods used to ensure the validity of the study; it is also described as “staying power” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, trustworthiness refers to the truth value of a study, which depends on its credibility, dependability or confirmability, and transferability (Connelly, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). These are discussed below.

Credibility

Credibility is the most important aspect of a study because it indicates the study measures or tests what the researcher intended (Creswell, 2018; Connelly, 2016). Achieving triangulation with various data collection methods was one way that I established credibility (Connelly, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, the semi-structured interviews, field notes, artifacts, and the lived experience description responses allowed me to gather rich and detailed information about the participants’ lived experiences with teaching homeless students in the classroom. Each of these provided corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that was also framed by the preliminary document review. Bracketing also helped in boosting credibility because it addressed and removed existing biases and assumptions (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). I also contacted a content liaison from the ICPH as previously explained to gather preliminary data in the form of up to date reports on the sites and districts to help provide context and relevant information for this study; being sure to confirm with ICPH that the reports were correct and the most up to date added credibility. Furthermore, I had an expert in qualitative research methodology review the credibility in the development of my research questions, data collection, and data analysis protocols. Persistent observation throughout the research process using field notes also helped to maintain credibility. Member checking as a strategy was also used (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I had participants review, clarify, and

respond to a draft of Chapter Four's findings that I emailed to them in order to gather their views regarding the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process increased the reliability of a study because as the researcher, I was then be able to do minor subsequent revisions of the final findings based on participants' responses and feedback wherever necessary, which then allowed me to create a better representation of the reality that the participants lived, and it again served as a check-point for avoiding investigator bias during analysis. Crystallization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), which is looking at the phenomenon through multiple lenses, also adds to the credibility of the study.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability refer to rigorous and organized practices that result in the stability of findings over time. In essence, it refers to consistency, so that if replicated as closely as possible in another study, similar results would be obtained (Creswell, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Member checks, along with the use of thick, rich descriptions helped in confirmability since these methods ensure clarity. Furthermore, an audit trail (Appendix N) was kept as a record of the research path used in this study. In the audit trail, I transparently described the research steps taken from the beginning of the study to the development, analysis, and reporting of the findings, which also helped with dependability and confirmability (Creswell, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Audit trails help to secure the inter-subjectivity of the data in qualitative studies by ensuring that the data are grounded in participant viewpoints instead of my own. I also worked closely with a seasoned phenomenological researcher to discuss my interpretation of the data and the participants' experiences in order to limit the influence of my own experiences on the interpretation (Moustakas, 1994). Paired with the audit trail (Appendix

N), this further ensured that the results reported were a product of the research methods and not of conscious or unconscious bias (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

According to Korstjens and Moser (2017), dependability also involves participants' evaluations of the findings, interpretations, and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study. After conducting the research and analyzing the findings, I used member-checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Additionally, as noted in other phenomenological studies that deal with school employees, I contacted each school district superintendent and the principal where applicable in order to provide them with a copy of the research results. Since a primary reason for this study is to help educational leaders better support teachers serving homeless students in low-income NYC public school classrooms, it made sense to share the results with individuals in the school division who are in a professional position to implement the next steps, if necessary.

Triangulation also promotes confirmability in this study. Additionally, since confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data—bracketing, constantly reflecting throughout the research process, and member-checking also ensured this is the case (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I chose to study this topic because of some personal experience I have regarding the subject matter, so bracketing was essential (Moustakas, 1994). All of these methods reduced the effect of investigator bias and allowed the findings to focus strictly on the participants' experiences, not mine (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This is also known as reflexivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Transferability

Similar to the concept of generalizability in quantitative research, transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). According to De Chesnay (2014), phenomenological research is not concerned with the transferability of the findings regarding the unique phenomenon under study, but individuals who share that lived experience should be able to recognize the model or description. Other researchers should be able to adapt or use the methods described in this study's design and apply them to another context. To aid in transferability, I provided a rich, thick description of the context in which data collected in this phenomenological study could potentially be transferred for use in other phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The descriptions in my writing were also written in a way that is detailed and clear enough so that future researchers will be able to envision how my study could be the foundation for future studies they may want to conduct. Finally, I also addressed transferability through a universal member checking (Creswell, 2018) where the participants confirmed the essential themes from the data analysis and the findings, which were shared with them before revision as mentioned previously. Korstjens and Moser (2017) also recommended writing thick descriptions in the research study where more than just the behavior and experiences are described, but the contexts as well, so that the findings will become more meaningful to any outsider reading the study. The findings of this study also reflected a wide range of perspectives because it used purposive maximum variation sampling as described earlier, which lends to its transferability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were made throughout the entire research process described. IRB approval was obtained before any data was collected or participants were selected. In keeping in line with IRB suggestions, I ensured that all electronics used to collect or store data from this study, such as audio recordings, transcripts, or documents, were password-protected to ensure the security of any electronic data related to the study. I also locked away any printed copies. To my knowledge, I was the absolute only individual with access to my password and to the personal work office lockbox in my home where I keep printed documents related to this research. Documents and reports collected from ICPH, as well as any additional artifacts from participants, were also labeled and locked. Data storage continued for the duration of the study. However, safe data storage will continue for up to five years after this study is completed and published. After that point, all data stored will then be deleted or destroyed.

Pseudonyms were used for all participants and anyone else mentioned in the interview responses, or in the participants' lived experience written description responses (Creswell, 2018). The results of the study posed no impact to the classroom teachers, their students, their families, the school, or the researcher. Additionally, I developed a plan for assessing participants' discomfort, anxiety, or even more severe reactions during the study, and in particular during the interviews, though I never had to use it. This was developed even though the procedures in this study were very low risk, with the only potential risk being a breach of confidentiality (Creswell, 2018). To protect participant data, I ensured that all data was anonymized by removing any information that could identify individuals; during the transcription process, all other individuals were identified only by their role in square brackets or redactions and never by name. I also ascertained that students and others mentioned in the study were unable to be identified by any

quotations included in published data. Furthermore, the school districts and names of the schools used across both districts were assigned pseudonyms in order to add an additional layer of protection. When corresponding with my dissertation committee member about specifics during data collection or analysis, I was mindful of pseudonyms and used them at all times. It would be difficult for anyone to determine the true identity of the middle schools or the educators who participated in this research. There are 69 NYDDOE public schools in District B, of which 26 are middle schools; in District A, there are 59 public schools, of which 18 are middle schools. This makes it even more difficult for anyone to determine the true identity of the schools or that of the participants. Also, since administrators and superintendents across districts in the NYCDOE tend to know each other professionally, I did not discuss with any of them the identity of the classroom teachers involved in the research. Confidentiality was paramount in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018), as I owed it to the participants to ensure their experiences, opinions, perceptions, and overall private disclosures to me during the study would not in any way identify them or anyone else they mention. A few ethical considerations arose during the course of this research, but they were addressed to the best of my ability as the primary investigator.

Summary

In this chapter, I described why and how I conducted a transcendental phenomenological investigation of the experiences of a small group of public middle school teachers specifically with homeless students, and their instructional decisions toward these students primarily in the classroom context. The study employed qualitative data collection and analysis methods often used for transcendental phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). I used different forms of data collection to achieve triangulation for data saturation: semi-structured personal interviews with participants, lived experience descriptions written by the

participants, field notes based on participants' interviews, and a few artifacts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Before, as well as throughout the research process, I fostered trust between participants and myself, worked to remove investigator bias and maintained ethical conduct (Creswell, 2018). The characteristics of the study participants, sites, and study procedures were discussed. Finally, the trustworthiness of the research methods, as well as the data collection and analysis procedures described in this chapter were outlined in terms of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). This study was worthwhile on a local, national, and global level when it comes to the education of homeless students enrolled in public schools and understanding what teachers serving this marginalized group of students need. It also provided insight into what these teachers have lived through in their experiences and instructional decisions when serving homeless students in low-income NYC public schools.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across two low-income public middle schools in NYC. The research study's goal was to discover a deeper, richer understanding of the phenomenon and its significance to the classroom teachers who have encountered these lived experiences. To better understand the research participants' experiences, the central research question ("What are the experiences of NYC public middle school teachers with homeless students in their classrooms?") was essential in directing the research study. The research sub-questions were as follows:

Sub-Question One

How do educators across two low-income public middle schools in NYC describe the instructional decisions they make in the classroom context when teaching and promoting academic resilience among students experiencing homelessness?

Sub-Question Two

How do educators across two low-income NYC public middle schools describe their perceptions of curriculum guidance, inclusiveness, and instructional support accommodations when teaching homeless students?

This chapter presents the overall findings of the data analysis carried out during this study, which will present the participants' voices and lived experiences into rich, meaningful descriptions. The phenomenological reduction of the data analysis using Moustakas' (1994) method is revealed in the themes analyzed and subsequently derived from the data collection methods I used during the study: semi-structured personal interviews with participants, lived

experience descriptions written by the participants, my own field notes based on participants' interviews, and artifacts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, findings related to the textural and structural descriptions of the specific phenomenon examined in this study from the 12 research study participants will conclude this chapter.

Participants

In this research study, 12 classroom teachers participated. The research participants were classroom teachers of varying ages, subject area expertise, educational, ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds. I used purposeful sampling to select the initial participants to ascertain that they would be able to speak on their conscious lived experiences related to the phenomenon of interest and to collect data relevant to this research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Criterion sampling was also used to ensure that my focus was on the classroom teachers who experienced the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). I selected classroom teachers who were 18 years of age or older, were certified teachers for the New York City Department of Education, have been teaching for at least two years, teach in a middle school classroom setting, and most importantly, who were aware and knew for certain that they served and taught students experiencing homelessness. Table 1 includes the demographic data of the participants.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Data

	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity*	Years Teaching	Subject Area	Interview	Writing Response	Artifacts
1	Ms. X	33	F	African-American	5	ELA/ Social Studies; SPED	X	X	X
2	Roman	26	M	Montenegrin/ White	2.5	Social Studies	X	X	X
3	Shantelle	52	F	Afro-Caribbean	23	ELA	X	X	X

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)
Participant Demographic Data

4	Paul	33	M	Dominican-American	3.5	Math	X	X	X
5	Vanessa	30	F	Hispanic	6	ELA	X	X	
6	Pauline	26	F	Hispanic	4	ENL & ELA	X	X	X
7	Jane	39	F	Black	6	SPED/ELA	X	X	
8	Langston	28	M	African-American	5	ELA	X	X	
9	Tay	31	F	White/Latino	7	ELA	X	X	
10	Jessica	39	F	Black/Puerto-Rican	6	Science	X	X	X
11	Poppin	45	F	Black	21	Literacy/Music	X	X	X
12	Veronica	31	F	African-American	4	ELA	X	X	

**Ethnicity was written in by participants on the survey since I did not want to limit them to boxes.*

To begin the data collection procedures, I sent out recruitment emails with flyers (Appendix A) and included the demographic screening survey link to quickly assess which interested participants would meet the inclusion criteria. I also posted physical recruitment flyers in school neighborhoods, inside post offices, around my neighborhood, at local schools, and also had colleagues, family, and friends share it with others at their place of employment and also post it on their social media. Principals I have a good relationship with also shared the recruitment flyer with their colleagues, other principals, and teachers who they thought might be interested and who they thought would fit the eligibility criteria that I had shared with them. About four days went by with no response from anyone, but I soon received interest from nine teachers, all of whom fit the inclusion criteria. Later on, I received interest from five more participants. I sent each eligible participant a Thank You Message or Acceptance Message via email with the stamped consent form (Appendix D) for them to read, sign, and return electronically before their scheduled interview. In this Thank You Message, I also provided each participant with the link to the demographic survey (Appendix K) for confirmed eligible

participants only, and provided instructions for them to set up an interview with me at their earliest convenience. Out of 14, 13 continued to show interest in the study, and 12 were ultimately interviewed during data collection; data saturation was reached. Included below is a brief description of each classroom teacher (serving homeless students) who participated in the research study in order to provide a clear background of each participant. The participants' confidentiality is protected using assigned pseudonyms.

Ms. X

Ms. X is a 33-year-old African-American teacher who is currently in her fifth year of teaching and has been recommended for tenure. She grew up in what she described as a working-class family. A career changer who switched from the corporate world to education, Ms. X has her Masters in Teaching with a focus on Special Education, and currently teaches 7th and 8th grade English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies. Presently, she is a summer coach and mentors pre-service teachers. She has served on the school leadership team and has been serving in low-income neighborhoods for four years.

Shantelle

Shantelle is a 52-year-old Afro-Caribbean seasoned teacher who has been teaching for over 22 years. She originally taught high school in her home country, but the last almost six of those years have been spent teaching and serving students and families in the low-income school in which she currently works. Shantelle admitted, "A lot of people I know tried to dissuade me from, from going here to work. [They would say] How can you go in that area? That's a bad area, and those children—don't do it." Nevertheless, she stuck to her gut and plans on continuing to teach in low-income high poverty schools. Shantelle grew up in what she describes as a working-class family and now classifies her own family as middle class. Shantelle has a Master's

degree and teaches 7th grade ELA. She expressed that being a mother and wife herself, teaching offered her convenience. Presently, Shantelle is a newly tenured teacher.

Roman

Roman is a 26-year-old Caucasian teacher who is currently in his third year of teaching. He grew up in what he describes as an immigrant lower working-class family who had moved to America almost 29 years ago. Currently, Roman notes that his family is now middle class. Roman has his Bachelor's degree and has taught 8th grade Social Studies for the last two years. Presently, Roman is preparing to teach 7th grade Social Studies for the upcoming school year, and describes his interest in teaching as stemming from influence from History teachers from his own time as a student. Roman grew up in a low-income community like the one he has served in for now close to three years. His expertise is listed as historian.

Paul

Paul is a 33-year-old Mathematics teacher who has been teaching 8th grade Math for the last four years. He is currently going into his fifth year and shared that he always loved working with children. Paul is Dominican-American and describes the family he grew up in as being working class. Paul has been teaching and serving children in low-income communities for over five years. He has a Bachelor's in Mathematics, and this is undoubtedly his expertise, as he describes wanting to share his love of Math with students as one of the reasons that he became a teacher. He is presently working on his Master's degree.

Jane

Jane is a 39-year-old teacher who has been teaching Special Education ELA to 6th-grade students in small group as well as ICT classroom settings. She has been teaching for the last 5 years and is currently entering her sixth year of teaching in a low-income school and community.

Not originally from America, Jane describes herself as a Black Caribbean woman who grew up in a working-class family. She currently has her Master's and notes that all her previous schooling was in her home country. Her Bachelor's is in Psychology, and Jane contends that originally, she had wanted to go into child psychology; however, teaching was another way to work with children. Presently, she is a tenured teacher who has also completed an administrative program and subsequent internship in the low-income school where she teaches.

Pauline

Pauline is a 26-year-old Hispanic teacher who has been serving in low-income neighborhoods and schools for five years. Pauline describes the family she grew up in as a lower working-class immigrant family—which she notes is now middle class. For the last four years, Pauline has been an English as a New Language (ENL) teacher in a low-income school. Pauline has served both 6th and 8th-grade students over the years and has also taught ELA. She first entered the teaching profession because she wanted to give back to the community, but initially, she notes that she had wanted to be a social worker. Currently, Pauline is a newly tenured teacher who also mentors new teachers; she is also currently pursuing her doctorate in curriculum design. Pauline feels that educators often “underestimate the needs of homeless students.”

Langston

Langston is a 28-year-old teacher who has been serving in low-income schools for four years. He cites the need to help people as the reason he first got interested in teaching in his community. He also notes that he has always enjoyed interacting with people and wanting to be a part of the way that they could improve their lives. Langston has his Master's and currently teaches 6th grade ELA. He notes that he grew up in the same neighborhood that he now teaches in. Langston describes his Black family's socioeconomic status growing up as lower class,

though he now identifies as middle class. Currently, Langston is under recommendation for tenure and will be entering his fifth year of teaching in the Fall.

Vanessa

Vanessa is a 30-year-old Hispanic teacher who has been teaching for seven years, five of which have been in a low-income school. She is currently going into her 8th year as an ELA teacher but has also taught Social Studies. She has a Master's in Education, and expertise in Special Education. She has taught ELA in both small group and ICT settings, and has served both 6th grade and 7th-grade students over the years. Vanessa grew up in a working-class family and remembers "playing teacher" when she was a little girl. She recalls that after going to college and not quite being sure what to do, teaching seemed like a good fit. Currently, Vanessa teaches middle school honors classes.

Tay

Tay is a 31-year-old White/Latino teacher who has been teaching for seven years, five of which have been spent serving and teaching in a low-income school. Tay is entering her 8th year of teaching and currently teaches 6th grade ELA. She noted that she grew up in the area in which she now teaches, and has experienced homelessness at one point toward the end of middle school and early high school while growing up in a single-parent household with her mother. Tay says that as a teacher in a low-income school, she sees herself in the demographic that she teaches, noting that she feels like "a mentor for them because I have been where they are."

Jessica

Jessica is a 39-year-old Black and Puerto-Rican/White Latino bi-racial teacher who has been teaching and serving in low-income neighborhoods for five years. She has her Master's in Education and is entering her 2nd year of teaching 8th-grade science. Her expertise is in Biology,

and she has also taught high school in the past. She describes herself as a product of the public school system and says that she grew up in a working-class family. She noted that she wanted to give back to the community and to students who are exposed to similar situations that she was. Currently, Jessica teaches almost the entire 8th-grade class at her low-income middle school.

Poppin

Poppin is a 45-year-old Black teacher who has over 21 years of experience, with the last decade being in a low-income school district. Poppin has been at her current school for 8 years, lives in the area where she works, and describes both her past and current family socioeconomic status as middle class. However, Poppin notes that she has experienced homelessness before. An experienced professional, Poppin has her Master's degree and currently teaches 7th-grade Literacy. She noted that she was first a Music teacher with a background in Performing Arts, but that due to the demographic she teaches and the resources available to the school, Literacy and ELA are at the forefront of her practice, while she teaches music as a supplement since music programs were cut. Poppin's expertise is in reading remediation for students with reading issues.

Veronica

Veronica is a 31-year-old African-American teacher who has been serving students in low-income neighborhoods for four years. She first became interested in teaching through her love for reading and promoting literacy among underserved students. Veronica herself has experienced homelessness at some point in her life, and notes that she believes she serves as a model to the students as an example of overcoming obstacles associated with poverty. Veronica recently earned her Master's in Literacy and is looking forward to continuing her work in low-income schools and communities. Currently, she is looking into entering a more literacy-focused

position in the field of education because “what homeless students need is literacy support so that they’re not always playing catch up with the others.”

Results

To begin the data collection process, I conducted one-on-one personal interviews with each participant via Zoom. The interview questions consisted of 18 open-ended questions, which each participant was asked to answer. All quotations from participants in this section are presented verbatim, including any verbal ticks and grammatical errors in speech and writing to depict the participants’ voices accurately. During each interview, I maintained field notes. At the end of each interview, the participants were asked to complete a written lived experience response to the prompt and had to submit it no less than one-week post-interview. All 12 participants completed their lived experience prompt and emailed those to me electronically. Only seven participants mentioned and provided artifacts as examples. The focus of the data collection was the central research question and two sub-questions.

To best describe the phenomenon of the lived experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers with and toward homeless students in low-income New York City middle schools, 12 participants who met the selection criteria participated in this study. Twelve participants completed the one-on-one personal interviews and the lived experience written piece, and seven out of the 12 participants referenced and provided artifacts. Through open expressions about their lived experiences, the participants were honest and direct in their responses, especially when assured of confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms. Each participant had clear memories of their experiences over the years with homeless students in their classrooms, both past and present.

Five main themes emerged from the data analysis. Throughout the research study, participants shared experiences of each theme evidenced in the one-on-one personal interviews, the written lived experience responses, and found in the received artifacts. Participants discussed challenges in building trust and reciprocity, instructional academic interventions and special considerations, promoting resilience and motivation to completion, social-emotional impact and support, and curriculum pitfalls and revisions in the context of their interactions with homeless students. The arrangement of the themes is structured in conjunction with the research questions. Provided in the next section is an in-depth discussion of the codes and corresponding themes. Table 2 includes the codes and corresponding themes.

Table 2

Codes and Corresponding Themes: Educators Experiences with Homeless Students

	Codes	Corresponding Themes
1	unmet needs, physical appearance, hygiene, parent-teacher relationship, discretion, acceptance from students, assumptions, perceptions, avoidance, transparency, building connections, personal mental toll, availability, pride, savior mode, respect, individual needs	Challenges in Building Trust and Reciprocity
2	small-group, turn and talks, one-to-one, peer support, access to materials, after school, working lunches, engagement strategies, homework, strategic grouping, chunking information, step-by-step instructions, discipline leniency, extensions, goal-setting, learning gaps, grading, donations	Instructional Academic Interventions and Special Considerations
3	celebration, validation, modeling value of education, positive reinforcement systems, high standards, goal-setting, incentives, structure, consistent routines/rules, building comradery, school programs, student leadership roles, mitigating stress, grace, communication	Promoting Resilience and Motivation to Completion

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)*Codes and Corresponding Themes: Educators Experiences with Homeless Students*

4	emotional needs, conversations, lack of stability, insecurity, participation, aggressive behavior, isolation, counseling, home v. classroom environment, interactions, peer acceptance, trauma, social anxiety, outbursts, defensiveness, impulsive, exhaustion, restorative justice	Social and Emotional Impact and Support
5	relevance, culturally responsive, differentiation, critical thinking, inquiry-based, adjustments, rigor, background knowledge, equitable, flexibility, reading	Curriculum Pitfalls and Revisions

Theme One: Challenges in Building Trust and Reciprocity

A common theme among all 12 participants was how challenging it was to build trust and reciprocity, as they found this to be a particularly critical part of how they developed or failed to develop relationships with the homeless students they served in the classroom. For these educators, building trust and reciprocity were paramount because without it, the job of educating homeless students was made even more difficult. In research conducted by Chow et al. (2015), the researchers found that teachers' own social and emotional competencies, which included their ability to foster positive teacher-student relationships, affected how they responded to what their homeless students needed. In building trust and developing reciprocity, teachers noted that transparency, discretion, acceptance from students and parents of the help they offered and moving past mutual assumptions were some of the key challenges. Trust and reciprocity must be present for a teacher to move beyond surface perceptions and relationships. Jessica stated the following in her interview:

I think that it's important, first and foremost, to trust and respect. You have to be someone who can be trusted, someone who respects them, their boundaries, um, their privacy. And

I feel like when you meet that basic need of just trusting them and respecting them as people, that's when they can open up and give you the chance to meet other needs that they may desperately, you know, be reaching out for but don't quite know who to ask for that specific help.

Ms. X also shared:

You don't want to push your students too far that it breaks their trust, so you have to take as much as they're willing to give. So, for example, if he tells me today is not a good day—all right, I will take that but think how can I help you make it a better day? I'm not going to sit there and pry like, "Why isn't it good? Did you not get food? Did you..." But you know, I will drop off little snacks, and I'll make little comments so that they feel like they're not being singled out but are being included in the whole group. So, it's rewarding learning how to navigate their trust.

The experiences that accompany serving homeless students in the classroom can be difficult for teachers to navigate, and the participants voiced concerns about addressing the needs of their students in a way that did not violate the students' privacy, that did not bring attention to students' physical appearance or other unmet needs, and that did not appear as assumptions instead of a genuine attempt to provide support. There was also concern about the decisions made by the parents of homeless students. For example, in voicing her concern and frustration in offering help and the opportunity to build trust with some homeless students that she truly cared about, Jane shared in her interview that

The hardest thing was having his parent understand the importance of just having him attending school, like just having him be in school because she would make him stay at the shelter just because she had to go grocery shopping or do laundry.

Unfortunately, parents were not always helpful because their priorities were quite different from those of the teachers teaching their children. In most cases, teachers described building trust and reciprocity as a slow but steady process. For example, in her lived experience response, Shantelle wrote:

I began to ask her to stay behind a few minutes after class when I knew they had a lunch break [...] Through gentle questioning, I discovered that she had no place to do homework and there was normally so much going on that when she leaves school, she has no time to do school work; some nights, she barely got enough sleep. Some mornings she did not eat and on those days, I would encourage her to let me know as soon as she arrived so she could be given something to eat. I tried to be aware of her physical needs.

Building trust in their relationships in the classroom was not something that participants describe as ever being easy. Participants expressed that there were admittedly some points where they felt frustrated if additional factors or barriers prevented them from connecting with the student in order to help them. Some of those factors sometimes included, but were not limited to, parent-teacher relationships, assumptions about the teacher made by untrusting students, and pride expressed as refusal to accept help by the students. Poppin noted that “many parents tell the students not to say [redacted] about what’s going on at home or at the shelter.” One way that some teachers navigated this challenge when building trust was by holding what several of them called restorative justice circles, and also by including homeless students in decision-making processes. Roman provided an example of what building trust through decision-making might be like:

You really just have to give them as much benefit of the doubt as possible. It's more about, you know, okay, you missed this work with me. When do you think you can do

this? So, the consideration is also bringing them into the decision-making process because you cannot assume what's going on at home. You cannot assume anything. You can't even assume that the parents themselves are able to be there or not be there. So, you have to bring the student into it, you have to—the consideration becomes, or the adjustment becomes talking to them, right?

In her written lived experience, Tay explained her experience with a homeless student who was often disruptive:

She did it to get “removed from class” since it happened in her other schools. I had to have restorative circles with her and a lot of getting to know her sessions. She finally opened up after a couple of weeks of these sessions and told me she doesn't really feel like she fits in so being the class clown is her way of being “cool” with the kids that knew each other. We had to create a B.I.P (behavior intervention plan). She was given ownership of her own plan and it made her feel more responsible to hold her word. She held herself accountable, and little by little showed progress.

A big part of building trust with homeless students is including these students in decisions about their own education in the classroom. For many of the participants, this meant leaving what they call “a savior complex” at the door. Building trust means coming in and setting aside any misconceptions. Pauline admitted, “I didn't want to come in with the perception that all my kids who were homeless need me to save them. I never wanted to have that idea.” Participants described how perspectives shifted when it came to the reality of the work that needed to be put in to gain the trust of the students they were teaching.

Notably, all teachers acknowledged the reality that for their homeless students, basic needs often went unmet (Hernandez, 2020), and that this reality sometimes affected these

students' willingness to initially reciprocate attempts at building trust and connections. Vanessa explained in her interview:

I guess getting them to understand that like, you actually care. That can be the biggest challenge. Because they don't really trust a lot of adults, right? And then you're also a fleeting person in their life. I mean, you're only going to be there for 10 months.

Similarly, Poppin expressed matter-of-factly, "If a student is homeless, it is harder to form or relay an intimate relationship with them because they don't trust adults." She also noted that building trust was made even more difficult because "homeless students were more likely to employ certain strategies of avoidance in that way, you know, social avoidance, with their teachers and the administrators, you know, things like that." Participants noted that because homeless students they encountered in the classroom come in with various issues, it was important to first get the students to even want to disclose certain sensitive information with teachers in the first place. Paul shared during his interview, "Whether it's that they're hungry, or they're worried about a situation, or whatever the case may be. So, it's building a relationship enough with the student to be like, hey, you know, you can talk to me." Building a relationship with the students experiencing homelessness is extremely important to teachers because, as Paul continued to explain, "then we can figure out what's bothering them. Once we figure out what's bothering them, then we can resolve it." In this sense, then, building trust preceded reciprocity. Veronica seemed to agree, and shared in her interview, "Well, I speak to them during class, but also just pulling them out after class to ask them what's going on. It goes back into the relationship, and more one on one, because if they trust you, they'll open up to you." Teachers needed to have a trusting and respectful relationship with their homeless students, for them to

then address their needs without pushback from students, which then resulted in a kind of mutual give and take.

On the not-so-bright side of the battle to gain and build trust, participants noted that there was a personal mental toll that followed frustrations when homeless students were unresponsive to their efforts to make a connection. Roman noted in his interview that "We have a number of students who just have, just huge social anxiety, you know?" This social anxiety was exasperated in what many participants described as overwhelmingly large class sizes that both frustrated and prevented them as teachers from building necessary connections with every single homeless student, and thereby posing a great challenge in building trust. What Roman calls "the NYCDOE's need for maximum efficiency at the expense of students" is echoed by other participants such as Shantelle, Jessica, Tay, Veronica, and Vanessa, who all agree that smaller class sizes would make it easier to form close relationships. Shantelle stated, "It's hard because they just want to know that they're valued, they're appreciated, and you know, that they are seen. So, that's one of my biggest challenges in the classroom with them." In his lived experience, Langston wrote that he had to conduct "many one-on-one conversations [with students] in an attempt to understand what was causing their behavior and to gain their trust." Navigating the process of building trust and reciprocity, then, meant many one-on-one discussions with individual students experiencing homelessness. Sometimes, building trust and reciprocity with homeless students was as simple as spending time with them. Vanessa broke it down in her interview:

I think what the students valued a lot, and what I noticed what they valued was like spending time with me during lunch and after school. I would always have kids in my

room during lunch and they don't want to leave. I'd be like, all right, I'm going home, and they'd be like, no, no, stay a little longer and talk.

This meant that teachers had to undertake this part of their experience with homeless students in ways that were unable to take place during direct whole group instruction. Challenges to building trust and reciprocity with their homeless students allowed teachers the opportunity to learn how to navigate a quite delicate space. Ms. X stated, "I try my best to foster genuine relationships with all my students, but there was this one particular male student that I struggled with because he resisted everyone that tried to get close to him." Several participants shared that building trust and reciprocity was not always an easy or successful undertaking. However, as Tay realized, "If you usually sit down and get to know the kid, you'll see what's going on., and they'll open up to you. Once a kid trusts you, that's when you see their true selves, you know?"

Previous studies found that the way that teachers conducted their teaching relationships with students, including their instructional strategies, would depend on the teacher's own beliefs and understanding of that group. The participants in this study emphasized the importance of building trust and reciprocity as the foundation to their lived experiences with homeless students in the classroom because doing so would, in their opinion, mitigate the challenges homeless students bring to the classroom environment from home. Participants' attempts at building trust and reciprocity with homeless students was their key attempt at understanding how to navigate relationships with them and best identify and support their needs—academic and otherwise. As Jessica best explained:

I think that even though trust and respect aren't tangible per se, when you strengthen that need, then the other basic needs and accommodations that they need met—the things that can be tangible, then they'll be able to verbalize those things, and then you can meet those

needs. So, I do feel like you have to set that foundation, right, before you can meet the tangible needs.

Once the foundation of trust was established, even partially, participants explained that it became much easier for students to accept their help and to see participants as not just teachers but as liaisons to the supports available to them (Ingram et al., 2017). As Roman commented, “This is purely from my own experience, but they might be more willing to, you know, do their schoolwork, they associate school with a place that they like to be. And you like being in places that you trust and that make you smile.”

Theme Two: Instructional Academic Interventions and Special Considerations

All of the participants shared instructional decisions that they made when serving students experiencing homelessness, and 10 out of 12 participants pointed out special considerations they give to students due to knowledge of their home or living situation. Among instructional decisions were key academic interventions that echoed some suggestions found in the literature: Providing individualized one-on-one instruction, providing small group instruction, using peer support strategies, using goal-setting, and breaking the material down via chunking or step-by-step instructions (ICPH, 2016; Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018). All of these strategies are necessary to at least attempt to address what both Pauline and Vanessa call “persistent learning gaps that come from homelessness.” Special education teachers Jane, Ms. X., and Vanessa also noted that in addition to one-to-one strategies, they reached out to the administration to ensure that homeless students in their classrooms had individualized education plans (IEPs) and could receive extra supportive instruction, especially if they had a learning disability in addition to homelessness-related trauma. Vanessa shared:

That's when you have to do like a little bit more of small group instruction or one-to-one and pull that student out. Like, if I have a para[professional] or if I have another teacher, I may put them in a group with that other teacher or paraprofessional, so that they get a little bit more help or maybe redo the lesson for them.

Additionally, Ms. X lamented:

They may be distracted because they have previous trauma, and that's already listed in their IEP, so I know that I have to give them brain breaks. I know that I have to chunk the information for them and give those checklist steps. So, it's kind of like a "catch 22" because unfortunately, their learning disabilities could have stemmed from their situation of being homeless.

These special education teachers, even with considerably smaller class sizes than the general education teachers, still found it necessary to use one-to-one instruction and small group instruction as much as possible when teaching homeless students. For them, some homeless students who also needed to be in special education settings were doubly challenging and needed extra academic interventions that also considered their unique positioning due to simultaneously experiencing homelessness.

Similarly, general education teachers posited that small group stations, group work, one-to-one individualized instruction, peer support, and realistic goal-setting toward instructional or academic goals were most helpful. Paul explained that "if it's a homeless student, I would pull that student aside one-to-one to make sure that they get more attention and support." However, many participants described the importance of making sure that there is a balance in how often homeless students received these interventions that fell outside of whole group instruction. In describing how often she had to provide individualized instruction, Shantelle wrote:

I tried as much as possible to give some type of individualized instruction to her at least three times a week if she is in attendance. I also modified most end-of-unit assignments to assist her in completing as much work as possible.

The goal-setting and action planning that several participants described using with students centered around their use of small group and one-to-one support. Tay described what her small groups are like, stating, "I'll pull students into a small group with me in the back, and I'll honestly just re-teach it to them, and we'll do it together." In like manner, Langston confessed that "small groups are honestly how they prefer to learn." Veronica explained that in her integrated co-teaching (ICT) classroom, she uses small group stations to help homeless students during instruction:

I usually have a co-teacher, so I usually use station teaching as my classroom model, because I think when you have students in a smaller group, they usually perform better, having that one on one time with that teacher, or a smaller group with that teacher. So, you know, having a rotation of your groups, but always having those students specifically with you a little more than the others.

In conducting small group instruction or one-to-one instruction, participants found that it was easier to address the gaps in learning that some homeless students came in with. Paul noted that in his small groups and one-to-one instruction, "creating a checklist for a given skill with a breakdown usually works, and you have to introduce the supports and scaffolds into those problems and then only very gradually take them away when students are comfortable." Roman echoed this sentiment in his interview, stating, "You got to give them something that they can go back to like a step by step, and that's across every subject." The one-on-one, small group, and other individualized instruction are meant, then, as a way to also boost students' confidence.

Poppin also described small group instruction as a way to build learning retention among homeless students, that is otherwise usually lost due to absenteeism:

In a week, I plan five lessons, and I get through probably two and a half of them because I got to repeat them. I got to repeat them anyway because when I got homeless kids, you know, attendance sucks. So, I got eight kids that weren't here yesterday for the lesson. So, like, my pedagogy is always small groups with modifications. Like, I'm an ELA teacher but I'm just also a special ed teacher. So, I got stations; who wasn't here? Who doesn't get this? Who doesn't speak English? You sit at that table. I'll be there.

For teachers in the classroom, teaching a large number of homeless students means also having to be ready to have not only a day of instruction modified, but also be ready for the possibility that some lessons simply will not be taught at the expected pacing.

A few of the participants, however, pointed out that it was sometimes difficult to have any consistency with one-to-one or small group instruction due to large class sizes. Roman vented about not being able to truly give the individualized instruction he knows that some homeless students sometimes need in order to catch up after losing time in school:

I truly do believe that the school would function more, and the students' needs would be better met if classroom sizes were smaller. For me, that would be about 15 to 20 students, but if you were to run that by someone in the bureaucracy, that makes no sense. They want to have the least number of teachers as possible, teaching the most number of students as possible, without the entire system crumbling under its own weight.

Shantelle shared a similar concern in her questions, wondering how to balance individualized support in large class sizes: "So, how do you deal with roughly 25 or 30 kids when 16 of them, almost half of them, are facing homelessness? How do you figure out what is this one's need, and

what the other's need is?" It is not always easy to implement many of the suggestions made in the existing literature, and the participants' lived experiences as they relate to instructional decisions show that it involves "baby steps," as Tay calls it, which in fact, does not always reap results. Veronica recalled in her written response that "Although I wasn't able to make any modifications to her individual needs with her during my lesson, she enjoyed and benefited from having that one on one time with me." Sometimes, teachers could not get the time to do individualized instruction during a whole group lesson block, but they would still try to find additional moments to provide it to students, either during their own lunches or after school—unpaid.

For some participants, peer support was paramount to ascertaining academic improvement among homeless students. When it came to using peer support as an instructional academic intervention, several participants, Shantelle, Roman, Tay, Jessica, and Ms. X expressed how important this strategy was, especially when they cannot spread themselves too thin to accommodate all the academic needs of the many homeless students in their classrooms.

Shantelle discussed the impact of peer support in her classroom:

I think they learn a lot when it's not just from me, the teacher, but it's also from their peers, and they like when their peers go through their work. I think they can appreciate when their peers go through their work more than when I go through their work because they value what their peers think, and what they think is in their writing. So, they like when they have things like peer-reviewing of their work and peer support because they're seeing, oh, this is what my peer thinks. So, then they try to change things. It works.

Ms. X pushed peer support through "turn and talks, having them jot down or write down whatever comes to their mind, and then sharing it with their peers." She explained that "by

having them speaking to each other, it helps to kind of jog their memory and gives them support in thinking of different examples.” Finding ways to foster conversations between homeless students and their peers during instruction was key. According to Tay, she takes a slightly different approach to peer support in instruction:

Um, I like to give them a role during the lesson, a leadership role, meaning like, hey, you know, I'm gonna need you to watch this group for me, for example. So, while you're watching the group, I need you to take down the notes of what everyone is saying, so that way I could make sure that everyone is participating, or everyone is doing their work.

No matter which way the participants described pushing peer support during instruction, the one thing that stood out among all their descriptions was the impact it had on the social aspect of learning, which homeless students often struggled with.

Perhaps the single most important thing that all participants agreed across the board was not an instructional decision that worked was the use of homework to supplement learning among homeless students. Participants agreed that homework was useless for several reasons before the pandemic, but even more so during the pandemic. Langston pointed out in his interview that with homework:

It was rocky until students got internet access, but even then, they're kind of inconsistent because they're in this weird daycare thing where they're just kind of, like, not quite given supervision, or someone wasn't necessarily helping them, like guiding them to what they actually needed to do.

Shantelle shared her reasoning:

Well, one thing I know that doesn't work is homework. Personally, as a teacher, and probably this is a horrible thing to say, but sometimes I think homework is just useless work because if they don't know how to do it here, how will they do it at home?

Poppin also made similar comments, voicing frustration and stating, "Like, how are you gonna ask a homeless kid to do homework? They don't know where they're [redacted] sleeping tonight. Like, do this homework little Bobby, and it's like get the [redacted] out of here, I ain't doing your homework." The instructional decision to either give very little homework or none at all came from a deeper understanding among participants that the homeless students they served might not have a home, or if they did, they were living doubled up and had no personal learning space. Jane explained, "There is leniency with stuff that should be done at home because it's already hard for them there. That's where I have the leniency." Nevertheless, many participants mourned the lack of data due to missing homework. For the teachers, while they understood that homework was a key component of acquiring data on how to modify their lessons, they felt it was impossible to use it to gauge student understanding since many of their homeless students understandably did not complete homework.

Consequently, participants agreed across the board that without engagement strategies, none of their academic instructional interventions would even be possible. Common engagement strategies included a range of approaches, from something as simple as verbal encouragement to more targeted approaches aimed at helping students connect to what is being taught in the classroom. Participants admitted that not all strategies worked and that academic engagement was something they all struggled with. Nevertheless, all participants tried engagement strategies in their classrooms. Pauline noted:

When there's a lack of engagement from students, I typically try to, for example, if they're writing a response, I read it, and then I'm like, this sounds really great—would you like to share? I tell them I'm going to call on you to share, but I'm giving you a few minutes to, you know, to prepare yourself. So, I think that's me, encouraging them on the side for engagement, or when they have a really good idea.

In like manner, Tay noted that

If they're not engaged enough to do the whole activity, then I'll just give them baby steps. I'll say if you want, I'll sit with you and we can do it together, because some of them are insecure about their levels, so they tend to shut down, or they may be struggling, which is the major cause of kids not being engaged. So, if you work with them versus embarrassing them, it has shown that they become more willing to participate.

Shantelle explained:

When it comes to engagement, sometimes my way of responding is if I want to pick them out individually, I want to make sure I'm going to ask them something that I know that they know—to give them a boost. I ask them a question that I know that they know—whether I told them yesterday, or whether I give them a hint. I will ask them that question just to make sure that they give me the right answer.

For many of the teachers, engaging homeless students often meant being gentler in their approaches. Jessica pointed out:

We talk about meeting kids where they're at...so, when they're not engaged, I think that even just asking them where they are mentally, and then kind of trying to figure out how to get them to where you want them to be.

To clarify, teachers serving homeless students in the classroom felt that they had to be more conscientious in terms of ensuring that their attempts to engage the student did not inadvertently push them away. Pauline expressed her concern with calling out disengaged homeless students, admitting, “I’m not a big believer in calling out homeless students who are not engaged and raising their hand because then they just feel like they’re on the spot.” By talking with the student or working with them, and not just cold-calling students when they are not engaged, these teachers attempt sustained engagement.

Engaging homeless students also meant being cognizant of how their instruction in the classroom might not be engaging enough to serve as what Poppin calls “multiple entry points for all students, no matter their background.” Vanessa expressed:

The first thing I do is maybe either speed up or slow down the lesson. Because maybe if they’re not engaged, they’re not understanding, so I need to like slow it down, or maybe it’s just not challenging enough, so I need to wrap it up and move on. It could also be that the topic's really boring, so I’m gonna need to like swap out the text. Or let’s get up to change it to group work instead of like individual work...or more like visuals or a video.

Ms. X stated that there is always a reason for lack of engagement, and explained that it’s all about “meeting students where they are.” Additionally, Poppin further explained that “in terms of academic engagement, providing them time really helps, because sometimes they just need time and space, you know, because they don’t have it at the shelters or in their home with 12 other people.” If a student was not comfortable being engaged during whole group instruction, participants noted that they tried pairs or smaller groups, and if that also did not work, providing the student space during working lunches or after school in the classroom was the only other

way. In many cases, engagement happened outside of whole-group instruction on participants' own time.

None of the teachers blamed students. Instead, they considered what they could do to either improve the lesson in terms of relevance or to make that student more comfortable, less insecure, and therefore, more engaged. For example, Paul shared, "With engagement, I try to find something that relates to their everyday life. I think the buzzword is CRE or culturally responsive education. Because that helps a lot when they have something they can relate to in their personal life." Similarly, Jessica stated:

I think that one of the biggest struggles with engagement is finding value, right? Them finding value in the information and the things that we're doing. They try to connect it to real life and they're trying to figure out how can I use this information for the betterment of myself? And I think that, yeah, trying to show them that has been academically challenging, because they're asking, how does this assignment even impact my life?

Jane also noted that engaging students is all about "trying to have them see or make connections between how it [the lesson] could improve their life later on, but that's hard to do all the time." These teachers emphasized the need to ensure that homeless students saw value in the lesson, or could make a connection in what was being taught because otherwise, they would not be engaged.

Furthermore, most participants noted the need for them as educators of homeless students to think about the reason behind the lack of engagement from a student before addressing it. Poppin wrote of a homeless student, "In fact, it was my observation that Matthew didn't eat anything that was not supplied by school—lunch, breakfast, snacks." Often, participants described having to pay very close attention to students experiencing homelessness in order to

notice underlying problems. Paul calls it "finding out what the unmet need is," and Jane noted, "A kid is not going to be engaged if they're hungry, tired, or they're worried about where they'll sleep that night." Shantelle expressed a similar sentiment when it came to classroom engagement:

They're hungry, or they want to sleep, or they're coming to class and they're sleeping all day. And you wonder, is this child just lazy? All he does is sleep all day, and as he comes into the class, he is just sleeping. But truth be told, he didn't sleep last night, so it's hard to be engaged.

A few other participants, Jane, Poppin, and Roman, also emphasized their struggles with engaging students experiencing homelessness. Jane said that she tries to use interactive learning software, but lamented, "It's been a struggle for me, and I'm not gonna lie, this year, I kind of towards the end, I just went off; I was just tired." Poppin, who serves a classroom where many of her students are homeless and/or living in shelters, stated honestly, "Academic engagement, I'm still struggling with that, even now, 21 years later, I'm still struggling with getting these kids academically engaged." Roman confessed, "With engagement, you kind of just have to find another way to build that connection so that school and your classroom is fundamentally a place they want to be. And that's the hard part." Furthermore, Ms. X also noted, "their minds need to check into the learning process, and that's harder for them." As with many other prior examples, there was a clear way in which participants perhaps subconsciously made very different exceptions when trying to understand the lack of engagement among their homeless students. Because their needs go unmet outside of the classroom, Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs is relevant for this population inside the classroom since that's where unmet needs play out as lack of engagement, as described by participants.

A part of the reason that fostering engagement is much harder for teachers with homeless students in the classroom is that they might not come to school prepared. And even if provided the materials like all participants noted, engagement would still be tough because a part of engagement is students coming to class prepared enough to function appropriately (Fry et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Rodger et al., 2020; Smart, 2018). Interestingly, some participants, Veronica, Poppin, Jane, and Tay, also noted that it was difficult to engage homeless students academically because some students already knew they were going to be passed because of their situation. Veronica, though against this idea, admitted, "We want students to graduate at the end of the day." Poppin lamented, "I'm just a cog in the wheel, so if they ask me to just pass them, I have to do so to keep my job." In this case, some participants felt that academic engagement was not supported by the administration or school culture itself. Finally, all 12 participants noted that engaging homeless students was made entirely worse by the pandemic and the switch to remote learning. The primary reasoning behind this was "lack of access," as stated by every single participant when asked to describe in-person versus virtual engagement. Many teachers lamented not being in person, and Poppin stated, "It broke my heart. It really did, because there was nothing I could do."

That said, participants admitted to making special considerations for homeless students when it came to deciding final grades, due dates and extensions, and disciplinary consequences. Langston explained:

Life is full of second chances, even though we pretend it isn't—but you get a bunch of second chances, and the scholars should, yeah, hit due dates, but sometimes a lot of things are just beyond them. So, having like those due dates there for the rest of the class, but for the most part, it's going to be whenever they give it in.

Paul noted that when schools went remote, he was even more lenient with due dates:

So, for virtual learning, our due date was non-existent. And I think that was across the board. I could give a due date. And that was more so for the kids that were gonna do the work "on time." But anyone else who didn't do it on time, they just turned it in whenever.

Similarly, Vanessa admitted:

I don't have any due dates. Honestly, if they gave it to me afterward, even, like, a week after or whatever, I still put it in. I don't care when they give it to me. If I know a student is struggling at home and this is like their best work, I still give it full credit, even if it is not as great as another student's, because I know this is the best that this particular student can give me, so yes, of course, I accommodate grades.

Veronica rationalized:

I feel it's difficult to decide. The work isn't up to standards. So, should I pass you based on me knowing you have an outside situation of being homeless? Or should I give you the grade that you have given yourself in my class? I think that's the hardest thing because you don't want to discourage them or beat them down even more, so you just do.

For these participants, due dates and extensions on projects, essays, end-of-unit tasks, and even any additional or miscellaneous assignments were indefinitely extended until any point before the marking period. Participants seemed to employ extreme leniency toward homeless students when I came to work completed. Some special accommodations for grading included "just giving them extra credit for key assignments they at least tried on," according to Langston. Because most homeless students these participants serve are also absent a lot, Langston sees value in giving them extra credit points since they will not have as many assignments completed as their housed peers. Vanessa also rationalized that "when it comes to grading homeless

students, you can either choose to penalize a student for not turning in something, or you can leave it blank so that you only count and grade the things they turn in." For Vanessa, placing value only on the assignments that were submitted means that homeless students had a better chance at earning a passing grade. For Jessica, who stated, "I'll give them a longer time to do it, and sometimes, I'll just give them only certain parts of an assignment," special accommodations mean grading a homeless student based on a modified assignment that they still also had extensions on just in case they need additional time and support from her.

However, as Ms. X notes, giving extreme extensions to only homeless students should be avoided. To combat this, she explains:

The maximum extension time for students is about 1.5 weeks, no matter what any of their situations are. I always hold my students accountable. [...] I give extensions to my homeless students, but I make sure to give that extension to the entire class, and also find out what's preventing them from getting the assignment done.

So, the work does not just stop at providing the extension. Poppin explained her version of special consideration for due dates:

I only give them an extension for a day, and I'll tell you why. It's a day that they have to spend with me. Um, and I use this as a strategy because providing them space and time is a really...it's an effective strategy for a homeless child. You can give them three extra days but it doesn't matter. Like, they're homeless, so like, they're not gonna do it at home.

Poppin provides extensions, but only under the specific terms described above. Her rationalization of why her extension is only one day is understandable because she is aware that many of her homeless students either don't have a workspace at the shelter, don't have a workspace while living doubled up, or simply cannot get a moment of quiet wherever they are

living. Many of the teachers' rationalizations for the special considerations they give for grading and extensions are based solely on what they anticipate life for that individual student is like beyond the classroom. Meanwhile, other participants, like Jessica, stated matter-of-factly that the special considerations for final passing grades are given to homeless students "at the admin's behest" as a show of empathy. However, Jessica, too, describes adjusting grades throughout the school year:

So, like on individual assignments, I might, you know, curve it or make it a little bit higher, and then, looking at the scheme of things right...so, the final grade, I'll look at everything that was done. And if I believe that they put forth the extra effort or something of that nature, then yeah, I'll pass them.

Participants' decisions to provide special accommodations for grades and due dates are based on empathy and compassion, but also administrative directions. Similarly, disciplinary actions and consequences for homeless students are viewed from the same lens by participants. Shantelle expressed:

Behavior-wise for consequences, I do give special considerations. For example, when I see the behavior is aggression in the classroom in response to what someone else says, and I know this is not typically this student. You cannot do anything to trigger them, but I've never given any punitive action to students who I know are acting out of their traumatic situation because I do call it traumatic—the situation of homelessness.

Like many of the participants, the decision to not give severe consequences does not mean that teachers do not care to correct improper behavior, but simply that they might take a different approach, while also still teaching or modeling proper responses and behavior for the homeless student in the classroom through actions and even peer interactions.

But giving special considerations is not always easy and definitely not without its challenges for teachers serving homeless students. Tay expressed, “Sometimes they can take an inch and turn it into a foot, but you know, we work together.” Additionally, Jane notes that sometimes, other students might notice the special considerations given to homeless students, though they might not know the exact reason: “I’ve had kids be like, oh, you see, why are you only talking to so and so, but with me, you do so and so.” There is a delicate balance that must be maintained. Tay explained:

I know that their behaviors are based on their trauma. I'm not gonna yell at that kid because I know they have the trauma behind it, and it's going to do nothing but make the kid resent you, versus want to work with you. So, I think I take every kid's personality or their trauma situations into consideration, with the consequences they receive. And they're all fair consequences, though. It's not like I'm going to take gym away from one person, but then the other person gets to play for half the gym and...so, it's still fair, but it's just, you know, I have to take into consideration the mental state of my kids.

Above all, participants noted the need to still be fair to all students, though that might be challenging, because as Poppin said, “it should be about equity, not fairness.” Nevertheless, special considerations for disciplinary consequences were popular among the participants.

However, a few participants, Poppin, Veronica, Pauline, and Tay explained why they do not like to give special considerations for grades or disciplinary actions. Veronica was against special considerations for disciplinary consequences:

I think for discipline, I kind of don't...I don't give any special consideration, because I feel like, you know, you have to teach everyone the same what's your guidelines for your class, and your systems for discipline, so everyone is treated the same way.

When asked about special considerations as it related to grading, Tay let out a resounding, “No, absolutely not. Not at all.” She expressed the following inner struggle and what strengthens her resolve against grade accommodations:

This year was tough because I had to decide if some kids would have to go to summer school mandatory or not. And I know a lot of them are struggling, but I felt as an educator, I'll be doing more harm than good if I didn't put them in summer school, especially the kids that logged on, like, twice in a whole year. Like, you missed the whole sixth-grade year; for me to just pass you wouldn't be doing you more harm than good, like to just put you in the seventh grade?

Pauline expressed something similar when it comes to grading accommodations. She stated that she shows “special consideration for submitting graded work when it comes to deadlines, and for disciplinary actions,” but stood firm on her rationalization for not giving grades not fully earned:

I think the most difficult decision I've had to make is when it comes to grades. At the end of the day, we still need to present their grades for promotional reasons. And I think that that's a hard decision because I'm very empathetic to their situation and to them being absent. I'm very understanding, and I'm even understanding when they're not feeling well, and they just don't want to be there, or they don't want to complete the work but, I mean, I can't pass them because of their situation, and I think that I would be doing a disservice to them by saying yes, you know, and just give them a pass because of their situation. As much as their situation impacts them, I don't want them to be defined as the student whose homelessness is the only reason they pass.

And Pauline's concern is a valid one, because even the teachers that shared that they do give special accommodations for grades still lamented having to do so because of the academic harm

and long-term consequence since, as Jane explained, “they were already passed on and just keep getting pushed up to the next grade.” Poppin echoed this sentiment, stating, “Academically, if a student is homeless, they are more likely two or more grades behind grade level. More likely, in my experience, two or more.” All 12 participants noted that though it was not all homeless students that performed below grade level, most homeless students they served, except for those who were resilient, did perform below grade level. Poppin voiced her frustration with the educational system and expectations when it comes to special consideration:

Are you telling me to pass these kids and teach these kids [redacted] because you're like, oh they can't do it, oh, well? Because if so, I'm not preparing these children for anything but your prison system. I'm not preparing them for responsibility. If you tell me I have to pass them...oh, well, consider what they're going through. No...Consider what they are about to go through; they're going to be adults in this world who can't read or write.

Poppin voiced frustration for the same thing that up to nine other participants described at various points during their interviews and hinted at when describing attempts at helping homeless students in their lived experience prompts. Vanessa, however, stated matter-of-factly that “I feel like I have the support of the DOE because they're not trying to fail these students either, with the Every Student Succeeds thing, and I personally don't think it benefits them to stay behind and repeat the grade.” The reality is that the decisions participants describe making about the homeless students they teach and serve are embedded in the larger educational system in place.

Ultimately, the academic instructional interventions that teachers employ with and toward homeless students in their classrooms are also deliberate considerations that they make. The culture of the school and then the microsystem of the classroom both play an important role

in how participants choose to address the aforementioned aspects of their pedagogical practices, but on how they also make the decisions that are affected by and continue to drive their experiences with homeless students in the classroom. Whether they gave special considerations or not, all participants noted that they tried not to lower expectations in the actual classroom, even while providing special support (Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). As Tay expressed, “I tend to push them because I don’t think allowing kids to do or give the bare minimum helps them just because you feel bad for them.”

Theme Three: Promoting Resilience and Motivation to Completion

In middle school, homeless students are adolescents who have the added stresses that come with their living situations. However, promoting resilience among their homeless students is something that all 12 participants expressed as a crucial part of what drove certain decisions and practices in the classroom and what allowed them as teachers to avail themselves to these students beyond the classroom parameter. Langston stated:

I see a lot of need for consistency in being there for them. I think just being there every day. Like, I think I miss less than, like, five days a year. So, yeah, I think being there every single day and then going, yea, I'm here every single day for these students, and having the same systems in place every day, I think, promotes resilience.

For Langston, promoting resilience meant providing consistency for homeless students with this presence in the classroom and also ensuring that the structures and systems in place were clear. Other participants also noted the importance of structure, systems, and routines in maintaining resilience. Roman noted that structures and routines for promoting resilience also had to translate into consistent instructional supports: “With academic resilience, you have to give them something that they can always go back to like a step by step. You have to always have resources

at the ready.” Sometimes, routines to foster resilience also meant tailoring or modifying the structured routines for specific students: Jane wrote:

Moving forward, I ensured that whenever he came in that he got breakfast and sometimes allowed him to come to my class to take a nap during lunch. I also bought him a lock for his locker so he felt confident that no one would steal his things. And I convinced him to leave his basketball with the counselor every morning and pick it up at the end of the day. He stuck to these routines (most days) and I saw a significant difference in his behavior and the completion of class assignments across subjects.

Promoting resilience among homeless students is never a one-size-fits-all for these teachers. In fact, availing themselves to students meant entirely different things, but each with the same goal: “Getting students to graduate and go to high school,” as Veronica noted.

For other participants, celebrating and validating homeless students’ work and personal experiences was key to promoting resilience. Pauline expressed:

I think validation is the biggest thing that I try to do to push resilience because, you know, it's unfair for students at that age, going through those things, to expect them to be strong, and to be resilient. So, I think the biggest thing I try to do is make them feel validated when they do their work, when they do show up, and when they do participate and they have ideas. I try to just make sure that I instill in them that they are important, and that they contribute to the community, and that they belong there.

Tay discussed:

Well, at the end of every unit, we have celebrations. And I think that's what really helped. So, they present their work. It was crazy; this year was actually pretty cool because it was Zoom. So, a lot of their families were able to attend the presentations and celebrations.

So, when they feel their work is being celebrated, they want to do the next project: Oh my God, are we having a next celebration? So, we usually celebrate their work, no matter how much or how little you did, everyone deserves to be celebrated, and I think that's very important.

Vanessa offered, "I used to do like rewards for, you know, books read, i-Ready lessons completed, and I also do Student of the Week or Student of the Month. Students could also go into my treasure box." Similarly, Veronica contended:

I think rewards help because it's eighth grade, and it's a lot easier because they have graduation. So, that already could be a motivator...it doesn't always help, but I still like rewarding them. So, having, like, you know, most improved student of the month, most improved student or top student, you know, and like little prizes that I give them so that they want it. So, like, over remote learning, I gave kids \$10 amazon gift cards, and you know, I would send it to them, and they loved it, and it pushed them for them to do better.

Jessica passionately explained:

You know, resilience and grit are about the day in and day out, and about what am I actively doing towards my goal, right? So, I feel like effective goal setting is very, very important. I think breaking those goals down into actionable tasks is extremely important, and celebration, right? I feel like we're always focused on the finished product, right? But with these kids and their motivation being so, so low, I think that more of the little things need to be celebrated. So maybe you didn't include a whole project, but I'm proud that you did step one, baby, because two and three are coming.

For these participants, celebration and validation of student work tended to work when promoting resilience among middle school students who were homeless because they realized

that it had a three-fold impact: it helped to build resilience, but also aided in building trust and reciprocity, and it pushed students to want to attempt completion of assignments. Participants admitted that even though this strategy did not always yield positive results, most homeless students did appreciate feeling seen and valued as a part of the classroom community.

Interestingly, a few participants also noted that they could not promote academic resilience among homeless students without also facilitating relationships between homeless students and their peers in the classroom. Shantelle explained, "It's all about building comradery and teamwork," and Poppin offered, "We have something called PGC, which is peer group counseling. So, the eighth graders kind of mentor the sixth graders, and we kind of use that as a way to get kids to stay engaged and resilient." In addition to peer support, participants also cited school programs as extra needed support that helped them to inadvertently help students foster resilience. Whether or not students received support outside of the classroom could either make the participants' job of promoting resilience more difficult or less difficult.

Notably, during the pandemic, a few participants admitted that promoting resilience among homeless students was much more difficult and that availing themselves to students meant truly being available long beyond work hours. During her interview, Poppin shared:

So, um, you know at 11 o'clock at night if they were up and I was up, we would have class. And this kind of promoted resilience in so far as it kept them coming and kept them going and kept them pushing because at a point, they knew, you know, maybe not during class but sometime today, Miss [redacted] is gonna help me with this work. So, it kept them coming back to me. So, you know, I had to avail myself to them, and that was really something. I want you to see me since I need to show you that I'm always open to you.

Ms. X also shared:

So, it's always like how could I let you know, or how could I instill in you that YES, you can do better for yourself; you just have to work hard, and you just have to apply yourself. So just, I don't even [pauses], it's just so layered. There are too many words that come to mind, but it's hard to push them to develop that sense of everything—like independence, and just yea, you can do it. Being resilient more than anything and pushing them to have that resilience and that drive. It's tougher virtually. It's challenging.

Not having students in front of them in the brick-and-mortar classroom meant that for these teachers, promoting resilience became doubly challenging because it removed an essential component they were used to with homeless students: face-to-face interactions in person, and access. This is why helping homeless students to develop resilience meant making decisions that sometimes meant going beyond their listed job descriptions. As Tay stated, "It's hard when they're at home or in the shelters for remote learning because they're not held as accountable, and there's but so much we can do as teachers."

The last thing that many participants expressed helped to foster resilience among the homeless students they served was giving these students a consistent role in the classroom throughout the school year. For example, Roman wrote, "It became clear they needed a role within the class that would make them feel needed. So, I asked the student if they could help with tasks around the class like passing out worksheets, assisting in organizing classroom materials, etc." Other participants like Shantelle, Poppin, Tay, Ms. X, Jane, and Paul also noted the importance of assigning homeless students some kind of role, so that they felt useful and felt like they belonged; otherwise, as Poppin, Tay, and Jessica noted, these are the students who would continue to be "invisible." Shantelle noted the importance of assigning roles when promoting academic resilience:

Because they tend not to want to be in groups, they isolate themselves, and sometimes they don't participate as much. They become almost lonesome in a class of 30 kids you know, so they don't want to bring attention to themselves. So, they try to avoid any activity that would cause them to be among other students in the classroom. So, it's almost as if they don't want other students to recognize what's going on with them.

Promoting resilience, then, begins with educators first trying to find a way to motivate students experiencing homelessness to want to engage in the first place. In retrospect, participants realized that everything they tried to do worked together, not separately. Promoting resilience was impossible without first fostering trust and succeeding at engaging students.

Theme Four: Social-Emotional Impact and Support

In what was somewhat unexpected, 11 of the 12 participants cited social-emotional impact when asked about their experiences dealing with the main needs of homeless students within the classroom, and the subsequent impact it had on these students inside the classroom. Participants also discussed their experiences in terms of decisions made when supporting homeless students' social and emotional needs in the classroom that arose from unmet physical or emotional needs. Vanessa shared:

I think they need a lot of emotional support—just someone who's there to listen, to talk to them. Someone who, you know, can hear them out. A lot of the time, teachers don't open up the forum to talk about things that they want to talk about, and I know it's a lot harder in the [redacted] and in the school that we are at to kind of give more time to that.

Tay confessed:

I would say emotional needs. Um, a lot of...especially with middle school...a lot of them come in, I don't want to use the term angry, I don't like using the term angry, but a lot of

them come in—as many teachers would say, seeking attention. They come in full throttle, and I think a lot of them just want to be heard. Many of my kids come from family sizes of like eight kids. I had a kid that had 12 siblings living with them. So, some of them have moved from shelter to shelter throughout the years. So, I think one of their main needs would be emotional needs.

Pauline shared in her interview:

I would associate a lot of homeless students with being either extremely quiet or extremely impulsive. So, some students shut down because they have so many pending thoughts so they're not very open. So, some of them are very quiet, and then there's the other side, where a lot of students are sometimes really impulsive. They will have small outbursts, or they have a lot of emotions because, at that age, they're becoming aware of their emotions, but that doesn't mean they really know how to deal with them.

Roman also shared an experience:

So, I would say the needs are very much emotional needs, primarily. You do know that there are academic needs as well, you know, but I feel like the emotional needs are kind of like the core of it. I remember in my first year, we had a student who lived in a shelter and I kind of...I guess, I set them off in a way that I didn't really understand what I said. But I guess it kind of triggered what I can only describe as an episode for him. He was yelling, he stormed out of the classroom, and he was in tears.

For these participants and several others, the socio-emotional needs of homeless students were paramount. With basic needs going unmet, participants noted that this very clearly translated into the classroom environment in ways that they sometimes did not immediately understand. This is also seen when Jane shared:

It's academic, then obviously food and shelter. Like, food security, I realize, is very important to them, and just security in general, because it affects them emotionally, affects how they interact with others in the classroom, and affects just who they are. I remember I had one student in my first year, and again, I didn't necessarily grow up in the community I live now, which is the [redacted], so having kids that were so deprived of those basic needs—it took me a while to really like grapple with how that affects them.

It was important for participants to note that the social and emotional needs of homeless students were linked directly to physical needs and that all of these aspects played a role in academic outcomes inside the classroom. In thinking of the social-emotional aspect and a need for this change when it came to homeless students and other students facing traumatic situations, Ms. X suggested, “I would say that we need to add like a handbook or guide on social-emotional learning/well-being, so homeless students have all the resources they need in one place.” It was an interesting suggestion that Ms. X intends to bring up to the school administration.

The impact noted in the classroom when it came to socio-emotional needs of homeless students affected not only teachers but also the peers of homeless students. However, participants shared some strategies and support approaches they tried in order to cater to and support this side that is simply what they call the reality of where and whom they serve. Jessica wrote:

I decided to talk to him. Because of my sincere effort, I was able to learn about him, his strength, his interest, and eventually, his needs. I was humbled and honored by our interactions. He was so smart, funny, and kind. His perceived emotional aggression was just his protective shield. I was warm enough to melt his exterior. Because I approached him in a soft, genuine way, he opened himself to me. And I tried to honor that as much as I could by providing support, encouragement, and acknowledgment.

Jessica's approach to offering support revealed that she believed that homeless students are often simply misunderstood in the classroom, and that to combat social-emotional struggles, it takes considerably more effort from a teacher to understand that child. Poppin shared:

My pedagogy has been transformed in so far as I constantly have to modify and I constantly have to check on the emotional child. I have to. Um, it's made me a psychologist, more so than a pedagogue. It's pissed me off because it's put me in a position, pedagogically, where, you know, what I teach doesn't mean [redacted], since at the end of the day... like for example, summer school I put my summer school grades in yesterday and girl I passed everybody because I was told to.

Poppin's frustration is warranted because, in her school, more than 40% of students are homeless. Participants have expressed that oftentimes, teachers like them who serve in low-income schools have had to struggle with maintaining a balance between serving the child by focusing on academics or serving the child by focusing on social-emotional struggles to mitigate its impact on academics. It is not an easy position to be in as an educator. Some participants also describe addressing social-emotional needs from the root of the problem: lack of basic needs.

Tay shared:

So, I would say like with every one of my kids, I've taken them with like open arms as not only a teacher but like someone that they can confide in, because many of them don't have someone that they can trust. I've also...like if kids needed soap...I tell them from the beginning of the year, they can always tell me privately because I know a lot of kids come in like embarrassed, so they'll write me like a letter, or they'll pull me in the hallway like hey, Ms. [redacted], can I talk to you, and come in early? I've gotten kids basic needs stuff, like soap, toothpaste, and so on.

Similarly, Jessica noted:

On my break, I went and I bought him some bar soaps. I bought liquid soaps. So, I think I bought him washcloths too, and some socks because I know they always need socks and shirts, and underwear; it's something that they always, always need. So, I'm gathering this stuff together, and I just put it in a plastic bag and I go to his next class, and I said here, I got these for you. And he said thank you, and that was it, right? And even though that was something that was very short, it's stayed with me throughout this whole experience.

Participants were very aware that they could not address the social or emotional needs of homeless students without first addressing physical needs. Providing students with certain supplies was a first step to opening deeper conversations necessary to fully help them. Guidance counselors and deans were also key resources that participants mentioned using, but as Shantelle noted, “Only if I absolutely needed to call the guidance counselor in if it’s a super difficult situation.”

However, like everything else the participants described, supporting homeless students’ socio-emotional needs and addressing or mitigating the impact it has on them in the classroom is never easy. Veronica shared:

I think the biggest challenge that I have is providing them the support that they need in the classroom and also being someone that they can talk to outside. I think it's hard because we have such a heavy workload that it's very hard to provide each student with that individual support that they need—emotionally, academically, and otherwise.

The reality of teaching in low-income schools means that teachers simply do not have the time to always address these needs or provide the very necessarily additional non-instructional support that homeless students require. In discussing how they support homeless students when it comes

to these issues, some teachers shared certain barriers they faced when switching to the virtual environment. Paul lamented:

So, it's making sure that they have everything they physically, mentally, and emotionally need to get through the day. And that's a lot easier to do in person. Right? Oh, you're hungry, there's some food. Oh, you, you don't have these things? Well, here. You know, um, that's easy to do in person. Virtually, I think the biggest challenge was access. So, that and probably communication. Because again, if we don't know you have access, and you can't communicate with us, it's a ticking time bomb.

Roman also confessed, "It's the emotional side of it, so it's harder. While there are students who do well, despite being you know, homeless, they're more likely to be apathetic about schoolwork, and require way more motivation, which is harder to do virtually." When participants consider the social-emotional needs of homeless students, it is clear that they focus on the impact it has on the student, and not so much the impact it has on their sense of self in terms of burnout or having to go the extra mile each day because the low-income schools they serve in has limited resources.

Theme Five: Curriculum Pitfalls and Revisions

Of the 12 participants, all of them mentioned various pitfalls present in their current curricula but offered next steps that both schools across the two districts are working on. While two out of 12 participants were semi-satisfied with the current curriculum used for their subjects, they both still noted similar pitfalls as the other educators. Participants were both general and special education teachers who teach ELA, Science, ENL, Math, Social Studies, and Music. Their discussion of the curriculum available for their content area focused on the four core subjects, not on any additional electives that they taught. Veronica confessed:

The curriculum that we're given is not modified for students of these, you know, socioeconomic status at all. You as a teacher, have to modify it to fit the students' needs. But what is given to you is not modified. It is honestly too high for these students; they are not at that grade level to fully comprehend the material that is given to them. You know, I have to modify it for them, which takes a lot of time because every year you get new kids, and unfortunately, the reading levels aren't getting better every year.

Poppin shared similar sentiments about the curriculum, which was backed up by an artifact or example of the curriculum they have in use at her school:

Yeah, so the curriculum that my school uses is called TC: Teachers College, the reading and writing workshop. I'm sure you've heard of it. It's this wonderful, extremely Caucasian curriculum that teaches kids who can't read how to climb inside a moment. It's bull[redacted]; the [redacted] curriculum is bull[redacted]. Until 2006, it had almost no black and brown mentor texts. It doesn't teach grammar. It doesn't really lend for ELLs; it doesn't really lend for SPEDs. It doesn't lend for homeless or poor kids.

For these participants, who are from separate districts, the concern was similar, in that they felt that the curriculum used did not especially useful for the population they served in these low-income schools. In particular, they pointed out the disconnect between the curriculum in place, and the demographic type of students and/or reading and writing levels of incoming students. Roman, who teaches Social Studies, also admitted, "So, New York City uses Passport for social studies and I would say passport really does not offer much. It was not made with students who come from a lower income background in mind." Pauline, who teaches ENL students confirmed, "I think there needs to be a lot more work when it comes to the students who are—who come from different cultural backgrounds, and who come from these situations because a lot of ENL

students are homeless." Langston reiterated this by saying, "So, the curriculum--which is somewhat boxed...Uh, it's usually...it has a very general ideal student that they are attempting to hit." Unfortunately, participants contended that homeless students do not fall under the "ideal" student the curriculum usually has in mind.

In discussing next steps for the curriculum used in their various subject areas, participants either noted current steps being taken to modify the curriculum or shared what they would personally want to see done. Shantelle stated, "The only suggestion or modification that we're trying to make is—has to do with cultural relevance—not as specific in the sense of considering economic situation, but just culture. So, how do we make our curriculum culturally relevant to them?" In the same vein, Ms. X also shared:

So, let me see. I would say that as far as for ELA, we are required to do unit revisions each year, and each year the theme changes. So, in light of everything that's been happening—like COVID or Black Lives Matter and all these other innocent lives being taken—we are moving toward being more culturally responsive and working in SEL (social-emotional learning) moments for students. Again, that way, they are allowing—or being able to have their voices heard and they're being able to speak up on these current events and what they see happening in the communities that they're living in.

In this sense, cultural relevance in the curriculum is necessary for two reasons: to allow teachers serving homeless students to provide instruction that students could better connect to, and to provide students with a voice or representation across an otherwise irrelevant curriculum that they would see no value in given their socio-economic realities. Tay expressed, "We're basing it primarily on cultural relevance, experiences that the kids could relate to more, and social-emotional learning." Not all participants felt they had any say at all in the curriculum or its

revisions, however. Vanessa noted, “I kind of just followed the curriculum. I didn’t have much say.” Shantelle, however, noted that as a seasoned professional, she was told that “the curriculum is just a guide.”

For some participants, being given a curriculum that might not necessarily be designed for the students they served, but being allowed flexibility when carrying out instruction somewhat made up for some of the curriculum pitfalls. Pauline explained, "So, I think there's some flexibility in the sense that I can choose how to present the skills that I'm teaching, but I would still love the flexibility to teach them phonics." Special education teachers, Jane, Ms. X, and Vanessa, noted that they have the flexibility to differentiate the curriculum how they saw fit "if it's listed on the student's IEP." Paul, a math teacher, stated:

I am given the flexibility to switch out the scenarios, the mathematics, or whatever the case may be, bring in any outside resources, any additional information that I can personally find, or that I have access to. I'm not—I'm not handcuffed to our curriculum and/or our pacing guide.

Jessica agreed:

So, actually, um, we are afforded a lot of flexibility. There is a book, right, that we follow, and things like that, but as far as, text, right, or modes of representation, that's up to me. So, I could show a video, I can show, you know what I mean? I could pull a text from someplace else. So, there's a lot of freedom in that.

For these participants, flexibility was allowed as long as they were able to, as Roman noted, “justify our decisions.” Nevertheless, teachers expressed that they always tried their best when serving and modifying instruction in the classroom for homeless students.

Notably, the participants who taught Math and Science were more content with the curriculum used and expressed having positive outcomes. Jessica noted:

The curriculum is pretty decent...or the science that is actually being taught, are things that the kids experience, right, pretty much on a daily basis. They're also like facts and skills that are transferable, so that's pretty cool. The framework, right, that we use to roll out the curriculum is the 5E framework. And it is an inquiry-based framework, and it has actually been tried and tested, and it was found that it helps for ENL students, for students of low-income, um, all types of students, including homeless students.

Similarly, Paul contended:

Well, for Math, I will give our curriculum credit. It does provide a lot of resources on modifications and what-not, to like, adjust for like students with disability, multilingual learners, um, and whoever or whatever kind of student, and homeless students, that I may have in front of me—even like students with different learning styles, right?

Jessica and Paul stood out among the 12 participants because they were the only participants who felt that the curriculum in place was multicultural and accessible to all types of students. Interestingly, the examples that Paul shared showed modifications, but nothing extensive. On the other hand, for subjects like ENL, ELA, and Social Studies, which all required more reading and writing and overall literacy, participants made it clear that the curriculum was much more nuanced and difficult when trying to modify for low-income students.

On the other hand, some participants noted that even though it was not technically allowed, they made certain personal changes when carrying out curriculum via instruction in their classrooms, simply because they thought they knew what was best for the population they serve. Roman noted:

Now, in terms of my own kind of pedagogical practices, I've made great strides to be more culturally relevant, you know, if it boils down to, you know, having to get to pay closer attention to you know, our homeless students, it's also about, you know, interesting them, you know, if they're prone to kind of just becoming apathetic. Then, you know, perhaps being able to connect the material with them on a level that seems personal to them, where they can actually care about it is what I've been trying to do.

Like a few other participants, Roman realized that he had to modify the curriculum materials to make it not only more accessible for homeless students, but more in sync with their own lived realities. Poppin admitted to making her own revisions:

I think that the curriculum is not targeting and dealing with the deficits that these kids have. I have flexibility because I've been teaching for 21 years, and I dare somebody to come into my room and tell me what to do. [...] So, a lot of times what I do is, yeah, I like to modify the curriculum. I use things that I'm not allowed to use. I teach grammar, and I get in trouble for that all the time. But I mean I'm tenured, so I don't give a [redacted].

For Poppin, it was necessary to sometimes break away from the rigid curriculum not designed for the demographic she served, and especially not conducive to addressing the learning gaps and deficits of the homeless students she taught. In her opinion, it was worth a confrontation with the administration.

Ultimately, the findings of this study as it relates to curriculum and instruction modifications, make it clear that most participants support adjustments based on relevance and culturally responsive curricula that are also equitable, and allow teacher flexibility when making instructional decisions.

Outlier Data and Findings

Though perhaps not major, there were two outlier findings that did not align with the specific research questions or themes of this research study. These outlier findings were primarily connected to the differences some educators perceived when it came to their experiences with male versus female homeless students and the changes that they noticed regarding in-person versus virtual instructional decisions for these students. Ultimately, these outlier findings do still speak to an important part of what these educators experienced in the classroom and are therefore discussed below.

Outlier Finding #1: Teaching Male Versus Female Homeless Students

The research questions of this study did not focus on creating a distinction between educator experiences with male versus female homeless students. However, one participant spoke at length about the differences in the lived experiences she had with female homeless students versus male homeless students. This is important because this distinction might be useful for future research. For example, Ms. X offered:

You can see a difference with the needs of the female homeless students as opposed to the male homeless students. [Because] the females, you really wouldn't be able to tell that they are in a situation, because they would come to school well-kept and like, they wouldn't have a scent, and they were just more invested in the lesson and always putting their best effort forward. So, I would say when it came to the male students, I would kind of see their needs more, and I don't know if that's because they have more stress or more responsibility that's being placed on them.

Despite this important observation, however, it was generally the consensus among the other educators that there was no particular difference in their lived experiences in the classroom with homeless students based on gender. Nevertheless, it is something to consider for future research.

Outlier Finding #2: Virtual vs. In-Person Instructional Decisions for Homeless Students

Though not a key focus of this study's overarching research questions, given the reality of the changes to learning in the current global pandemic, a few educators spent a long time discussing the challenges that came with having to switch to remote learning in a low-income high-poverty school. One participant, in particular, spent considerable time during the interview discussing how having to teach and serve students experiencing homelessness remotely created insurmountable barriers that he simply could not overcome due to the lack of resources in the system structure itself. Paul shared:

Virtual teaching has been a terrible experience, and as far as I'm concerned, it's because the main issue with any student who is homeless, and I, you know, it's very obvious, but it's that they don't have access, or they don't have sustained access to technology.

This is important to note because instructional decisions that work in person in brick-and-mortar settings and are made by teachers could be severely impacted by virtual learning. Inadvertently, this may result in an entirely different type of lived experience for the teacher and of course for the homeless student who now has no access to instruction, modifications, or in-person amenities that a teacher may usually provide to promote resilience. It can make an educator feel hopeless.

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across low-income public middle schools in NYC. The data analysis was

influenced by the participants' responses to the research questions about their experiences and instructional decisions in the classroom while serving homeless students. The one-on-one personal interviews, the participants' written lived experiences, and artifacts allowed participants an opportunity to provide details of their experiences. An explanation of the responses is discussed below.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of NYC public middle school teachers with homeless students in their classrooms? It was important to explore the lived experiences of classroom teachers serving homeless students in low-income middle schools and how doing so impacted them. In this study, classroom teachers referred to teachers who taught students in a whole-group, small group, or one-to-one setting class. All 12 participants in the study met the selection criteria as classroom teachers who were at least 18 years old, had their teaching certification from the New York City Department of Education, had been teaching for at least 2 years, currently teach in a middle school classroom setting, and were aware of and knew they taught students experiencing homelessness. The unique characteristics of the participants contribute to the literature of homeless education, low-income students, and instructional strategies.

The study's findings revealed that participants' experiences with homeless students in their classrooms were filled with continuous challenges that pushed participants to constantly shift their understanding of how to address and cater to the unmet needs of their students. Also found in this research study is their propensity to constantly avail themselves to homeless students, even at the expense of their own time and personal emotional toll. Although participants described a mix of positive and negative experiences, most initial experiences were negative, while the positive experiences only developed later on after the challenges associated

with building trust and reciprocity were overcome. As such, participants navigated their relationships with homeless students through empathy, but not pity. Ms. X explained, “I do everything to get them to believe in themselves. They’re only children, and it’s not their fault that they’re in that situation, but I have to show them they can push through.” Tay also reiterated, “Um, me with my kids...I’m one of those teachers that if I had to, I’ll give them the shirt off my back to make sure they’re good.” Shantelle discussed in her lived experience prompt:

This student was almost always unprepared for classes, came to school late and infrequently and many times fell asleep during instruction. It was noticed that she had very few “friends” from her classroom peers. She often sat away from others and rarely participated in class.

Instead of giving up on this student, Shantelle went on to express how she began spending one-on-one time with this student to learn the reasons behind her actions. Teachers experienced increased empathy because children at the middle school age are not able to be as self-sufficient as older students and adults who experience homelessness. With a hint of sadness in her voice, Poppin noted, “Homeless kids and other kids too, you know, teachers, we have to understand that children acclimate themselves to their lives, to their surroundings...So, homeless kids acclimate to inconsistency because their lives are inconsistent, and I have to not be.” Due to increased empathy, participants’ experiences with homeless students in the classroom centered primarily around providing food, school materials, social and emotional support, and excessive time to these students that they did not necessarily have to provide for the students’ housed peers. Additionally, many participants donated their clothes, books, school supplies, and sometimes even money to school and community-based organizations to help at-risk homeless students and their families. The location of the low-income schools within which they worked also had an

impact on teachers' experiences because they extended beyond the classroom as well. In her interview, Poppin offered, "I want to send you a picture of my school, Peta, because my school is flanked by a methadone clinic, an abandoned building, and a men's shelter." The picture showed just what Poppin described, and this kind of reality of the school's location further complicated the issues students brought into the classroom and how Poppin would then need to address them.

Some participants expressed some frustration stemming from their experiences. Though teachers experienced a constant need to make themselves available to homeless students, they also inadvertently expressed how hard it was to do so sometimes given their workload, other people's perceptions of homeless students, lack of school resources, class sizes, and more recently, the pandemic induced switch to remote learning. Shantelle confessed, "It...it gets overwhelming. Because you have 60 kids—two main classes—I've had classes where almost half of them were facing homelessness!" It was the reality of teaching in a low-income school that was also a zone school that simply had to take everyone. Roman reiterated this point, stating, "We're a zone school, so we have to take everyone. We can't refuse anybody at all." Poppin expressed similar sentiments, noting that her school is also a zone school that has a disproportionate number of homeless students in classrooms:

I think one of the problems with equity is that the DOE has put all of these children in one place. They put all the homeless students in one place. And then the one or two that they've sprinkled in other places, of course, their needs are being met, because they're not, they're not overwhelming their system.

In speaking to participants, it became quite clear that the large number of homeless students in their classrooms and these educators' experiences with them might have been somewhat mitigated if their low-income schools did not have such high numbers of homeless and displaced

students. Perhaps the personal toll would be less, but the microsystem of the classroom is fed by the systems that surround it (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Tay shared, "It's hard. Sorry, we have an 80% percent shelter rate at my school. Our students from out school...80%. So, if a class has 30 kids, about 20 to 25 of them are homeless and live in the shelter." This statistic is why Veronica lamented, "I wish I could split myself into 90 people, because that's how any I feel like I have." Poppin revealed:

Before remote learning, it was, baby, are you hungry, you're falling asleep, are you hungry? Okay, I will get you some food. I would keep food in my classroom. I couldn't do that remote. So, unfortunately, I just stopped asking tough questions, I stopped asking to turn the camera on, because I knew what I was gonna see. So, I stopped asking. There was a need for more autonomy with my homeless kids so that I wouldn't see where the [redacted] they lived. So, I wouldn't hear their stomachs growling, and so I wouldn't see that they were dirty.

Another participant, Veronica stated, "Title 1 schools get additional money to support our homeless students, but I don't see where that money is going because everything falls to us." Jane, who cried at one point during the interview, admitted to feeling frustrated sometimes:

Okay, yes, you're experiencing a whole bunch of stuff, but I'm making myself available, I'm begging you. I'm pleading with you, and I'm there for you, like I'm offering my time that I'm not getting paid for, but take me up on it because trust me, you're going to need to have some form of education. But I feel like they just keep on giving them grace, grace, and more grace, and then they're failing horribly, and we still pass them. That is...and it irks my soul, and over the years, it just has gotten worse, and because of the pandemic, I guess it's just...I throw my hands up. This year, I was like, what am I doing?

The participants' experiences with homeless students in the classroom showed that even though they had the propensity to go above and beyond to offer their help to homeless students, it sometimes came at a great personal toll that showed up in the form of frustration. Jessica explained, "If you provide interventions for them, and they're receptive, they can turn it around, right. But if you try to provide incentives and interventions, and they're not receptive, then no, and then academically, they suffer. There's but so much I can do!" The participants all want to help these students and, in their experiences, have tried their best to provide all the help that they can, but it does not always mean that there is full reciprocity from homeless students.

For participants, their experiences, despite the challenges noted with teaching homeless students, were worth it because of the personal rewards they felt. Pauline stated, "I think the most rewarding part of my job in working with homeless students is literally just seeing them happy and seeing them grow, because not having a stable home and experiencing homelessness can really affect a child." Veronica expressed:

I think the most rewarding thing is knowing that you can be that positive role model in that student's life. Especially when I share my story that I was once homeless, and they understand. They look at you differently because they're like wow, I could be, you know like Miss Veronica one day, you know. I feel like, you know, being that role model is the most rewarding because they look up to you and they see that this is just a temporary situation and that you can still make something of your life.

Other participants such as Poppin and Tay, who have also experienced homelessness at some point in their lives also discussed that their experiences with homeless students are largely driven by their personal need to be a living resource for students in their classroom who were

experiencing homelessness. Participants such as Langston, Jessica, Paul, Roman, Pauline, and Veronica, who grew up in lower or working-class families, also expressed a similar sentiment.

Ultimately, all the stressors that homeless students bring into the classroom setting impacted the experiences that the participants describe having with homeless students. Classroom teachers who serve homeless students understand that the issues go far beyond the four walls within which they teach, and this allows them to navigate their experiences with a sense of motivation fueled by their need to ensure that as many of their homeless students have basic unmet needs met first, so that they can get to building trust second, and to learning and acquisition third. The participants described a very clear trajectory in their experiences with these students, citing challenge after challenge, but all challenges that they were up for, no matter the personal toll. As Poppin expressed

The biggest reward, no matter all the challenges, is knowing that I'm needed. I find it a privilege to teach the unwanted. [...] Give me your homeless. Give me your tempest tossed. Oh, you can't teach those kids, or oh, they're too much of a problem for you? Oh, you're uncomfortable. Send them to me. I got it. I've been homeless, and I'm not unwanted. I'm a child of God, just like they are.

For teachers like Poppin, Tay, and Veronica, who have experienced homelessness at some point in their own adolescent lives growing up, their commitment to this group of kids provides them with an even more unique drive to overcome all the challenges in their experiences teaching these children.

Sub-Question One

How do educators across two low-income public middle schools in NYC describe the instructional decisions they make in the classroom context when teaching and promoting

academic resilience among students experiencing homelessness? The results of the data analysis revealed several factors of instructional and general decisions or interventions used by classroom teachers when promoting academic resilience. Some of the most widely used instructional decisions included or were related to the following: small-group and one-to-one instruction, peer support, alternative access to materials, after-school tutoring, strategic grouping, learning modifications, discipline or grading leniency, extensions, goal-setting, celebration or validation, modeling the value of education, positive reinforcement systems, consistent structure and routines, building comradery, using student leadership roles, mitigating stress, and open communication when learning. Most importantly, the data revealed that many of the educators serving homeless students in their classrooms felt that it was necessary to provide as many targeted individualized or small group academic interventions as possible—whenever possible. Tay wrote, “One-to-one or small group with them always shows progress.” Veronica agreed, “I always work with students one-on-one and have an action plan.” Shantelle also shared that she “worked mostly one-to-one three to four times a week” with homeless students who needed additional support. Large class sizes in low-income schools meant that it was important for teachers to have targeted small group or one-to-one instruction when teaching homeless students in the classroom because otherwise, they explained that these students were more likely to get lost in the sea of generalizations. Individualized and small group interventions were what participants called a necessity if any academic improvement or resilience was the goal. Educators also relied heavily on structure and routines, engagement strategies, and positive reinforcement applications in the classroom. Vanessa shared that she has to “make sure there’s a routine, and structure, and classroom management” because “they need that safe space to learn,” as eight other educators later confirmed.

Subsequently, participants also noted that providing validation to homeless students was important when fostering their academic resilience. Pauline shared that “the biggest thing I try to do to promote resilience is validating their work, and responses, and their presence.” Notably, the findings reveal that special considerations not usually provided to other students were provided to those experiencing homelessness because teachers admitted not wanting to add to the already existing trauma. Jessica shared, “I would try to give him later due dates than the others, because he had so much to handle.” All participants admitted to giving special considerations to homeless students when it came to deadlines for work to be submitted, tardiness, and absences. Initially, the participants admitted that it was quite difficult to determine how to navigate the way that they made instructional decisions toward homeless students because it involved too many nuances. They also expressed that they had to learn how to be considerate, discreet, and kind to homeless students in a way that allowed them to maintain a very difficult balance between being pedagogues who teach and being empathes who provided special accommodations and considerations instructional and otherwise—just because of what they knew homeless students were going through. Shantelle noted, “Knowing that I teach and work with students who face homelessness pushes me to be more cognizant of what I’m teaching them and how, so they can come and ask me for absolutely anything.”

Sub-Question Two

How do educators across two low-income NYC public middle schools describe their perceptions of the degree of inclusiveness in the curriculum in terms of instructional support accommodations, differentiation, or guidance when teaching homeless students? Whether the participants were special education or general education teachers who taught 6th, 7th, or 8th grade, and whether they taught ELA, ENL, Math, Science, Social Studies, or Music, all participants

across both school districts believed that the curriculum used either (a) fell short in terms of being designed for the majority demographic of students they served, or (b) needed some revisions and adjustments in order to consider the needs of homeless students, and to provide additional flexibility so that teachers could be more inclusive without fear of administrative or district pushback. As such, curriculum pitfalls and ongoing or suggested revisions are what educators focused on. An example artifact shared of a school curriculum provided by Ms. X revealed the following sections under modifications: “SPED and ENL.” This kind of modification was consistent with what many other participants described as what passed for modifications and stipulations. However, as Pauline noted, “homeless students are a unique set of students with many needs.” Yes, homeless students are sometimes special education students, and homeless students are sometimes ENL students, but they do not all fit into this common binary modification that shows up in mainstream curricula. Jane admitted, “There isn't much consideration in terms of them being homeless. It's just that I try to maybe select materials that they may connect with a little bit more. That's the only additional thing that I try to do sometimes.” Even Jessica and Paul, who admire the science and math curriculum used and felt that it lent itself to different kinds of students, agreed that they had to make revisions when carrying out instruction because the examples and suggestions in the curricula were not at all relevant. Poppin confirmed, “I know this curriculum was not made for these students because it doesn't consider their deficits or their realities.” Langston also admitted that the “ideal student” seen in curriculum examples are not the students they serve.

In this sense, representation and inclusiveness in the curriculum are lacking, according to participants. All participants did concede that including differentiation for students was their job as teachers in the classroom, and several participants, Tay, Paul, Jessica, Shantelle, Poppin,

suggested that curriculum is "just a guide" and that every other decision was theirs, even if it meant getting into trouble. However, participants expressed that both school districts are attempting to make some strides toward revision and allowing teachers input and flexibility. Tay noted that her school was trying to involve teachers in the curriculum development process but that the biggest challenge still was "differentiating the lessons for the wide spectrum of the levels in the classroom so that everyone understands the material." Current ongoing revisions focus on what Shantelle, Paul, Ms. X, Roman, Jessica, and Pauline call "culturally relevant" modifications. Vanessa shared, "We've done a lot of revisions, but it could honestly always be better."

Summary

Included in Chapter Four were detailed descriptions of the research participants, themes, and narratives that the data analysis yielded through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, written lived experience prompts, and referenced artifacts. A total of 12 middle school classroom teachers participated in the study. The participants' voices could be heard through thick, rich, and detailed descriptions. Challenges in building trust and reciprocity, academic instructional interventions and special considerations, promoting resilience and motivation to completion, social-emotional impact and support, and curriculum pitfalls and revisions were the five themes that emerged through the data analysis. The themes answered the central question and two sub-questions and established the crucial foundation necessary to develop a composite description of the lived experiences of these teachers who serve homeless students in the classroom inside low-income public middle schools. The findings were presented in a narrative format (Moustakas, 1994; Yee, 2018) and grouped by emergent themes. Furthermore, participant responses were

presented in quotations and block quotations to reaffirm the answers to the research questions as they related to the applicable emergent themes.

Notably, the one-on-one personal interviews, the written lived experience prompts, and referenced artifacts yielded results that confirmed the types of experiences educators had with homeless students, and the instructional decisions they made for these students while navigating through their experiences as educators serving in low-income middle schools. Overall, the participants described their experiences as consistently challenging, but undoubtedly rewarding, though at times frustrating. They described instructional decisions made in the classroom as being navigated based on empathy for homeless students' unmet physical, emotional, and academic needs. Once participants built trust with students, they often made special considerations for homeless students, while also providing a lot of one-to-one and small group academic interventions several times throughout the week, both in and out of the classroom. Participants describe promoting resilience among homeless students as a major challenge (Rojas, 2015; Masten et al., 2015; Opong Asante, 2019), but noted that celebration and validation of homeless students' work and existence were some of the key factors that oftentimes worked. Additionally, in doing so, participants found that they had to avail themselves to students in a lot more ways than just that related to academic resilience; that is, participants found that promoting academic resilience was impossible to separate from promoting emotional resilience (Opong Asante, 2019).

Finally, even though these educators personally tried their best to modify curriculum when carried out as instruction in their personal classrooms, most of them felt that their respective curriculum was not initially inclusive enough in terms of representation, cultural relevance, differentiation, stipulations beyond the binary of SPED and ENL modifications, and

socioeconomic considerations. Participants addressed the need for teachers to lead curriculum development in low-income schools serving a disproportionate number of homeless students because they knew what their students would best respond to since they were more aware of their needs. All educators who participated articulated the many challenges and rewards during their experiences, the time and energy expended to build teacher-student trust and provide additional support, their frustrations, their expectations, the academic interventions they attempted by trial and error, and a seemingly irreversible commitment no matter the personal toll to themselves. Ultimately, they contended that while their current experiences were imperfect, it was worth it all to see the students who come to them homeless make strides, however great or small that may be.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across low-income public middle schools in New York City. A group of twelve classroom teachers was purposefully selected to participate in the study. This chapter summarizes the research results important to the lived experiences of classroom teachers serving homeless students in low-income public middle schools. This is followed by an empirical and theoretical discussion and interpretation of the research findings as they relate to relevant literature and theory. Subsequently, this chapter also examines the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this research study, including its delimitations and limitations. Finally, there are recommendations for future research and a study conclusion.

Discussion

This section includes discussions and interpretations of the study's findings as they relate to the empirical and theoretical literature to reflect the relevant related literature and theories used as a lens for this study. First, I provide a summary of the thematic findings as was revealed by the data analysis. Subsequently, I articulate how this study has corroborated, extended, contrasted, or shed light on previous research findings and suggestions for educators serving homeless students. In doing so, I express how the research questions and the findings discussed helped to reveal a clear understanding and interpretation of the lived experiences of the educators who participated in this study. The responses provided during data collection and the meanings derived were clearly developed and defined in the data analysis because the interview and lived experience prompt questions were well-connected to the research central and sub-questions.

Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory guided this transcendental phenomenological study to help understand the lived experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers serving homeless students. The results were contrasted to the existing theories that reveal the interdependent nature of the study and affirm, substantiate, and explain the detailed descriptions of the lived experiences of these educators.

Interpretation of Findings

Five themes emerged from the data analysis: challenges in building trust and reciprocity, academic instructional interventions and special considerations, promoting resilience and motivation to completion, social and emotional impact and support, and curriculum pitfalls and revisions. The significance of the empirical and theoretical knowledge included is explained in the following sections through my interpretations and offers helpful insights to educators, leaders in educational administration and curriculum, and other educators currently serving in low-income middle schools and/or even pre-service teachers who will be entering low-income public schools where the number of homeless students is high. My interpretations of the findings in this study are therefore tied to both prior research and what I understand to be the lived experiences and truths of the educators who volunteered to be part of this study.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Primarily using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological research design with a focus on a transcendental phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yee, 2018), five themes emerged in this study that provided the essence of the phenomenon (Table 2). These themes were challenges in building trust and reciprocity, academic instructional interventions and special considerations, promoting resilience and motivation to completion, social-emotional impact and

support, and curriculum pitfalls and revisions. The research questions in this study were answered using these five themes. The twelve classroom teachers' experiences shared through personal one-on-one interviews, written lived experiences, and a few shared artifacts were used to better understand the lived experiences, challenges, personal and professional impact, instructional decisions, and curriculum perceptions of these teachers who serve homeless students in low-income schools. The findings reveal the complexity of these educators' day-to-day instructional decisions and lived reality while serving homeless students in the classroom setting.

More specifically, the study's results revealed important concerns and realities for educators and administrators in low-income public middle schools to consider. To begin, classroom teachers serving homeless students need considerable support in mitigating and managing the challenges that these students bring into the classroom, both in academic and social-emotional contexts. These educators noted that the most important challenge they faced and had to first overcome was getting beyond the obstacles that came with gaining the trust of homeless students. Educators discussed the realities of having to navigate a delicate balance between respecting students' homeless boundaries, addressing their individual needs, and building necessary connections. Next, the instructional decisions, academic interventions, and considerations that teachers made for these students were largely dependent on the culture of the school, and what administrators encouraged, supported, or allowed in teachers' pedagogical practices. Educators described using various instructional strategies such as one-to-one support, peer support, small group response to intervention that allowed them to help target students, and strategic grouping to address learning gaps. Special considerations for homeless students were described by educators as necessary given the realities that their homeless students face.

Additionally, promoting academic resilience among the homeless students they serve required that classroom teachers be open to providing support to students beyond just the classroom. Educators also described using various positive reinforcement systems to encourage, validate, and celebrate homeless students when attempting to promote academic resilience and motivation. Finally, classroom teachers also discussed the need for effective and equitable curricula and instructional resources that will be helpful to all educators serving homeless students and other students from low socioeconomic households. My key interpretations of these findings are discussed below and include support from the empirical and theoretical literature.

So Many Homeless Students, So Little Time to Build Relationships. The themes that emerged from data analysis demonstrate that the instructional decisions educators serving homeless students make are largely tied to the type of student-teacher relationships they manage to build and maintain (or not) with students, and the resources, time, and support available to them. When educators' lived experiences begin in a place where they are supported in building trust and reciprocity between themselves and the homeless students they serve, positive experiences and outcomes are possible. When they are not, the opposite outcome is also true. When referencing mitigating, overcoming, or moving past negative experiences in the classroom with homeless students, all educators discussed building trust and reciprocity as the chief obstacle. The first theme of this research study, challenges in building trust and reciprocity, is supported in the existing literature and adds to the empirical literature as well. All 12 educators expressed consistent challenges in building positive relationships through trust developed over time between themselves and the homeless students in their classrooms. Being able to maintain a delicate balance between responding effectively to what homeless students need, being transparent, and being respectful of student privacy while also overcoming certain personal

surface perceptions and misconceptions was important. This is noted empirically in the literature. Schools are described as safe spaces and lifelines for homeless students (Ingram et al., 2017; Iwundu et al., 2021; Rodger et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020), and as such, caring teachers can empower homeless students (Chow et al., 2015; Kim, 2020; Moore, 2013; Underwood, 2016). Yet to effectively and actionably care about homeless students, educators shared that students had to first trust them enough to *accept* that care and consideration. Many of the participants explained that it was important for them to build trust and reciprocity because they needed students to understand that they cared about them—about their well-being and also their academic success. These teachers wanted students to understand that this care was without judgment. Essentially, all participants discussed building trust as the key component and necessary first step to navigating their relationships and experiences with homeless students in the classroom.

Findings also revealed that understanding the needs of homeless students while simultaneously trying to mitigate academic, social, and emotional outcomes for these students is a challenge that all educators experience. However, these classroom teachers agree that they feel a sense of reward in serving this marginalized group of students. The data analysis also showed that the culture of the school and the resources offered to homeless students and their families were primary precursors of how experiences and student-teacher interactions played out inside the microsystem of the classroom. Essentially, educators initially described negative experiences, but noted that strategies and support systems they used to navigate those initial experiences determined whether future interactions with themselves and homeless students in the classroom would be positive and improved or continuously negative and strenuous. However, the themes found in the data analysis also revealed a major underlying concern shared by educators serving

homeless students in the classroom. More specifically, educators described and made clear to me what appeared to be the personal impact that they also feel throughout their lived experiences. Concerns were also shared about large class sizes with high percentages of homeless students, which leave teachers with little time to cater to every single student effectively at all times. This is an issue that stakeholders can help to mitigate for these public school educators, especially since the data analysis conducted revealed that all 12 educators feel that their experiences teaching and serving homeless students in the classroom have negatively changed the way that they view the New York City Department of Education as a support system. This was true for all participants, but these educators simultaneously noted that their experiences with homeless students have also positively impacted their pedagogical practices and instructional range. I think that the latter is a crucial takeaway because it shows the necessity for evidence-based practices.

Balancing Act: Teaching with Empathy While Rationalizing Decisions. No prior research focused on examining the lived experiences and instructional decisions of teachers serving homeless students in low-income urban middle schools that are public, zoned, and located in high poverty areas; this is the case even though there is a lack of evidence-based practices in the classroom setting where these students are. The role of teachers in the lives of homeless students is extremely important (Chow et al., 2015; Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Park et al., 2019). Teaching homeless students means acknowledging their unmet needs (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Gewirtz O'Brien et al., 2021; Maslow, 1970; Oppong Asante, 2019) and how this, in turn, affects them academically inside the classroom. The existing literature discusses key suggestions and strategies for teachers when it comes to serving homeless students: flexibility in assignments (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Ryan, 2018), individualized or one-to-one instruction (Rogers & Shafer; Morgan, 2018;

Moore, 2013; Swick, 1996), peer interventions (Armstrong et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2019), tutoring, cooperative learning, and differentiation. This research study's findings add to the literature by examining what teachers serving homeless students actually tried, what they found worked or did not work, and how their instruction and overall pedagogical practices evolved throughout their lived experiences in the classroom with this marginalized group. All educators admitted to providing flexibility to homeless students in terms of assignment due dates, which is a suggestion made in the literature. However, teachers also insisted that flexibility provided to homeless students must neither be seen as the lowering of expectations for those students nor must it be perceived as favoritism by their non-homeless or adequately housed peers. As such, flexibility in assignments had to have limitations. One instructional strategy that was suggested in the literature and echoed throughout the study's findings is that of individualized or one-to-one instruction as a key intervention used with homeless students.

However, there was a key difference in the lived realities of teachers. In these low-income schools where teachers described large class sizes with many homeless students, in-class interventions meant conducting a lot of small group instruction, using peer support strategies to make up for low personnel, and conducting one-to-one conferences and re-teaching as much as was possible during the school day. This reality also meant that most of the tutoring or one-to-one instruction often happened on the participants' own time—outside of paid contractual hours. Educators also ensured that IEPs were followed for homeless students despite lack of support. Regardless of the approach, any strategy attempted was also further complicated by the fact that not all homeless students were always present consistently, which is a problem previously acknowledged (Morgan, 2018). That said, educators' reasoning for their various instructional decisions made and special considerations given can be tied to previous studies' findings; these

previous findings show that lack of academic support and resources beyond the school and classroom, absences, inconsistent caregiver support, and other obstacles homeless students face manifest in the classroom (Fry et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2019; Low et al., 2017) in ways that sometimes affects students' academic readiness (Masten et al., 2015; Manfra, 2019; Rojas, 2015). Teachers acknowledged this, explaining that this reality, in turn, made them aware that some or most of their homeless students did require a considerable number of support, modifications, and interventions (Griffin et al., 2019; Ingram et al., 2017; Morgan, 2018). Subsequently, the research findings revealed that making instructional decisions and special considerations for homeless students was often conflicting for participants, sometimes frustrating because engagement posed a struggle for most teachers, and involved a lot of rationalization about what was fair but equitable in a classroom where homeless students were still expected to be held to the same high academic expectations as their other peers. The results add to the previous literature by substantiating the understanding of some general teacher practices when it comes to instruction and interventions used to support homeless students in their classrooms, and teachers' *why* behind these instructional decisions and considerations when attempting to promote academic resilience. Ultimately, many of the lived experiences described by educators revealed a pattern in which empathy drove the instructional and general decisions they made with homeless students.

Just Trial and Error: Promoting Resilience. No two homeless students are the same, and so what works for one student experiencing homelessness might not work for the other. Living situations, levels of support outside of the classroom, and academic readiness vary across groups of students experiencing homelessness. Therefore, there is no way for educators to know what will work with their homeless students until they attempt to address the issues presented

before them in the classroom. All educators discussed various instructional decisions and academic interventions paired with special considerations made in the classroom for homeless students. Similarly, all of these educators acknowledged the barriers to education that their homeless students face and cited specific challenges in their experiences with making academic accommodations to address learning gaps, improving engagement, promoting resilience, and coping with learning challenges created by chronic absenteeism (Aratani & Cooper, 2015), high rates of mobility, school dropout, disruptions in their schooling (Clemens et al., 2017; Underwood, 2016), and a myriad of other issues related to students' condition of being homeless. All classroom teachers described promoting academic resilience among homeless students to be a constant struggle but discussed their attempts to do so through trial and error techniques: small group and one-to-one interventions, strategic grouping and peer support, providing access to materials, working through lunches and after school hours to help students, trying various engagement strategies, doing realistic goal-setting, modeling the value of education, using positive reinforcement systems, setting high standards, having consistent routines and rules, building comradery, mitigating stress, extending grace, and celebration and validation of homeless students and their work. The latter seemed crucial to educators, many of whom reiterated it a few times. This is because most of the participants believed that it was important to celebrate and praise homeless students for achieving even the smallest of milestones or completing even just parts of projects, essays, or key assignments. They gave out rewards that were in the form of certificates, gift cards, prizes from treasure boxes, and posted student work on bulletin boards for recognition even if it was incomplete in comparison to other submissions. Classroom teachers discussed the importance of these decisions in fostering resilience. For these educators, validating students' work was one way to reassure them and make them feel

represented in the classroom. Nevertheless, it was repeated several times by several participants that promoting academic resilience was the most difficult for all of them, many of whom admitted that it was still something they struggled with. This shows that more evidence-based and tested instructional decisions would benefit educators serving homeless students because it would mean they could eventually have a plethora of evidence-based strategies to choose from. Trial and error is a start, but providing teachers with more than just untested suggestions would do a great deal of good in their classrooms and more importantly, for their students. Notably, though nothing was ever certain, these educators certainly tried.

The Ideal Student in Curricula Is Not Homeless: Rethinking Instruction. Many participants expressed their frustrations with curriculum pitfalls needing revisions to better consider the plight and realities of homeless students. The ideal student that the curriculum caters to is not one that is homeless and is not one that is potentially experiencing severe learning gaps. Several participants cited the need for additional supports and modifications needed in the curriculum beyond just the binary of multi-language learners (MLL) and Special Education (SPED) modifications. Subsequently, these educators noted the need for relevance in the curriculum to low-income communities and representation through inclusiveness. Notably, several participants admitted to having to sometimes go against the norms or expectations for their school or district's mandated curriculum and instruction in order to properly cater to homeless students in their classrooms. They would not have to do so if curricula acknowledged the differences that come with serving students existing in poverty. According to educators, "mainstream" curricula did not work with most of their homeless students. In fact, 10 out of the 12 participants described wanting more flexibility in carrying out instruction and/or choosing materials that were more in line with the experiences of the majority of their homeless students.

Finally, the degree of inclusiveness in the curriculum in terms of instructional support and decisions for homeless students was seen as a work in progress, given that the way that homelessness looks is not a monolith and is always constantly changing when it comes to how it is experienced by each student. This reality adds complexity to how educators would even then proceed when planning and carrying out instruction for any homeless student they identified as needing modifications.

A key part of carrying out instruction effectively is the curriculum on which it is based (Apple, 2015). Educators from each school described their curriculum as one prescribed or mandated by the school district, and all participants confirmed the need for more teacher input in leading curriculum development in schools serving large numbers of homeless students since they felt that as teachers, they perhaps knew best what homeless students needed and what they would best respond to during instruction. The results from this study extend previous literature by adding to the limited literature on curriculum reform specific to homeless students, and by corroborating the existing literature in which teachers have been asked to not only differentiate for students based on mixed-ability (Bondie, 2019) but to also acknowledge the realities that homeless students face and how this might affect how they process and understand information in different ways (Cowen, 2017; Griffin et al., 2019; Masten et al., 2015; Moore, 2013). Ongoing revisions are needed where it concerns ascertaining that the curriculum is relevant and representative of the low-income neighborhoods and families that these educators serve (Moore, 2013). This study's findings also go slightly against Morgan's (2018) warning that homeless students do not need a separate or modified curriculum. While teachers in this study acknowledged that homeless students are just as capable as their peers in every way once provided proper support, these educators also made it clear that while a separate curriculum is

not necessary, it would be irresponsible as educators for school districts to pretend that current curricula are equitable to all, or representative of a range of realities faced by students.

It was acknowledged that each school is beginning to make the curriculum more culturally relevant, but that not enough is being done across the board to make this the norm. There was also fair concern about providing instruction that students could better connect to in terms of seeing value in what they are being taught instead of feeling disconnected and inadvertently expressing that to their teachers. Perhaps the most important reality shared by these educators in their lived experiences as it related to the curriculum is the fact that they felt that any slight alterations they made to the curriculum (Moore, 2013) to accommodate homeless students and their low-income students, in general, had to be approved by school leaders or administration or district leadership. As such, some educators felt that the disconnect between the curriculum in place and the demographic of the students they taught, including some of these students' academic readiness levels, was only constantly increasing. This in turn created more frustration among teachers, many of whom truly wanted to do what they felt would be best for the homeless student population they work with closely and serve inside their classrooms. Ultimately, teachers confirmed that they support curriculum reform that is culturally and socio-economically responsive, allows flexibility and trust toward educators, and is relevant to their particular student demographic.

In rethinking the curriculum, then, many educators craved more input. In one school, 40% of students were homeless and living in shelters, with an additional 15% living doubled up; in the other school, 80% of students were homeless and living in shelters. It makes sense that participants would want more input in designing a more inclusive curriculum that considers not only special education and language modifications but also the unique needs of a low-income

demographic population, of which homeless students are a marginalized group with their own unique needs. While Morgan (2018) warns against making curriculum modifications for homeless students, the educators in this study suggest changes that at least consider the socioeconomic status of the students taught. Viewed this way, it does not primarily call out homeless students, but becomes inclusive and supportive by considering students from a lower socioeconomic background; this would cover homeless students who exist in extreme poverty and therefore would not relate to what one educator called “an extremely wonderful Caucasian curriculum that does not relate to our students at all.” What stood out about participants’ responses regarding curriculum is the fact that much of the changes needed for an improved or more inclusive curriculum might not actually be possible due to funding and resources. However, by suggesting revisions instead of a complete discarding of the current curricula in place, these educators have addressed part of their secondary concerns with funding and resources. Nevertheless, the steps educators have tried to make on their own when it comes to swapping out texts and examples for more relatable ones is a step they note is in the right direction, but just needs enough support at the school administration and subsequently, the district superintendent levels.

The Impossible Nature of Leaving Homelessness at the Classroom Door. Previous findings demonstrate that promoting resilience among homeless students often poses serious challenges because of the added stressors that come with their living situations and how that affects their motivation, academic readiness, and ability to be resilient—academically, socially, and emotionally (Clemens et al., 2017; Masten et al., 2015; Oppong Asante, 2019; Rojas, 2015; Sulkowski & Michael, 2020). Because of the challenges that homeless students face, the data collected in this study confirm that teachers have to avail themselves much more to the homeless

students in their classrooms when trying to promote resilience and retention to avoid dropout (Clemens et al., 2017; Uretsky & Stone, 2016) because they are aware of the adversities these students face. According to this research study, varying aspects of how educators understood the way that the exosystem (and in particular the location of a home environment and resources) affected the students' academic development and resilience, played a role in how these teachers opted to attempt the promotion of resilience and motivation to completion among homeless students. For example, many teachers noted that it was important for them to foster resilience through consistency, in both academic and other classroom routines. Having clear and consistently structured routines, rules, instructional supports, and expectations in place were crucial to the successful promotion of resilience. However, as referenced in previous literature, consistency on the teacher's end does not always coincide with the inconsistency apparent with most homeless students' sporadic attendance (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Morgan, 2018; Underwood, 2016). This is revealed in the concerns various educators shared.

That said, this research study adds an extra layer to the existing literature because according to educators, consistency in the classroom and making school and especially classrooms safe spaces for homeless students, positively affected attendance because some students came to view this microsystem as a space where they could have most of their needs met since they came to rely on and trust their teachers. This study's findings extend discussions in previous studies found in the literature about schools providing access to education, essential services (Hernandez, 2020; Sullivan-Walker et al., 2017; Underwood, 2016), food, shelter, and more for homeless students (Iwundu et al., 2021; Gewirtz O'Brien et al., 2021; Hallet & Freas, 2017; Bucker et al., 2018; Moore, 2013). This is because there was one very crucial component not previously fully considered, and that is the importance of teachers in the lives of these

students (Chow et al., 2015; Morgan, 2018; Ryan, 2018; Smart, 2018; Wright et al., 2018), especially in promoting resilience and motivating them to want to stay in school. Though teachers noted that not all resilience promotion strategies worked, they contended that when homeless students had a routine they could stick to, they realized that these students were more apt to do well. It was found that personal teacher interactions with homeless students in addition to how well teachers could facilitate peer interactions between homeless students and their classmates (Griffin et al., 2019) also determined much of whether the motivation to completion of middle school for these homeless students would stick, or whether it would all fall apart. Teachers shared that they found it impossible to promote resilience without allowing homeless students and their peers to also build relationships with each other. The participants also expressed the need for positive reinforcement (Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018) and constantly ensuring that students were actively working toward their goals, despite any hiccups. A part of this positive reinforcement was consistent celebration and validation of homeless students' experiences or submitted work, assigning homeless students leader roles to keep them focused, and including them in realistic decisions about their academic goals.

Many educators shared frustrations that promoting resilience among homeless students during the onset of the pandemic was much more difficult, and sometimes impossible when schools eventually went remote (Sulkowski & Michael, 2020). This was in line with what educators shared about promoting resilience when they were in the brick and mortar classroom since many of the effective strategies for promoting resilience were much harder to implement remotely. Teachers lamented not being able to provide the same level of support and consistency that was crucial to promoting resilience among homeless students. This is because these educators felt that more than anything, homeless students became even more invisible and

inconsistent due to lack of access during the pandemic (Gewirtz O'Brien et al., 2021). Ultimately, however, educators acknowledged that if there is a lack of engagement from homeless students, to begin with, then promoting resilience was impossible. This research study confirmed that everything teachers do with homeless students in the classroom has an impact on whether these students persisted to completion (Clemens et al., 2017; Underwood, 2016), or gave up due to adversity and lack of support in being able to maintain consistency in their academic journey. Even when homeless students may not have additional support outside of the microsystems of schools and classroom, teacher actions and decisions as facilitators inside the classroom can and do still positively affect that dynamic, thus promoting resilience (Griffin et al. 2019; Kim, 2020; Oppong Asante, 2019; Rojas, 2015). It is also important to note that promoting emotional, social, and academic resilience is inseparable when serving homeless students. It is therefore impossible to leave all that comes with homelessness at the classroom door; it will always be a part of every decision and outcome educators make and how they navigate experiences with homeless students.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Participants expressed both the positive and negative impacts of being a classroom teacher serving homeless students, and how their instructional decisions, strategies, and pedagogical practices were informed by or impacted by this reality. They also shared their perceptions of curriculum inclusiveness and what they thought would be the best next steps for homeless education when it comes to curriculum and instruction. This study's findings can therefore be used to inform school and classroom instruction and curriculum in homeless education of middle school students, academic improvements for homeless students, tested instructional decisions and strategies used to promote academic resilience among homeless

students, and advisory practices to school leaders and other educators to assist teachers serving this vulnerable group in such an important setting. Implications for policy and practice are discussed below with considerably more focus given to the practical implications.

Implications for Policy

The primary implication for policy revealed throughout this study when examining the lived experiences of classroom educators serving homeless students in New York City's low-income high-poverty middle schools has to do with homeless education's primary legislation: the McKinney-Vento Act. This legislation ensures that there are certain rights and services provided to students who are experiencing homelessness. One of those rights is the right to an education. Within education, the McKinney-Vento Act stipulates school stability, enrollment, and participation for homeless students (Clemens et al., 2016). Educators, then, play an important role in whether or not these three tenets are fully actualized in classrooms and schools. The implications for policy are described below.

McKinney-Vento Actualization in the Classroom and Funding. The McKinney-Vento Act (1987; 2015) stipulates that schools must be held accountable for implementing standard requirements and resources that essentially ensure the success of enrolled homeless students (Clemens et al., 2017; Crook, 2015; Morgan, 2018; Rahman et al., 2015). However, according to educators in this study, that responsibility or accountability ultimately falls to them as teachers in the classroom when serving these students. This is the case even though the MVA legislation does not consider the roles of teachers in the classroom (Canfield et al., 2016) or their responsibilities and lived experiences when navigating instructional decisions for homeless students. This is the case even though teachers work more closely with homeless students (Morgan, 2018; Wright et al., 2018). Therefore, policymakers may want to consider how the

McKinney-Vento Act and its subsequent policies can be modified to include classroom teachers, and as an extension, how their role in the lives and academic success or resilience of homeless students might be bolstered if more funding was allocated specifically for classroom interventions to support this group. The lived experiences and instructional decisions associated with educators in this study reflect a very somber reality: classroom teachers in low-income high poverty middle schools in New York City need considerably more resources and funding than the schools receive, but somehow are trying their very best to give the many homeless students they serve an education that considers the child holistically. These educators make special considerations, they make themselves constantly available outside of work hours, they either buy for or donate their own clothes and books to students, they are constantly mitigating the stress and trauma of their students, and so much more—all while attempting to promote academic resilience (Clemens et al., 2017; Oppong Asante, 2019). A policy that “sees” these educators and funding that acknowledges the need for more resources may prove to be a good investment in the homeless education field, and specifically in low-income high-poverty schools.

Implications for Practice

This study’s practical implications are important to all middle and high school stakeholders, including administrators, superintendents, policymakers, principals, classroom teachers, parents, and students. For classroom teachers serving in low-income high poverty middle schools in New York City, this study’s findings are relevant to the various factors affecting and influencing teacher experience and instructional decisions with homeless students, and how they ultimately navigate the challenges brought on by students’ unmet needs (Maslow, 1970) in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of the classroom. Administrators, superintendents, principals, policymakers, and parents can gain a deeper understanding of these

classroom teachers' challenging experiences and instructional decisions based on the detailed discussions and feedback from these educators in the one-on-one personal interviews, participants' written lived experiences, and a few artifacts. Their perspectives can provide practical truths of what these teachers' experiences and instructional decisions are like, and how they navigate teaching and student-teacher relationships in the classroom with homeless students. These educators' experiences and perspectives can also offer possible added strategies and suggestions for other current or preservice educators who plan on teaching in these kinds of school communities or school districts where the number of homeless students is particularly high. It is also imperative that district leadership consider that schools in certain districts are serving disproportionately high rates of homeless students, and how this then affects educators who are tasked with supporting a high concentration of at-risk students in comparison to other schools or districts.

Additionally, these educators' perspectives offer school and district leaders a firmer understanding of where to begin when it comes to offering professional development training and support to target the challenges these classroom teachers face, and to better provide and advocate for additional in-class support staff for educators in schools and classrooms. Changes and improvements in curriculum proposed by participants, paired with an increase in support services for these classroom teachers will ultimately positively affect both teachers and the homeless students they serve. The perspectives of educators shared in this study might allow school leaders and instruction and curriculum leaders to change the way they address homeless students in need of holistic support and academic interventions. Due to large class sizes, the findings indicate that teachers would perhaps be better able to serve homeless students in small group settings. Subsequently, a part of implementing and allowing a holistic approach to

instruction to promote academic resilience would mean that stakeholders need to consider that the classroom teachers serving in these low-income high-poverty schools need additional in-class support if they are to better serve homeless students and avoid personal burnout, disconnect, or negative mental impact from stretching themselves too thin. The data also revealed that educators spent less time mitigating stressors among students in the classroom only when there were enough resources provided. As such, providing more resources and scheduled time in the workday that allow teachers to truly employ the strategies they note work best in promoting academic resilience among homeless students would perhaps be helpful.

Furthermore, the five themes that appeared in this study were consistent, and offer stakeholders a better understanding of how essential classroom teachers are to the resilience and overall success of the increasing number of homeless students in their public middle school classrooms. By supporting teachers, both in navigating their experiences and in the practical instructional decisions made in the classroom through professional development, preparation programs, or workshops associated with serving and teaching at-risk students, stakeholders can ensure that teachers no longer have limited training, limited time, or limited resources to promote academic resilience among homeless students. To adequately prepare classroom teachers serving in low-income NYC public middle schools, these educators should receive support training or exposure before entering classrooms where the majority of their students are or have experienced homelessness (Kim, 2020). Where exposure beforehand is not possible, workshops with scenarios that fit the school districts and communities these teachers will be serving in will be beneficial in mitigating stress or the personal impact these educators might face not only in teaching but also in having to consistently address and be mindful of homelessness-related trauma in the classroom (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Griffin et al., 2019). Finally, in today's

academic environment, where access to education in a global pandemic that has pushed so many schools into going remote or offering a hybrid model, classroom teachers in low-income high poverty middle schools in New York City face an even more challenging outlook in attempting to serve homeless students holistically. Stakeholders can learn from the practical truths of these classroom teachers in low-income schools to see how best to support educators as they serve homeless students who face a primary issue that many of the participants express continuously mitigating: lack of access.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Many high-poverty low-income public schools have a disproportionately high number of homeless students. According to the NCHE (2019), the number of homeless students identified across public schools in America each year has increased by more than one hundred percent from 2008 to 2019, bringing the tentative total to a whopping almost 1.4 million students in 2019. In New York City, there were over 114,000 enrolled public school students experiencing homelessness (NYSED, 2019), with the actual number constantly increasing and being much higher in reality (Ingram et al., 2017; Teall et al., 2018). Throughout this study, educators expressed the harsh, personally and professionally taxing, but sometimes rewarding nature of teaching in a school where their classrooms had a high number of homeless students. The results of this transcendental phenomenological study affirmed the lived experiences of educators serving homeless students in low-income public middle school classrooms, and might ultimately be beneficial to all stakeholders. The theoretical and empirical implications of this study are discussed in this section.

Theoretical Implications

In this study, a combination of Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory was the framework used to show how homelessness negatively impacts students' levels of motivation, resilience, abilities, engagement, and achievement (Clemens et al., 2017; Crutchfield, 2018; Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Griffin et al., 2019; Masten et al., 2015; Opong Asante, 2019), and how this then interacts with the microsystem of the classroom where the educator plays a crucial part in this unique power setting. Therefore, it may be beneficial to apply these two theories to the lived experiences of classroom teachers serving homeless students because the classroom plays an integral role in shaping homeless students and their outcomes, academically and otherwise. Furthermore, classroom teachers are essential to the way this microsystem runs, and the challenges that show up in the classroom when these teachers attempt to support or promote academic resilience among homeless students, are inseparable from the challenges created by the outside systems that homeless students navigate and how their needs are met within all interacting systems. The experience that teachers then go through within these spaces are largely dictated and shifted by the realities of the marginalized group they serve, the school culture within which they serve, and the exosystem that plays a role such as district or educational system policies, and so forth. In short, nothing is separate. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted, all systems are interdependent, and therefore the academic, social, or emotional development of homeless students being affected by the mere fact of being homeless, also means that they bring these shortcomings or obstacles to the classroom, where the teacher has to navigate a very unique space in which trauma and education often clash—which is what many participants described. More community and in-school support programs for at-risk or homeless students created by administrators and/or community leaders would benefit students and their families, the educators who serve them, and ultimately, the community at large

because it would perhaps improve retention and solidify teachers' cries that "it truly takes a village to serve the underserved," as one participant put it.

Nevertheless, many educators note the powerful space that the classroom as a microsystem can become for homeless students and that it is more than a place where they hope these students can learn to become academically resilient. As such, the classroom is meant to be a home for homeless students. In providing basic resources inside the classroom such as stationery, snacks, access to technology, access to social-emotional and academic support, and much more, educators serving homeless students understand that creating a welcoming environment is important as a juxtaposition to the spaces outside of the classroom and school that their students might navigate daily and lack these kinds of resources. Teachers noted that the few homeless students they encountered in their classrooms that were well-behaved, seemingly self-composed, and academically and socially resilient, were the homeless students who had or accepted support from within the school community, went to the after school programs, formed positive relationships with their peers, and allowed themselves to trust their teachers to intervene, advocate for, and support them. However, because of the theoretical implications here, participants also noted that even homeless students who appeared to "have it together" could just as easily fall apart or be triggered, or become inconsistent if any important changes were made outside of the classroom, such as a change of their shelter location, or anything else that created external instability. However, being consistent and aware of what is going on with the homeless students they serve is another necessary, thankless, and what educators admit is an exhausting part of the process of building trust and reciprocity with this vulnerable group. This is because teachers serving homeless students understand that what happens inside the classroom is fully informed by all that takes place outside of it in the lives of their students.

Ultimately, classroom teachers in low-income middle schools serving homeless students are more focused on serving the whole child, than just on their academic resiliency, success, or outcomes. In sharing their lived experiences, these educators note that to even employ successful instructional strategies or interventions, make successful instructional decisions to foster academic resilience, teach curricula that matter to their homeless students, and to effectively navigate their relationships with homeless students, they had to first always consider the following: the outside systems or communities affecting the child (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Griffin et al., 2019), whether the student had support systems beyond the classroom (Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Opong Asante, 2019), their living situation, the potential trauma behind every behavior or every academic deficit requiring an intervention (Chow et al., 2015; Manfra, 2019), and the physical, social, and emotional deficit in needs (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Maslow, 1970; Underwood, 2016). Therefore, Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory have strong implications here as discussed below.

Unmet Needs and Lack of Trust. An understanding of Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory posits the fact that when needs go unmet in homeless students, teachers inadvertently face various challenges in the classroom—building trust being one of them (Griffin et al., 2019; Kim, 2020; Mulrenan et al., 2018; Opong Asante, 2019). Consequently, the importance, success, and/or failure of teachers building trust and reciprocity when developing these relationships depended largely on how teachers set aside misconceptions (Kim, 2020, Havlik et al., 2020), empathized (Ingram et al., 2017; Underwood, 2016), and navigated experiences based on the acknowledgment of homeless students' backgrounds (Griffin et al., 2019). Similarly, it was clear that all educators considered how the microsystem of their classrooms is inseparable from all the adversities or challenges their homeless students face in

the interacting and changing properties of the environments that these students navigate. Teachers noted that they had to often be mindful of the way they communicated with students to build trust and cited awareness that many of their students lacked structure at home and the ability to fully trust adults in the first place due to inconsistency in their own lives. Building trust and reciprocity, then, meant that participants had to understand what unmet needs in environments outside of the classroom looked like inside the microsystem of the classroom, especially when it came to homeless students.

Classroom Instruction and Beyond: Teacher, Counselor, Mitigator. With all the stressors that homeless students face, their own external struggles inadvertently spill into the microsystems of schools and classrooms (Crutchfield, 2018; NCHE, 2020; Teall, 2018) where teachers are serving these homeless students. This is because homelessness creates a myriad of problems that affect students academically, socially, and emotionally (Low et al., 2017; Manfra, 2019; Uretsky & Stone, 2016). This makes sense because all educators cited social and emotional impact and the subsequent supports they had to provide to homeless students. This study adds to the previous literature on homeless education in which educators were advised to watch for indications of whether homeless students were struggling to adjust academically, socially, emotionally, or psychologically (Anderson et al., 2018; Armstrong et al., 2018; Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Moore, 2013). Educators discussed the reality that from their lived experiences, the social and emotional needs of homeless students were paramount and stood out each day in the classroom, second only to the need for food and shelter—which were surprisingly more readily mitigated by resources available in the school and community, and by family shelters in the district and near the school. While much of the existing literature focuses primarily on the legal, academic, and school retention of homeless students, this study confirmed

and extended the suggestions made that providing homeless students with concrete social and emotional support while in school is crucial to promoting their emotional resilience and overall general ability to stay in school and do well academically and socio-emotionally (Ingram et al., 2017; Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Rogers & Shafer, 2018). Teachers acknowledged that the social and emotional needs that manifested in the classroom stemmed from unmet needs (not just physical) outside of the classroom in ways that they did not often immediately understand or respond to appropriately at first.

Inadvertently, unmet social and emotional needs then created additional problems for teachers because this meant that they had to find ways to mitigate trauma, which meant that they could not proceed with academic interventions until social and emotional impacts stemming from homelessness trauma were addressed and resolved, or until students were provided with helpful resources. This aspect is important because while the existing literature discusses what teachers can do to help with academic interventions, this research study sheds new light on the reality that educators in these low-income classrooms are overwhelmed with much more than the task of simply teaching homeless students. The negative or strained impact created by the unmet socio-emotional needs of homeless students affects both teachers and other students alike. Teachers also voiced frustration about feeling spread thin in their attempts to provide social and emotional support to what they noted was too large a number of homeless students in one classroom. While the existing literature discusses schools as safe spaces that provide essential services (Hernandez, 2020; Sullivan-Walker et al., 2017; Underwood, 2016) which often includes counseling, this research study's findings reveal that teachers are the first line of contact to homeless students struggling with various issues, and therefore consistently find themselves mitigating the impacts of this reality. These educators' lived experiences, then, are further

compounded by not always having the time to address social and emotional needs, but finding themselves in a position where they had to also find the time to provide additional non-instructional support that the homeless students in their classrooms required in order to be successful. This ultimately led to what most participants described as teacher burnout because on top of addressing homeless students' physical needs, providing academic or instructional interventions, and building trust and reciprocity to even be able to do these things in the first place, educators also had to mitigate social and emotional problems whenever they showed up in the classroom. As such, this finding adds a unique perspective to the existing literature.

Classroom teachers serving homeless students in low-income middle schools have the enormous task of paying attention to all aspects of these children's lives, their academic, social, and emotional output in the classroom, and what affects said output. Administrators and other educational leaders with an interest in improving homeless education and outcomes for students should begin to pay more attention to the voices of the educators serving homeless students. This is especially important since these classroom teachers' lived experiences will add depth to the professional approach and support given to current and preservice teachers looking to serve in low-income high poverty areas where the number of homeless students is increasingly high.

Empirical Implications

Five major themes emerged through the results of this study, and the findings have useful implications for all stakeholders, such as homeless students, current and preservice teachers, middle and high school administrators, homeless education liaisons, administrators and policymakers, district superintendents, principals, and the parents of homeless students. Considerable research has been done in the field of homeless education but has primarily focused on legislation, policy, resources for schools, teacher perception, or on the experiences and varying

academic outcomes of homeless students and how homelessness impacts them versus their housed peers. However, very few studies have focused on the classroom teachers that serve this vulnerable and marginalized population of students in low-income public middle schools. More specifically, very few studies have focused on the lived experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers in low-income middle schools in New York City with students who are homeless. The empirical implications of this study's findings provide public middle and secondary schools with meaningful insight, strategies, and instructional approaches from teachers' experiences, in addition to clarifying what support these educators need in order to better serve homeless students and promote academic resilience, among other factors. Administrators and other educational or community-based organization leaders should make a conscious effort to address the challenges these teachers face inside the classroom when attempting to promote academic resilience among homeless students, especially when there are clear deficits created by or associated with when homeless students are not properly cared for holistically in schools and classrooms. The following are recommendations that may positively affect current and even incoming preservice teachers' lived experiences while serving homeless students in low-income public middle school classrooms in New York City throughout the school year.

Preparation Workshop in Homeless Education Training. For classroom teachers serving homeless students in low-income middle schools, the process of getting these students to trust them and reach a point of reciprocation in both respect and the effort given inside the classroom is challenging. While it is perhaps difficult to get any at-risk child to trust a teacher in a clear power-setting environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), homeless and highly mobile students ultimately trust teachers and other adults less because they have oftentimes faced trauma, lack stability, or both (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019; Griffin et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020; Kim, 2020).

Researchers have studied teacher perceptions of homeless students (Kim, 2013, 2020; Park et al., 2019), academic resilience (Clemens et al., 2017; Masten et al., 2015; Rojas, 2015), academic readiness (Fry et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2019; Low et al., 2017) of homeless students served by teachers, have made suggestions for teachers to follow (Ingram et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018), and have studied numerous factors affecting homeless students in the classroom. It may be helpful to provide teachers projected to teach in low-income schools with early preparation and homeless education training courses (Havlik et al., 2020), in which a key tenet will be focused on strategies for incoming teachers to build trust, rapport, and reciprocity in a class where the reality is that a majority of the students are homeless. In low-income schools like the ones in this study, educators emphasized how important the relationships they fostered or failed to foster with various homeless students and their families set the road for their lived experiences teaching and serving these students.

These programs can be created to effectively benefit classroom teachers in low-income middle schools as they embark on a journey that is difficult, and which requires certain social and emotional competencies (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019) from educators who serve a vulnerable group. Investing in such a program will positively support these teachers in feeling more prepared in low-income NYC middle schools where the number of enrolled students in public school classrooms is the second-highest in the country (USICH, 2020). Additionally, prior research has shown that the classroom teacher who is prepared to serve homeless students, is taught or exposed to reality versus misconceptions, and who is aware of what homeless students go through and what they need from their teachers, is more capable (Kim, 2020; Moore, 2013; Morgan, 2018; Park et al., 2019) of building trust and connections (Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019). Education stakeholders should support this initiative to provide incoming and current

classroom teachers in low-income high poverty schools with this kind of preparation program or workshop, especially when it will ultimately benefit homeless students since homeless students and teachers navigate unique relationships in the microsystem of the classroom learning environment. Such programs will prove beneficial since building trust is an important first step in any environment where creating safe learning spaces for teachers and students is important.

Holistic Approach to Instruction: Academic and Socio-Emotional Interventions.

According to educators in this study, their lived experiences as classroom teachers in low-income, high-poverty middle schools taught them that the instructional decisions they ultimately made when attempting to promote academic resilience were inseparable from decisions they made when it came to the social and emotional aspect of serving these children. In fact, it was impossible to do their primary job (teaching and promoting academic readiness or resilience) if they did not address the other unmet needs of the homeless students in their classroom. As such, the necessity for administrators and other educational leaders and policymakers to look into allowing and supporting classroom teachers in providing holistic academic, mental, social, and emotional support (Anderson et al., 2016; Armstrong et al., 2018; Chow et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2019; Rogers & Shafer, 2018) is clear in the findings of this study. Additionally, educators indicated that they were often overwhelmed because though they recognized that their homeless students required a holistic instructional approach, it was also clear that because there were so many homeless students in one class, it was sometimes impossible to fully support all students in every aspect required to promote resilience to completion. Stakeholders might therefore want to consider a way to create smaller class sizes, so that classroom teachers serving displaced homeless students can better navigate relationships and experiences with these students. This will allow for academic readiness, resilience, and other factors to be equally addressed by

educators. A few participants noted that they fared better if there was a paraprofessional in the room. With so many homeless students in crisis, these educators also noted that one guidance counselor per grade was not enough.

Another critical element of classroom teachers' success when promoting academic resilience among homeless students was validating these students' realities, making them feel represented in the classroom in curricula, showing increased empathy, extending courtesies to due dates but upholding high expectations, and providing small group and one-to-one intervention instruction whenever possible. The latter is crucial because in low-income high poverty schools, while participants expressed that they do small group and one-to-one instruction with homeless students as often as possible, their definition of "often" was once a week, and that was if absenteeism caused by homelessness (Canfield et al., 2016) was not an issue that week. With the added challenges evident for classroom teachers serving homeless students, it is important that the holistic strategies, instructional approaches, and decisions they see as having a positive impact on homeless students, are taken under serious consideration. Beyond consideration, it would be impactful if stakeholders such as principals and district superintendents could come together to find a way to create funding so that classroom teachers serving homeless students will have the ability to teach smaller class sizes with more holistic resources and approaches that they deem necessary for these students' success. Finally, educators in these low-income middle schools cited wanting more support from administration and school leadership when it comes to being allowed increased autonomy over how they navigate teaching and supporting homeless students. The additional challenges that homeless students bring into the classroom inadvertently affect teachers, and as many of these educators noted, they feel that they know best after being in the constantly shared setting of the classroom with these students every

day. A little trust extended by school administration to classroom teachers serving this challenging group in the classroom context might positively affect the experiences of these educators.

Limitations and Delimitations

The inclusions and exclusions that I made in this research study determined the delimitations. The study's locations and its participants were both identified as delimitations. Low-income high poverty public middle schools in New York City were chosen for this study because they exist in two school districts that both have very high and disproportionate numbers of homeless students; public schools were chosen instead of private or charter schools because over 114,000 enrolled public school students experienced homelessness in 2019 (NYSED, 2019), and the number is continuously climbing (ICPH, 2019; USICH, 2020). As such, the study location was chosen for its capabilities to reach a very specific group of classroom teachers who shared common experiences and served similar students and families, many of whom live in temporary housing or shelters, live doubled-up with family members (Routhier, 2017) whenever possible, or are otherwise legally homeless as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act (1987, 2015). Participants were selected using purposeful criterion sampling. Each participant was a classroom teacher employed in a low-income public middle school since the research focused on their lived experiences and instructional decisions toward homeless students. Additionally, the educators in this study were at least 18 years old, were certified teachers for the New York City Department of Education, had been teaching for at least two years, and most importantly, were aware and knew for certain that they served and taught students who were experiencing homelessness. This resulted in the exclusion of all uncertified classroom teachers, who were teaching as a teaching fellow through alternate teaching programs, who were preservice teachers, and also excluded any classroom teachers working with homeless students in elementary, secondary, or post-secondary

classrooms. However, the rationalization for this decision was to ensure that focus was on the classroom teachers who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants from the schools in this study taught various grades and subjects and were from various socio-economic, cultural, and professional backgrounds. This allowed for the promotion of more authentic perspectives of educators' lived experiences and instructional decisions with homeless students in the classroom setting. The transcendental phenomenological design that was chosen for this study allowed for focus to remain on the lived experiences of the participants and how these experiences informed their instructional decisions toward homeless students, rather than on the researcher's perspectives (Denzil & Lincoln, 2018).

The small sample size is of course one of the study's limitations. There is a possibility that different findings may have been generated if the sample size had been larger. Additionally, educators volunteered to be part of this study, which could mean that results might differ if the study had instead been conducted with participants who were selected via random sampling. Another limitation to note is that all participants were teachers of public middle school level education. This presented a limitation that could have been eliminated with the inclusion of teachers from elementary or high school levels, but such a limitation could not be controlled because of how specific the sample needed to be for this transcendental phenomenological design. Furthermore, another limitation of the study is that I am an 8th-grade teacher serving in a low-income, high-poverty middle school and have served students who were homeless in the past. I was familiar with a few of the participants' experiences. However, through strategies such as bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) before beginning the research study, not interrupting participants during personal interviews or altering anything they shared, and focusing on their experiences only, I sought not to have my prior knowledge or past experiences influence the

research. Nevertheless, this is still a limitation to be noted even though I believe that my approach with participants was bias-free and that all necessary steps were intentionally taken to ensure that only these educators' lived experiences were considered in detailed data analysis. Consequently, the lived experiences and instructional decisions described by this group of classroom teachers serving homeless students in low-income high poverty middle school classrooms in New York City school districts may not represent all classroom teachers serving homeless students, especially those who may be serving homeless students in non-public school classroom settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study covered an important gap in the research literature and specifically gave a voice to the middle school classroom teachers serving homeless students in high poverty New York City school districts. While the research findings described the unique lived experiences, perspectives, and instructional decisions of low-income public middle school educators with and toward homeless students, future research can still be conducted to further understand many of the nuances mentioned in the findings, but not fully developed since they were not the focus of this study. The importance of understanding the lived experiences of classroom teachers serving homeless students in low-income schools can lead to an increase in practical in-class support given to educators, an understanding of best instructional practices for homeless students that are evidenced-based, increased support for homeless students in schools, differential instruction, and curriculum changes that are more inclusive, changes in policy for homeless education, and increased funding for low-income high poverty schools where teachers need more resources. As such, future phenomenological studies on classroom teachers serving homeless students in low-income high poverty urban schools, conducted with a broader sample of educators, could be

useful in deciding whether the current study's findings are indicative of all or most classroom teachers serving homeless students or instead exclusive to the participants in this study.

Additionally, since this study focused on classroom teachers serving homeless students in middle school settings, future studies could examine those educators that serve homeless students in low-income elementary or high school classroom settings instead. This may provide additional data on whether the lived experiences described and the strategies or instructional decisions made by classroom teachers across the trajectory are either similar, or vastly different in terms of how they navigate their relationships, and how they navigate teaching and learning practices with the homeless students in their classrooms. In a similar vein, future studies could also be conducted to examine the lived experiences of classroom teachers who serve homeless students in non-public school settings, as a way of extending the findings here and adding layers to the findings presented in this research study.

Notably, since the findings in this study reflect lived experiences of educators serving homeless students as largely challenging, future studies might also be conducted with participants (having set the inclusion criteria) that work with homeless students in the classroom, but have had no challenges. This will provide additional data about what teachers find work when building relationships and promoting academic resilience among homeless students in the classroom. Another aspect of this study that would benefit largely from future research conducted in this area, is if future studies are conducted on classroom teachers' application of varied curricula used with homeless students in low-income high poverty schools. This may provide additional data to support the next steps educational leaders might potentially take when determining what curricula and instructional approaches work best for classroom teachers trying to promote academic resilience through instructional decisions and practices in pedagogy.

Finally, future experimental research should also be conducted in which a homeless student education intervention program is provided to preservice educators who will be teaching in low-income high poverty urban schools whose classrooms have a high number of enrolled students, and then examine the impact this type of intervention has on the lived experiences and instructional decisions of these educators over time. In doing so, additional data will be provided on whether or not the lived experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers serving homeless students in low-income high poverty schools can be mitigated to have a positive outcome for educators. These recommendations are a result of insights provided or supported by the findings in this study. They highlight the need for all relevant stakeholders to be invested in not only offering additional support to classroom teachers serving this marginalized group of students in low-income high poverty schools, but also listening to the experiences, instructional or curriculum suggestions, and overall voice of a group of educators who are a very important part of ensuring that homeless students succeed academically, socially, and emotionally while in their classrooms. Future research will result in more proactive approaches to homeless education.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to develop a composite description of the lived experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across low-income public middle schools in New York City. The educators in this study were 12 middle school classroom teachers. Using personal one-on-one interviews, written lived experiences, and shared artifacts, the data were collected and coded primarily using steps from Moustakas' (1994) method of data analysis. Previous literature supports this study's findings on some of the obstacles that educators face in the classroom when navigating their experiences and relationships with homeless students who bring unique

challenges to the classroom. Similarly, suggestions found in the literature connected to the instructional decisions that teachers make toward these students in terms of strategies and academic interventions. However, the findings of this study do add to previous research by providing detailed, rich, and comprehensive accounts of classroom teachers' lived experiences and rationalizations behind the various instructional decisions they make to holistically serve homeless students in public low-income high-poverty urban schools. The data revealed that educators felt that it was important to navigate their lived experiences and instructional decisions with homeless students from a place of empathy that allowed them to serve students holistically, even while citing many challenges and obstacles they faced personally and professionally. Recommendations for future research could explore the lived experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers in low-income elementary or high schools in order to provide additional data; the use of larger sample sizes would also give merit to findings from this study. Creating change through classroom and curriculum interventions and providing more support for these educators is key. The educators' reactions and inputs given in this study may cause them to reflect on and reevaluate their status as classroom teachers serving in low-income high poverty schools where their lived experiences and instructional decisions are significantly affected by the fact that they teach such disproportionately high numbers of homeless students each year. They may also see their lived experiences as an advantage that has broadened their pedagogical approaches as educators.

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Appendix A:**SAMPLE RECRUITMENT EMAIL AND RECRUITMENT FLYER**

Summer 2021
Sample NYCDOE Public School

Dear [Recipient]:

My name is Peta Henry and I am a teacher in the NYCDOE system and a current doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University. I am conducting a study as part of the requirements for a doctor of philosophy degree. The title of my dissertation research project is: *The Experiences of Educators in Low-Income NYC Middle Schools Navigating Classroom Instruction and Decisions for Homeless Students: A Phenomenological Study*. I have received permission from the school district superintendents to conduct research with classroom teachers within this district. The purpose of my research is to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across low-income public middle schools in NYC, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, a certified teacher for the NYCDOE for at least 2 years, teach in a middle school classroom, know that you teach students who experience homelessness, and be willing to share your experience. Your participation is completely voluntary, and those who fit the eligibility criteria and participate in the study will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card as compensation for your participation.

I have attached the study's consent form to this email; this contains the main details of the study, my contact information, dates by which you should contact me or return documents, and a link to the demographic survey.

To participate in the study, please complete the initial demographic survey: [LINK].

If you meet the criteria and are accepted to do the study, then you will be asked to complete an additional (and more study specific) demographic survey prior to scheduling interviews. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to be a part of a 60-90-minute recorded interview and will also respond to a short writing prompt about your experiences. Participants must meet the requirements outlined above and in the consent form, so it is important that you read it carefully, while also understanding that if accepted to be a part of the study, you may withdraw at any time for any reason.

If you are selected for the study, I will contact you (via your selected preferred contact method listed on the demographic survey response form) with additional details and to request a signed consent document.

Thank you very much for your time. There is also an additional recruitment flyer attached if you know of any other classroom teachers who might be interested in participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Investigator: Peta G. Henry

Email: [researcher email redacted]

Liberty University –Lynchburg, Virginia

Research Participants Needed

The Experiences of Educators in Low-Income NYC Middle Schools Navigating Classroom Instruction and Decisions for Homeless Students: A Phenomenological Study

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you a state-certified NYCDOE public school educator? |
- Have you/do you currently teach in a low-income school district (specifically Districts [REDACTED] [REDACTED]?)
 - Have you been teaching for at least 2 years?
 - Are you currently a public middle school teacher (grades 6 through 8)?
- Have you knowingly served or taught homeless students in the classroom (virtually or in-person)?
 - Would you be willing to share your experience?

If you answered **yes** to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a phenomenological research study dedicated to examining the lived experiences of educators like you who navigate instruction and decisions when serving/teaching homeless students in the low-income public school classroom.

The purpose of this research study is to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across two low-income public middle schools in NYC. Participants will be asked to complete a brief demographic screening survey (see link below). If participants meet the inclusion criteria and are accepted to do the study, they will then be asked to complete a second demographic survey and schedule an **audio-recorded** interview with me at their convenience. Participants will also be requested to write a response to a lived experience prompt and will use **pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality**.
Participants will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card as compensation for their time.

To participate, please complete the initial demographic survey: [\[LINK\]](#)

The study is being conducted remotely due to the pandemic, and participants can request to either meet in person (following safety protocols) or via video conference calls for interviews using Google Meets, Skype, Zoom, etc.

Peta Henry, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Peta Henry at [REDACTED] for more information.

Appendix B:**RELEVANT MCKINNEY-VENTO LAW DEFINITIONS**

For purposes of this part:

(1) The terms “enroll” and “enrollment” include attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

(2) The terms “homeless children” or “homeless students”—

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence
(within the meaning of section 11302(a)(1) of this title); and

(B) includes—

- (i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- (ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 11302(a)(2)(C) [1] of this title);
- (iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- and (iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 6399 of title 20) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this part because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

Appendix C:**REQUEST TO SUPERINTENDENT/PRINCIPAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Spring 2021

Dr. Sample Superintendent

Sample NYCDOE Public Schools

00000 Liberty University Boulevard Lynchburg, VA 22963

Dear Dr. Superintendent,

My name is Ms. Peta Henry, and I am a public school teacher serving the NYCDOE District █. I am also a doctoral student and candidate at Liberty University. As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am looking to conduct a study as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The title of my dissertation research project is: *The Experiences of Educators in Low-Income New York City Middle Schools Navigating Classroom Instruction and Decisions for Homeless Students: A Phenomenological Study*. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to develop a composite description of the experiences and instructional decisions of classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students across low-income public middle schools in NYC. At this stage in the research, participants will include only those who classify as classroom teachers (whether virtual or in person). I am writing to request your permission to seek school personnel within your school district to participate in this study. All participants and districts will be identified using a pseudonym in any publications, and anyone mentioned by participants will also be identified by pseudonyms only to protect identities and make true identification of either parties impossible. **It is important to note that no part of this research will involve interviewing students/children**

or parents in your school district. I am only interested in the experiences of teachers in the brick-and-mortar or virtual classroom.

Participants will be asked to schedule an interview with me at their convenience; this can be done virtually as per COVID-19 protocol. The participants will also be requested to write a response to a lived experience prompt and will use pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. This information can potentially be used to assist school districts in planning future professional development activities as needed and serving our urban homeless students more effectively. Participants will be asked to sign an informed consent information form prior to the research. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time, without penalty. **If you choose (now or later) to grant permission, I would truly appreciate it if you would provide a signed statement on your school or school district's letterhead indicating your approval for this qualitative educational research.** Your response can be e-mailed in a document to the email address below. Thank you so much for considering my request and let me know if there is anything else you will need me to provide or complete to earn your permission. Have a great day and thank you in advance for your time. For your consideration. **I have also attached a copy of the sample flyer that I would potentially send out after IRB approval from my university and permission from you.**

Best,

Investigator: Peta G. Henry

Email: [researcher email redacted]

Liberty University –Lynchburg, Virginia

Appendix D:
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Study Title: The Experiences of Educators in Low-Income New York City Middle Schools Navigating Classroom Instruction and Decisions for Homeless Students: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Peta G. Henry, Doctoral Student

Research Institution: Liberty University—Lynchburg, Virginia

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Floralba Marrero

Invitation to be part of a research study: You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be:

- 18 years of age or older.
- A certified teacher for the New York City Department of Education for at least 2 years.
- A middle school classroom teacher (whole-group, one to one, small group) in a low-income public school within Districts A or B (pseudonyms).
- A teacher who has knowledge that he/she teaches students who experience homelessness (i.e. participant knows for certain that he/she serves homeless students).
- Willing to share your experience.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to conduct a dissertation research project at Liberty University in the doctoral program. This phenomenological study will incorporate one interview with each participant about his or her lived experience with regard to teaching and making decisions about students in their classrooms who they know are affected by homelessness.

Procedures: If you agree and are accepted to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey that is estimated to take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Subsequently, additional data collection will involve one 60 to 90 minute recorded personal interview. Transcripts of the interviews are provided to the participant to review during the data collection phase of the project, which ends August 2021. Participants will also be asked to write a lived experience response to a given prompt as a part of the data collection process. This response is estimated to take the participant anywhere between 30-60 minutes as it is a subjective response. However, these responses must be submitted to the primary investigator by August 2021.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. If you tell us about abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety or the health and safety of others, it will be reported as required by law.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this

Liberty University
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Approved on 7-14-2021

research. However, this research hopes to find the essence of the teacher experience and instructional decisions when teaching and serving homeless students, and their perceptions of support in this area. It may help leaders better understand how schools, districts, teachers, and administrators of teacher preparation programs may better support teachers who serve homeless students in the classroom, which will thereby (hopefully and inadvertently) improve the experiences and outcomes these students themselves have.

Confidentiality: Any personal information you provide will be coded with a pseudonym so it cannot be directly linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked in my home office desk and safety box. I will refer to your data with a code or pseudonym that only the principal investigator, Peta G. Henry, knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. I will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and all study documents will be destroyed 2 years after I conclude this study. Your information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Similarly, any printed transcriptions will also be stored in a locked cabinet and then shredded and destroyed after three years. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings and your information will remain confidential.

Compensation: You will receive compensation in the form of a \$20 Amazon gift card upon completion of all study procedures.

Voluntary Nature: Participation in this study is voluntary. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time without affecting your relationship with the primary researcher, Peta G. Henry, Liberty University, or your district.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is greatly appreciated, but I acknowledge that some of the questions I am asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may also skip any questions you do not wish to answer during the semi-structured interview. This study is not a requirement for you, and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time we sense that you are uncomfortable, I will pause the interview and ask if you would like to continue. If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contact Information: The researcher conducting this study is Peta G. Henry. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact the researcher at [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Floralba Marrero, at [redacted].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Statement of Consent: By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Appendix E:**LIVED EXPERIENCE WRITING PROMPT**

Please submit electronically no later than one week after interview.

Think about an experience with a specific student who you knew was homeless, and was enrolled in your class. **Without providing any identifying or confidential information about the student (name, age, school, his/her place of temporary residence, etc.),** describe your experience/relationship with the student in the classroom, your perception of their well-being, their engagement in class, their attendance, or anything else that stood out to you about your relationship, experience, and instructional decisions toward this student. For example, did you make any special accommodations or provide any individualized instruction?

Be as detailed as possible and contribute as much information as you feel comfortable sharing. You can write as freely as you wish, so long as you **avoid any identifying information about the student as described above.** All information will be kept confidential.

Appendix F:
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 14, 2021

Peta Henry
Floralba Arbelo Marrero

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-948 The Experiences of Educators in Low-Income New York City Middle Schools Navigating Classroom Instruction and Decisions for Homeless Students: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Peta Henry, Floralba Arbelo Marrero:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix G:
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Pseudonym: _____

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this study, and thank you in advance for sharing your experiences. I appreciate you participating in this research about the teacher's lived experiences and instructional decisions in the classroom with students affected by homelessness. I want to review the consent form and your voluntary participation. The district does not review the interviews and your participation is confidential. Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator, the school, or the district. Therefore, I want you to feel free to speak openly about your experience. Will it be okay for me to record the interviews? These recordings will not be published anywhere. Once I get these interviews completely transcribed, I might ask you to look at the themes I have found and review them for accuracy and further discussion. Would you be willing to do that for me? Before we begin, I want to give you the opportunity to ask me any questions pertaining this study or information you would like to learn about me.

Time of Start Interview:

Time of End Interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

{Begin Recording}

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we have never met, and include how long you have been teaching in NYC public schools, the grade levels and subjects you currently teach, and how you first became involved in teaching, and any other information you would like to share.
2. How would you describe the main needs of the homeless students you encounter (whose situation you are aware of) in your classroom (both in person and/or virtually)? Please be specific about these needs.
3. How would you describe the microsystem of your school and classroom as a place that considers the needs of homeless students both before and during the pandemic?
4. In your role as a classroom teacher, what behaviors or academic outcomes do you most often associate student homelessness with, and why? (i.e., if a student is homeless, then they most likely also are/have _____).
5. How would you describe the primary result teaching homeless students has had on your perception of teaching in low-income NYC schools and on your pedagogical practices in the classroom?
6. What types of experiences have you had in the classroom (both virtually and/or in person) with students who experienced homelessness?

7. What would you say is the most challenging part of being a teacher who serves homeless students?
8. What would you say is the most rewarding part of being a teacher who serves homeless students?
9. What do you think your students who are homeless struggle with the most in your virtual or in person (brick-and-mortar) classroom?
10. How do you respond to the struggles these students face and what they need? (i.e., engagement, learning, focus, on-task behaviors, etc.)
11. Describe the instructional strategies, if any, that you have tried in order to promote resilience or engagement among students experiencing homelessness who you find do struggle with focus or keeping up academically with the rest of their non-homeless peers? (Discuss what worked, and what did not).
12. Describe any moments if/where you had to make difficult instructional decisions regarding students in your classroom who are homeless.
13. Describe, if any, the special considerations you give to homeless students related to due dates, completion of work before and even during the pandemic, grading, work submitted, attendance, disciplinary actions, etc. based on their needs.
14. Describe the current curriculum used for your content area in relation to instructional stipulations or modifications for classroom teachers dealing with homeless students.
15. Describe any services or programs in place at your school (that you are aware of) that cater to students facing housing insecurity/homelessness.
16. Describe any flexibility you are allowed in curriculum and/or instruction when it comes to serving/teaching homeless students in your classroom (virtual or in person).
17. Please tell me your thoughts on whether or not you feel your experiences with homeless students in the classroom would be different if you were not in a low-income/high-poverty NYC public school?
18. Finally, is there anything else you would like to add about your experience in the classroom with homeless students?

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

Appendix H:

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Name of Project: The Experiences of Educators in Low-Income NYC Middle Schools
 Navigating Classroom Instructions and Decisions for Homeless Students: A Phenomenology
 Study

Principal Researcher: Peta G. Henry

Institution: Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA; College of Education

The researcher will make every effort to protect the confidentiality and identity of all participants in the above-named study. This includes teachers, any students mentioned, and the target schools and educational system. All information, electronic or otherwise, will be safely secured either by locked cabinet or password-protected systems.

The names of participants will not be used in the data collection process or in the final report, but will be changed to pseudonyms. All the identifying information on all records, written responses, surveys, or anything otherwise completed by participants will be removed. No names of teachers, schools, or the system will be mentioned in the final report.

Principal Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix I:

SAMPLES FROM ICPH REPORTS & DISTRICT RESOURCES ON MVA GUIDES

City Council District

Rank by Largest Number of Family Shelter Units

4 out of 10 districts in Manhattan
4 out of 9 districts in the Bronx
2 out of 51 districts in New York City

Rank by Highest Percent of Homeless Students

3 out of 10 districts in Manhattan
4 out of 9 districts in the Bronx
7 out of 51 districts in New York City

Highlights

District **1** ranked second highest among New York City Council districts for the number of shelter units. Over 900 family shelter units are located in the district.

With ten Adult and Continuing Education centers and six community schools, opportunities exist to connect families in shelter and those experiencing housing instability to these critical support resources.

1 out of 5 District **1** students experienced homelessness in the last five years

Community Resources

Homebase: Homelessness Prevention	2
NYC and NYS Job Centers	1
Adult and Continuing Education	10
Financial Literacy Program	0
Community School	6
Health Center and Immunization Facility	3
Runaway and Homeless Youth Services	0

Community Indicators

Homelessness and Poverty Among Students OOD8 NYC

Homeless (N=4,368)	15%	8%
Formerly Homeless (N=1,874)	7%	4%
Housed, Free Lunch (N=18,376)	65%	60%
Housed, No Free Lunch (N=4,101)	14%	28%

Educational Outcomes of Homeless Students OOD8 NYC

Chronic Absenteeism Rate	42%	37%
Dropout Rate	15%	18%
Graduation Rate	59%	52%
Math Proficiency 3-8 Grade	16%	18%
ELA Proficiency 3-8 Grade	14%	14%
Received IEP Late	62%	62%

Affordable & Public Housing

39,365 remaining affordable units
2,115 affordable units could be lost from 2017 to 2022

19,902 NYCHA units
194 affordable units lost between 2005 and 2016

Family Shelters

931 units
13% of Manhattan shelters
15% of Bronx units
9% of NYC units

24 family shelters
8% of Manhattan shelters
13% of Bronx shelters
8% of NYC shelters

Neighborhood

29% of households are severely rent burdened
14% of people are unemployed
48% of people work in low-wage occupations
36% of people have less than a high school education
48% of single mothers with children under five live in poverty

Note: The number of homeless students represents the council district where students attend school; homeless students may attend schools in districts where they do not live. Students who experienced homelessness in the last five years is the ratio of currently homeless and formerly homeless students to the total number of students in the district. Formerly homeless students are defined as those who are currently housed but experienced homelessness at any point during SY 2010-11 to SY 2014-15. Chronically absent students are those who miss 20 or more school days in a school year. Late IEP is defined as received after Kindergarten. Data represent a cohort of students who entered Kindergarten in SY 2010-11 and received an IEP at some point during the next five years. Math and English proficiency rates refer to students who score a 3 or above on the New York State Education Department Math and English Language Arts tests. Dropout and graduation data represent the four-year dropout and graduation rates for students who entered high school in 2011 and experienced homelessness at any point during their high school career.

Source: Legal Aid Society; New York City Council; New York City Department of City Planning; New York City Department of Education, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, SY 2010-11 to SY 2014-15; New York City Department of Homeless Services; New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development; New York City Department of Youth and Community Development; New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation; New York City Housing Authority; NYU Furman Center Moeils Institute for Affordable Housing Policy; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2014.

78 2017 On the Map: The Dynamics of Family Homelessness in New York City ICPHusa.org

City Council District

Rank by Largest Number of Family Shelter Units

1 out of 10 districts in Manhattan
6 out of 51 districts in New York City

Rank by Highest Percent of Homeless Students

1 out of 10 districts in Manhattan
5 out of 51 districts in New York City

Highlights

District **1** has the largest number of homeless students in **1** and is home to one-third of the borough's family shelter capacity.

Close to 3,000 affordable housing units in District **1** are at risk of being lost in the next five years.

1 out of 5 District **1** students experienced homelessness in the last five years

Community Resources

Homebase: Homelessness Prevention	0
NYC and NYS Job Centers	4
Adult and Continuing Education	1
Financial Literacy Program	1
Community School	5
Health Center and Immunization Facility	5
Runaway and Homeless Youth Services	1

Community Indicators

Homelessness and Poverty Among Students OOD8 MN NYC

Homeless (N=2,306)	15%	9%	8%
Formerly Homeless (N=985)	7%	5%	4%
Housed, Free Lunch (N=9,497)	63%	51%	60%
Housed, No Free Lunch (N=2,326)	15%	35%	28%

Educational Outcomes of Homeless Students OOD9 MN NYC

Chronic Absenteeism Rate	45%	36%	37%
Dropout Rate	11%	15%	18%
Graduation Rate	53%	57%	62%
Math Proficiency 3-8 Grade	11%	20%	18%
ELA Proficiency 3-8 Grade	12%	16%	14%
Received IEP Late	63%	61%	62%

Affordable & Public Housing

38,126 remaining affordable units
2,909 affordable units could be lost from 2017 to 2022

11,423 NYCHA units
389 affordable units lost between 2005 and 2016

Family Shelters

606 units
34% of Manhattan units
6% of NYC units

21 family shelters
58% of Manhattan shelters
6% of NYC shelters

Neighborhood

27% of households are severely rent burdened
13% of people are unemployed
34% of people work in low-wage occupations
20% of people have less than a high school education
56% of single mothers with children under five live in poverty

Note: The number of homeless students represents the council district where students attend school; homeless students may attend schools in districts where they do not live. Students who experienced homelessness in the last five years is the ratio of currently homeless and formerly homeless students to the total number of students in the district. Formerly homeless students are defined as those who are currently housed but experienced homelessness at any point during SY 2010-11 to SY 2014-15. Chronically absent students are those who miss 20 or more school days in a school year. Late IEP is defined as received after Kindergarten. Data represent a cohort of students who entered Kindergarten in SY 2010-11 and received an IEP at some point during the next five years. Math and English proficiency rates refer to students who score a 3 or above on the New York State Education Department Math and English Language Arts tests. Dropout and graduation data represent the four-year dropout and graduation rates for students who entered high school in 2011 and experienced homelessness at any point during their high school career.

Source: Legal Aid Society; New York City Council; New York City Department of City Planning; New York City Department of Education, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, SY 2010-11 to SY 2014-15; New York City Department of Homeless Services; New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development; New York City Department of Youth and Community Development; New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation; New York City Housing Authority; NYU Furman Center Moeils Institute for Affordable Housing Policy; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2014.

80 2017 On the Map: The Dynamics of Family Homelessness in New York City ICPHusa.org

D. What do the terms "fixed, regular and adequate" mean in relation to residence?

A "fixed residence" is one that is stationary, permanent, and not subject to change. For example: a tent is not "fixed," but a house or an apartment are usually fixed to the ground.

A "regular residence" is a place that a student can return to consistently and count on, night after night. Example: If the family has a lease or they own their own home, the housing is usually "regular," but if the students are staying in someone else's home with the host's permission, the housing may not be regular.

An "adequate residence" is one that is sufficient for meeting both the physical and psychological needs that are typically met in home environments. For example: A home without heat, running water, or with an infestation may not be "adequate."

E. What are the school rights and protections of students in temporary housing?

Students in temporary housing have the right to:

- Go to school, no matter where they live or how long they've lived there.
- Choose between the local school where they are living and the school of origin. The definition of a school of origin includes preschools, charter schools, and feeder schools.
- Please note: A student may have more than one school of origin. A school of origin could be the school the student attended, or was entitled or eligible to attend before the student lost housing; or the school where the student was last enrolled.
- Be immediately enrolled in school without proof of residency, immunizations, school records, or other documents normally needed for enrollment, even if they have missed the application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness.
- Receive free transportation to school and to school-related programs for the duration of homelessness and for the remainder of the school year if they move into permanent housing and continue to attend the same school
- Receive credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed at a prior school.
- Receive the same special programs and services, if needed, provided to all other students served in these programs. Enroll and attend class in the school of their choice, even while the family or youth and school district resolve disagreements about enrollment.

II. School Selection

A. What does "school of origin" mean?

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, students in temporary housing have the right to attend their school of origin or their local school. The term "school of origin" means the school where the student was enrolled when last permanently housed or the school they most recently attended. The definition of a "school of origin" also includes the designated receiving school at

Appendix J:

DEMOGRAPHIC SCREENING QUESTIONS

The following questions will be emailed via an electronic survey link in the recruitment email in order to begin screening eligible participants and to see who has interest in being a part of the study. This will be completed by all interested potential participants so that it will have been completed **prior** to their scheduled interview date (if they meet inclusion criteria). All participants that do not meet inclusion criteria will have their information deleted.

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Contact Information (Will not be shared with anyone or any organization; confidential and known to primary investigator only):
 - a. Email:
 - b. Phone number (one that is best to reach you):
4. Gender:
5. Ethnicity:
6. Highest Level of Teacher Education:
7. New York Teacher Certification (YES/NO):
8. Subject Area That You Teach:
9. Grade Level You Teach:
10. Type of Teaching Setting (Whole Group, One-to-one, Small Group):
11. Number of Years Teaching in Low-Income Communities:
12. Aware of Homeless Students in Classroom (YES/NO):

Appendix K:
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

The following survey will be emailed only to participants who volunteered and signed the informed consent form, and will be completed **prior** to their scheduled interview date. Unlike the brief demographic screening questions survey, this survey is research specific, and meant to gather additional information. Answers to questions will simply be yes or no, or have a drop down menu with options to select.

1. Number of Years in District A/B
2. Number of years at current school
3. Do you live in/near the school neighborhood in which you teach?
4. What do you consider the socioeconomic status of your household growing up as a child?
5. What do you consider to be the socioeconomic status of your current household?
6. Have you personally ever experienced homelessness (as per this definition: the state of lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence due to loss of housing or economic hardship)?
7. Are you aware/made aware that some of the students you teach in your classroom are homeless?
8. Is SES apparent to students in your classroom?
9. Do you feel socioeconomic status impacts a student's education/learning experience?

Appendix L:

BRACKETING ESSAY EXCERPT

I have been teaching for almost 8 years, and I have primarily taught in low-income schools and communities. However, I was never aware that I served students and families who were experiencing homelessness or had experienced homelessness until two years ago. Even so, I never ever brought it up with students or the families. In fact, students never personally told me. I would only know because I saw it in their file, or if parents were explaining to the guidance counselor and teachers in group meetings why their child had been chronically absent. In writing this essay, I am trying to isolate any preconceptions I may have about the phenomenon under study in this research. After searching myself and my own experiences, I have identified only two primary preconceived notions that I have regarding the research subject. They are described and subsequently isolated below.

As an educator who has served students who have experienced homelessness, one of the preconceptions I had was that these students would be behind in grade level expectations no matter what I did as an educator. This is because I felt that even as I was working to help them improve, there were so many persistent gaps and so many other factors at play in their lives through no fault of their own, that nothing I did would be enough. This preconception of my own past experiences is easily isolated during this study because while my preconception is that they would be behind grade level, the study itself neither includes my input, nor does it focus on teacher perceptions of their homeless students. Instead, the purpose of this study is to develop a composite description of the lived experiences and instructional decisions of middle school classroom teachers specifically with and toward homeless students. This means that I am examining the participants' experiences in the classroom specifically related to instructional decisions, and this specific subject matter is not something that I have ever had to consider for myself. I have never had to think about my own instructional decisions specifically with homeless students or how they affected my experience in the classroom. My own preconceptions were mainly tied to just my belief that they would not be on grade level because they were going through a lot. This preconception, though unrelated specifically to instructional decisions and lived experiences, will be isolated nonetheless, because I do not want any of my own personal input in this study's data.

Secondly, bracketing also requires me to set aside previous research findings related to this subject matter. However, as I uncovered and shared in my review of the research literature, I mostly found research that explored the challenges homeless students face in schools, some strategies suggested for teachers to use with these students, and perceptions of preservice educators toward homeless students. So, I suppose that one could say that I am now well-versed in the research on topics adjacent to this study's subject matter. Perhaps knowing the aforementioned topics from reading a plethora of research is something I can consider in terms of me (potentially) knowing some of the things teachers might bring up when it comes to strategies, but I believe that since their lived experiences are entirely subjective and the interview questions very clearly ask participants to describe their own strategies, instructional decisions, and overall experience with homeless students specifically in their own classroom settings—that the previous research I am aware of will not affect their answers since I will give no background to teachers on what previous studies have noted, or what research suggests that they do.

I am incredibly passionate about this study because the hope is that this study will begin to fill the gap revealed in the related literature by focusing on the lived experiences of classroom teachers serving homeless students. Having set aside and acknowledged these two key preconceptions I personally have, I will be entering the data collection stage and especially subsequent analysis, with no biases to cloud what my participants bring to the conversation; this study is entirely about them and their experiences and responses are the only thing that will be analyzed in order to develop the composite description of their lived experiences that I hope to garner from conducting this study. It will be prudent of me to keep meticulous field notes, keep my audit trail up to date, and to ensure that during interviews, my participants' voices dominate and that I am—most importantly, a listener.

Appendix M:
PERMISSION LETTERS/EMAILS FROM COMMUNITY SCHOOLS'
SUPERINTENDENT



COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

[Redacted] Superintendent - [Redacted] Deputy Superintendent



May 24, 2021

To Whom it May Concern,

I grant permission to Peta Henry to conduct research for her dissertation research project, *The Experiences of Educators in Low-Income NYC Middle Schools Navigating Classroom Instruction and Decisions for Homeless Students: A Phenomenological Study*, according to the proposal she has submitted, with the understanding that she will observe all Department of Education regulations in her interactions with teachers and with respect to student privacy. Please feel free to contact me with additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted Name], Superintendent



Department of
Education

Chancellor Dr. Meisha Porter

COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

"LIGHTING THE WAY FOR OUR LEADERS OF TOMORROW"

Community Superintendent

July 2, 2021

To Whom it May Concern,

I grant permission to Peta Henry to conduct research for her dissertation research project. The Experiences of Educators in Low-Income NYC Middle Schools Navigation Classroom instruction and Decisions for Homeless Students: A Phenomenological Study, according to the proposal she has submitted with the understanding that she will observe all Department of Education regulations in her interactions with teachers and with respect to student privacy.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the Superintendent.

Superintendent

Appendix N:**AUDIT TRAIL**

Date	Entry: Event/Task/Update
5/3/2021	Dissertation Proposal Manuscript Approved
5/13/2021	Dissertation Proposal Defense Passed/Approved
5/14/2021	Approval to proceed with IRB process in order to begin data collection.
5/23/2021	IRB Application created on Cayuse.
5/24/2021	Permission granted from community school district #1 superintendent to conduct research + interviews with teachers.
5/26/2021	IRB Application submitted with permission letter added; investigator CITI training certified.
6/23/2021	Dissertation Manuscript Edited and References Updated
6/30/2021	IRB Application returned for edits to be made to documents.
7/01/2021	Permission granted from community school district #2 superintendent to conduct research + interviews with teachers.
7/02/2021	IRB Application resubmitted with corrections made to documents.
7/14/2021	Received IRB approval to begin study
7/15/2021	Recruitment Begins: Flyers + Emails Sent
7/18//2021-8/13/2021	Conducted all one-on-one interviews and field notes, and received lived experience prompts from participants.
*7/21/2021	Contacted ICPH; received response; accessed latest reports and documents on student homelessness across districts A and B.
7/20/2021-8/13/2021	Transcribed one-on-one interviews; Sent transcription to participants for member checks; Received from participants.
8/19/2021	Completed coding and developed five themes; Completed Chapter Four and submitted to chair for review before I send it to participants for member-checking.
8/24/2021	Began writing Chapter Five
09/10/2021-09/16/2021	Revised Chapter Three to Past Tense; Revised Chapter Four
09/15/2021-10/09/2021	Completed Draft of Chapter Five
10/22/21-11/05/21	Revised/Edited Chapters 1-5 + Submitted to Chairperson for Review
11/10/21-01/05/21	Editing Chapters 1-5 + Submitted to Committee for Reviews
01/11/2022	Manuscript Submitted for Departmental Review
01/30/2022- 02/03/2022	Manuscript Approved; Successful Dissertation Defense