

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO  
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A Case Study: Exploring How Elementary School Teachers Build  
Relationships and Interact with Homeless School-Age  
Students in the Classroom

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

California State University San Marcos

2017

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to the loving memory of my father, Wyatt Lynch and my brother Howard Lynch.

Without Dad's belief in me, faith in me, confidence in me, this journey would never have taken place. Dad always told me I could do anything I set my mind to. He encouraged me to push myself. He subtly nudged me to continually challenge myself throughout my life.

I wanted to share this journey with him, but was only able to share the first year. He passed away June 10, 2013. However, he has been with me through every step of this journey.

Howard always believed in me. Long before I reached my journey's end, he called me Dr. V. I am so thankful Howard was here when I defended. He passed away February 17, 2017.

I love and miss you both, Dad & Howard.

To my family and friends who continually encouraged me when I doubted myself, I thank you. You wouldn't let me quit. Your love and unwavering confidence in my ability kept me moving forward. Without you, I may not have seen the end to this journey.

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## Vita

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## **Abstract of the Dissertation**

A Case Study: Exploring How Elementary School Teachers Build Relationships  
and Interact with Homeless School-Age Students in the Classroom

by

Valerie Ann Lynch

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2017  
California State University, San Marcos, 2017

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In 2008-2009, nearly one million children experiencing homelessness were enrolled in school. In 2012, over 1.5 million children were identified as homeless. In a 2013 U. S. Census report, 2.5 million children were identified as homeless in America. The number of homeless children in America continues to increase every year. Homeless students are among the most marginalized and vulnerable populations in schools. They

experience daily trauma and encounter more risks than their non-homeless peers.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth in educational research regarding how teachers work with homeless students and what they do to meet the children's educational needs. There is even less research on homeless school-age children. Through the lens of two theoretical frameworks of care theory and attachment theory, this inquiry explored what relationship building practices teachers engage in and how elementary teachers build relationships and interact with their homeless students to meet the children's educational needs. By examining how homeless students' educational needs are currently being met, this study contributes to a better understanding of the challenges homeless students face, the types of support they need to be successful, and the support needed to provide elementary school teachers with the tools and knowledge to help them meet the unique needs of homeless students.

## Chapter One: Introduction

“Had I known he was homeless, I would have done a lot more for him.”  
(Statement at the end of a school year from a fourth grade teacher  
when she learned a student of hers had been homeless all year.)

The mid-1980s saw a shift in the homeless culture and population in America. Skid row was no longer well demarcated to a specific section of an inner city. It began to spread throughout cities into suburban and rural areas. The historical profile of homeless individuals began to shift from single males ranging from alcoholics, drug addicts, and transients to people who lost their homes or jobs, and now receive public assistance. Homeless shelters also observed a change at this time, reporting a shift in their “clienteles.” Women were now included among the face of the homeless population, and, more times than not, these women were accompanied by children (Bowman, Dukes, & Moore, 2012; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Today, families with teens and school-age children make up the fastest growing segment of the homeless population in America (Bassuk & Friedman, 2005; Cunningham, Harwood, & Hall, 2010; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008; Reed-Victor & Stronge, 2002; Rubin et al., 1996; Zima, Wells, & Freeman, 1994).

Twenty-five percent of the homeless population in the 1980s was made up of families with children of school age. School age has multiple definitions in the literature. Masten, Miliotis, Graham-Berman, Ramirez, and Neumann (1993) identify school age to be ages 6 through 11 years; Richards and Smith (2007) identify school age to be 6 through 13 years. For the purpose of this study, school age is identified as 5 to 11 years, including Transitional kindergarten children. In the early 2000s, families made up nearly

40% of the homeless population (National Alliance to End Homelessness [NAEH], 2007; Williams, 2003). Research shows the number of homeless children increased by 38% from 2007 to 2010 (Bowman et al., 2012; Miller, 2011). In 2012, the nation saw over 1.5 million, or one in 50 children, reported as homeless (Bowman et al., 2012; Guarino & Bassuk, 2010; National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], 2012). In the most recent census report from the National Center on Family Homelessness, the number of identified homeless children in America has risen to 2.5 million (Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach, & Berman, 2014). The fact is the number of homeless children continues to grow every year.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Though studies show the number of homeless school-age children (ages 5 years to 11 years or Kindergarten through fifth grade) is staggering, the numbers continue to increase annually (Bassuk, Murphy, Thompson-Coupe, Kenney, & Beach, 2011). Studies also show there is a lack of cultural competence regarding the homeless school-age child on the part of the classroom teacher. Unfortunately, teachers' lack of informed awareness can lead to an insensitivity to the daily problems homeless children face and the difficulties they may encounter within the classroom setting (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

In an effort to alleviate the negative impact on homeless children's educational development, and the multiple hazards associated with child homelessness need to be a part of teacher ongoing training. Such information made available enables the teacher to meet the extreme needs of this unique population. It is important that teachers are aware of the severity of the problem of child homelessness; understand the risks homeless

children face on a daily basis and the consequences they suffer (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008; Guarino & Bassuk, 2010; Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Gaining cultural awareness, and recognizing the unique social-emotional needs of homeless school-age children, has the potential to move teachers toward effectively addressing and meeting the needs of these children.

### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this study was to explore how positive, supportive relationships are developed between elementary school teachers and homeless school-age students in the classroom. The focus was on what teachers did to support the social-emotional health and growth of homeless students. Also explored was how teachers interacted with the students. Literature on the risks related to homeless youth, ages 12 to 17 years, are plentiful. However, on the specific topic of working with homeless school-age children, literature and empirical studies are sparse (Grant et al., 2008; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2010). The meager literature that does exist on this topic underscores the importance of teachers being educated on the child homeless culture. Without awareness or comprehension of the daily life experiences of homeless children, teachers tend to subscribe to the societal view that homelessness is caused by laziness and weakness, rather than being a significant social injustice (Hocking & Lawrence, 2000; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Pellino, 2013; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008).

The unique educational profile of homeless students includes taking 3 months to half a year to adjust academically to a new school. Studies show that math and reading scores of homeless students to be lower than those of their low-income housed peers, and

they have difficulty engaging in on-task behavior (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse, & Culhane, 2012; Grant et al., 2008). The inadequacies in social skills exhibited by many homeless students includes the inability to cooperate with peers, ask for and receive help, and engage in appropriate social behavior (Fantuzzo et al., 2012).

Literature says that with limited personal exposure to and proper training of child homelessness, teachers generally do not recognize the unique social-emotional needs of homeless students. Therefore, teachers might not be meeting the students' needs (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008; Reyhner, Gilbert, & Lockard, 2011). However, when teachers understand that homeless students enter school with social-emotional and other education needs that are more challenging than their non-homeless students, teachers will have information to guide the students in the transformation of their social-emotional connections. Teachers should have the tools to look at their practices and make modifications or changes to better address the social-emotional and multiple educational needs of homeless students in their classroom (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

### **Research Questions**

The following research question and sub-questions guided this study: How do elementary school teachers approach meeting the unique needs of homeless students? Sub-questions: What relationship building practices do teachers engage in with their homeless students? How do elementary school teachers build relationships with their homeless students? How do elementary school teachers interact with homeless students in their classroom?



## Theoretical Frameworks

This study was based upon two theoretical frameworks: care theory and attachment theory. Care theory addresses the whole person—cognitively and emotionally. It is at the heart of what homeless students require in order to successfully grow both socially and emotionally (Bergman, 2004). Nel Noddings (2003) introduced care theory to the education field recognizing the need for a strong relationship between the one caring, the teacher, and the one cared for, the student.

In her book, *A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Noddings (2003) describes care theory as a mental state similar to that of the mental state of a mother caring for her child; one person caring for another. Noddings reflected that upon entering into the teaching profession, the individual is introduced to a very specialized form of caring relationships with his/her students. The teacher is absorbed or attached to the student. The caring and attachment is for the whole person and not simply a physical entity to be taught and to learn. Rather, the individual caring accepts the one cared for completely and nonselectively (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Noddings, 2003).

Jennings and Greenberg (2009) concur with Noddings (2003), acknowledging the importance of a caring relationship between the classroom teacher and students. In their paper “The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence in Relation to Student and Classroom Outcomes,” Jennings and Greenberg highlighted the model of the prosocial classroom. The authors described the importance of teacher social and emotional competence, and the teacher-student relationship. Patricia Jennings is an Assistant Professor of College of Health and Human Resources at Pennsylvania State

University. Mark T. Greenberg is a Professor of Human Development and Psychology at Pennsylvania State University.

The educational environment that nourishes students both emotionally and intellectually is predicated on care theory. In such an environment, the teacher encourages students to develop, produce, and perform to the best of their ability, is one predicated on care theory (Noddings, 2003; Soto, 2005). A caring environment considers and facilitates the social-emotional growth of students, which demonstrates engagement between students and teachers (Noddings, 2003; Soto, 2005).

Homeless students' needs are specific and require teachers to be aware of the student's individual social-emotional status. Possessing an understanding of the homeless culture is extremely helpful in understanding and addressing such specific needs (Guarino & Bassuk, 2010; Jennings & Greenberg, 2008; Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

When a student has a positive relationship with a teacher, the student has a more successful, healthier educational experience. For the homeless student, the caring relationship with the teacher may be the only positive relationship the child has aside from the relationship with a parent (Mizerek & Hinz, 2004; Moore, 2013).

Attachment theory is described as supportive relationships with caregivers characterized by trust, acceptance, and responsiveness that promote social and emotional development through the growth of healthy internalized working examples (Jennings & Greenberg, 2008). Children connect with certain adults in their lives and adults connect with children in their lives. Attachment relationships are characterized by specific behaviors, both in children and in adults. Children use their adult attachment figures as a secure base when exploring their world (Bretherton, 1992). Children demonstrate their

attachment by showing preference for a particular person or retreating toward that person when threatened or upset (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Adult attachment behavior includes the adult attending and responding to the child's needs and signals (Ainsworth, 1979; DeWolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997). Children develop attachments with adults both within the family (e.g., mother, father, and siblings) and outside the family, such as teachers or caregivers (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Pianta, Hamre, and Stuhlman (as cited in Jennings & Greenberg, 2008) applied components of attachment theory toward understanding the teacher-student relationship and the significance of that role for the student in the classroom. They found that when teachers are warm and supportive, provide students with a sense of connectedness with the classroom and school environments, and provide students with the sense of security to take risks, children are more apt to have the confidence to explore new and different situations. This is fundamental in learning, in and outside of the classroom (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999; Murray & Greenberg, 2000; M. Watson & Ecken, 2003). Thus, demonstrating the importance of teachers developing caring, trusting relationships and forming meaningful attachments with their students. For the homeless student, such relationships and attachments can be the difference between success or failure in school, and possibly outside of school.

Care theory and attachment theory are the two lenses from which this study was researched. Both theories focus on the social-emotional connections between adults and children and the importance of such relationships in the educational development of the child's self.

## **Methodology**

Case study is the methodological design for this investigation. Yin (2003) suggests such a format is appropriate when the researcher wants to answer “how” and “what” questions, when behaviors cannot be manipulated, and/or when the phenomenon takes place in a specific contextual environment. The use of observations, interviews, and artifacts, such as documents, are the most common data collection tools used in qualitative research (Stake, 2010). For this investigation, questionnaires, observations, and open-ended one-on-one interviews were the primary forms of data collection. A detailed explanation of methods used in this inquiry, generalizability, and limitations are provided in Chapter 3.

## **Significance**

This case study about teacher-homeless student relationships and the impact on the homeless child has the potential to contribute new knowledge in the teaching of homeless school-age children. It could inform practice and shape professional development opportunities for teachers and others in the education field. Considering that the research related to working with homeless school-age students in the classroom is scant, almost any research targeting this group of marginalized students will contribute to the literature. It is the hope of the researcher that this study provides teachers and other educators with previously unknown information about the homeless school-age culture. It is important that teachers and administrators alike grasp the severity of the child homelessness situation in the school district and in the classroom. The researcher hopes that all teachers and educators come to understand the teacher-homeless student

relationship is especially significant, as oftentimes the classroom is the only safe, stable environment in the child's life. Additionally, the researcher is hopeful this study leads teachers to recognize their role in the social-emotional development of the homeless children in their classroom; that teachers make the conscience effort to develop and cultivate meaningful, supportive relationships with their homeless students, and consciously work to meet the homeless children's social-emotional needs.

The benefits of bringing awareness to teachers working with this vulnerable population are twofold: (a) it offers teachers the opportunity to develop an authentic understanding of the homeless culture and, more specifically, child homelessness, and (b) it offers teachers a working comprehension of the daily struggles experienced by homeless students in and out of the school environment (Pellino, 2013; Swick, 2004). Additionally, such awareness offers teachers the opportunity to appreciate the need of providing more support of connectedness to homeless students (Moore, 2013; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008; Stronge & Hudson, 1999). Through developing a realistic understanding of the homeless school-age culture, teachers have the capacity to build effective and appropriate relationships with this population and interact accordingly. In possessing a working comprehension of the homeless child's daily struggles, the teacher has the ability to develop and implement caring, authentic relationships with homeless children, addressing the child's unique social-emotional needs.

Identifying and addressing one's biases, teachers have the opportunity to adjust their attitude and belief toward homelessness (Moore, 2013; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008; Stronge & Hudson, 1999). This awareness of the homeless school-age culture allows teachers to begin to work through any personal issues they may have that hinder

their ability to work with this unique population and to provide appropriate emotional support for homeless children in the classroom (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

### **Key Terms**

*Homeless:* The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001, a part of No Child Left Behind, defines “homeless” as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate, nighttime residence and includes:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
4. Migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA] of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (1) through (3) (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2001).

*Homeless individual or homeless person:* According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the term “homeless” or “homeless individual or homeless person” includes the following:

1. An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
2. An individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is
  - A. A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);
  - B. An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
  - C. A public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

Because this study focused on homeless school-age students and the relational practices of elementary school teachers, the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless was used.

*Homeless/Highly Mobile (H/HM):* Students who move more than once a year.

*School-age:* A student in elementary school between the ages of 5-11 years.

## **Summary**

As there is a paucity of research on the topic of the unique social-emotional and educational needs of homeless students, this topic continues to be in need of exploration. It was the goal of this researcher to learn what steps elementary school teachers took to build teacher-homeless student relationships and meet the social-emotional needs of this marginalized population. In Chapter 2, a look at the federal

policy, McKinney-Vento Act, is reviewed for the definition and federal understanding of homelessness. The educational risks and barriers homeless students face is presented. Seeking to understand the approach teachers take in building teacher-homeless student relationships, the best teaching practices for homeless students, and a review of the available literature and empirical studies are presented. The study focused on understanding a contemporary, real-life phenomenon that takes place in many classrooms across America (Yin, 2012).



## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The following literature review focuses on how elementary school teachers approach developing relationships with homeless students and meet the children's social-emotional needs. The definition of homelessness is explained. The literature describing the risks associated with child homelessness, such as barriers to education, high mobility, academic risk and retention, and social-emotional behaviors are examined. The significance of the teacher and the development of teacher-homeless student relationships are reviewed.

### **Homelessness Definition**

Homelessness is defined as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Initially enacted as policy in 1987, the McKinney- Vento Homeless Assistance Act was designed to meet the housing, physical and mental health, and substance abuse needs of homeless persons. It also assured that children of such individuals had access to a free public education (Bowman et al., 2012; Masten et al., 1997; Moore, 2005; USDOE, 2004). The section of the McKinney-Vento Act focusing on family homelessness specifically defined their living situation. A family is said to be homeless if they share residence with other family members or friends, referred to as "doubled-up"; have lost their own housing, either due to loss of employment and/or income, or eviction; are living in motels, trailer parks, campgrounds, cars or other types of accommodations unsuitable for human beings. A family is considered homeless if they are living in short-term emergency or transitional shelters (Bowman et al., 2012; McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2001; Miller, 2011; National Center for

Homeless Education [NCHE], 2013; Samuels, Shinn, & Buckner, 2010; Swick, 2004; USDOE, 2004).

### **McKinney-Vento Act**

In 2001, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was reauthorized under No Child Left Behind and amended to *protect* the educational rights of homeless children. The aim was to eliminate barriers that made it difficult for homeless students to access a free, public education (NCHE, 2013; USDOE, 2004).

As part of a school district's responsibility towards homeless children, the McKinney-Vento Act (2001) requires all schools to enroll homeless students immediately upon attempting registration, even when parents do not have the correct documentation required for school enrollment. Such documentation includes birth certificates, proof of residence, and school records (Bowman et al., 2012; Miller & Bourgeois, 2013; USDOE, 2004).

The section of the Act that pertains specifically to homeless children's education requires school districts to remove all barriers that prohibit students from gaining immediate entry into school. The McKinney-Vento also put in place mandates to ensure school stability: consistent access to education in a permanent, stable school environment (Bowman et al., 2012; USDOE, 2004). Homeless children are entitled to attend their school of origin with transportation provided by the school district if the placement is in the best interest of the child (Bowman & Barksdale, 2004; USDOE, 2004; Wall, 2003). School districts may also provide funding for public transportation, such as bus tokens or bus passes. School of origin is defined as the school the student last attended prior to or

during the time the child became homeless (Bowman & Barksdale, 2004; USDOE, 2004).

Since its inception, the McKinney-Vento Act has been amended to remain current with changing legislation. As the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act sunsetted in 2007, then President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in law on December 10, 2015 (National Center for Homeless Education, 2016). The ESSA reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) updated to include new supports and authorizations for homeless children and youth in the McKinney-Vento Act (CDE, 2017; Hallett & Skrla, 2017; NCHE, 2016).

In addition, the role of the school district homeless liaison was revised. The job description now includes a mandated professional development training in which the liaison must participate (Hallett & Skrla, 2017).

### **Title I, Part A**

Homeless children are the most under-identified, marginalized population in need of educational services and support (Miller, 2007). In an effort to minimize the negative effects of homeless children's education, Title I, Part A addresses the responsibilities educators have in assisting this population (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; NCHE, 2013).

Originally established in 1965 as the Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged Act, Title I, Part A, is a federally funded program assisting all school districts across America in ensuring all children have the opportunity to receive an equal, fair, and high-quality education. Through aligning high-quality assessment, teacher preparation, and rigorous curriculum and instruction, Title I, Part A provides funds to school districts to meet the academic needs of low-achieving children in high poverty

areas, bridging the academic achievement gap between at-risk students and typical, non-at-risk students (NCHE, 2012; USDOE, 2004; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [WDPI], 2012). However, the Act does not specify the individuals at the school level responsible for the implementation of the services for the disadvantaged children and, therefore, may cause a delay in meeting the needs of these children.

To date, there are no laws or policies specifically mandating classroom teachers to consider homeless students when designing learning in the classroom. Nor are there mandates address meeting the social-emotional needs of homeless students in the classroom.

An abundance of empirical studies and policy papers can be found addressing the topic of best teaching practices for all students from educational researchers and institutions, such as Anooshian (2003); Fairfax County Public Schools (Fairfax Network, 2009); Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering (2003); National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC, 2007); Public Schools of North Carolina, Department of Public Instruction: Elementary Division (n.d.); Stronge (2007); Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2005).

However, there is a paucity of literature and empirical studies regarding what classroom teachers should know about homeless students and their educational needs. As well, only a dearth of literature and studies that address how teachers actually work with and support homeless students in social-emotional success exists. It should be noted that research on best teaching practices and effective teachers could be leveraged to meet the unique challenging needs of homeless students in the classroom (Grant et al., 2008; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005).

## **Risk Factors of Child Homelessness**

Multiple risk factors characterize the educational experience of homeless children and impact their social-emotional growth and achievement. These risks have been identified as high mobility, low academic performance, high rate of special educational needs, high rate of grade retention, and above average absenteeism (Fantuzzo et al, 2012; Hart-Shegos, 1990; Miller, 2011; Miller & Bourgeois, 2013; Obradovic et al., 2009; Rafferty, Shinn, & Weitzman, 2004; Samuels et al., 2010; USDOE, 2004; Vostanis, Granttan, & Cumella, 1998; Zima, Bussing, Forness, & Benjamin, 1997). In the section that follows, the literature demonstrates how the high mobility component of homelessness appears to be the catalyst from which much of the other risk factors precipitate.

**High Mobility.** Due to the transient nature of homelessness, families move frequently, sometimes several times in a school year (Bowman & Barksdale, 2004; Bowman et al., 2012; Masten et al., 1997; Rog & Buckner, 2007). The constant movement from shelter to shelter, or couch-to-couch, negatively impacts the homeless child's social-emotional growth (Zima et al., 1994). For example, a study of 169 school-age children in homeless shelters across Los Angeles, California, found that 39% of the children had missed 1 week of school in the previous 3 months. An additional 16% of the children in shelters had missed 3 weeks of school over the same time period (Zima et al., 1997). The 39% who had missed 1 week of school had also transferred schools two to five times in the previous 12 months (Cunningham et al., 2010; Rafferty et al., 2004; Zima et al., 1997).

The U.S. Department of Education continues to identify high mobility as the number one barrier for homeless children when attempting to enroll in and access school (Obradovic et al., 2009; Rafferty et al., 2004; USDOE, 2004). Several studies have revealed that homeless children may move as many as three times in a school year (Cunningham et al., 2010; Hart-Shegos, 1990). It takes 4 to 6 months for these students to recover academically from multiple moves (Cunningham et al., 2010; USDOE, 2004). For a child to have the opportunity to be social-emotionally and academically successful, the child needs to attend school.

**High Absenteeism and Retention.** High absenteeism is another factor that contributes to low academic performance of homeless children. If the child is not in the classroom, the child has a greater chance of failing. Frequent school changes and lack of transportation leads to decreased attendance causing high absenteeism (Aratani, 2009; Cunningham et al., 2010). These factors contribute to absenteeism and negatively impact a homeless child's school success. When children miss a great deal of school, they can easily fall behind their housed-peers and put them at high risk of grade retention (Cunningham et al., 2010; USDOE, 2004). In a study of the largest homeless shelter in Minneapolis, parents stated their children had missed a "substantial" amount of school (substantial not defined). Of the 8- to 17-year-old children in the study, 38% had repeated a grade (Masten et al., 1997). Though literature on homelessness dates back to the 1980s, there is scarce data specifying the long-term social-emotional or academic effects of homelessness on school-age children.

**Social-Emotional Risks.** Along with being at risk for academic failure, homeless children are also at risk for emotional and behavioral problems. At school, while trying

to hide the fact they are homeless, children are frequently ridiculed and ostracized by their peers. This can cause feelings of shame and embarrassment about their situation (Anooshian, 2003; Tower, 1992). Often comparing themselves to their peers, homeless children are acutely aware of social and economic differences. This awareness can have a negative effect on the child's classroom behavior (Anooshian, 2003; Pellino, 2013). The lack of social support, perpetuated by feelings of being overwhelmed by expected standards of behavior in the classroom, appears to be predictors of adjustment difficulties and classroom behavior problems (Anooshian, 2003; Tower, 1992).

Compounding factors of poverty mars a homeless child's social skills and ability to form positive peer relationships. The inability to form beneficial relationships with peers and adults hinders the child's development of the foundation of positive social interaction. The lack of foundational social skills also contributes to the inability to conform to the expected school behavior (Thistle-Elliott, L. 2014). In addition, several studies reveal that the high transiency experienced by homeless families often breaks the bonds of friendship and trust that have been or have begun to be developed (Miller, 2011; Obradovic et al., 2009; Rafferty et al., 2004; Stronge, 2007). The broken bonds frequently lead to isolation from extended family, friends, teachers, and other positive sources demonstrating the importance established, positive relationships have on the social development of children.

Constant change of environment through multiple moves is stressful for families, and especially for children; relationships built outside of the immediate family are difficult to maintain (Guarino & Bassuk, 2010). Erratic school attendance and high mobility experienced by homeless children leads to repeatedly disrupted relationships.

The interrupted bonding process puts children in a vulnerable emotional position and can precipitate behavioral problems (Guarino & Bassuk, 2010; Hart-Shegos, 1999; Obradovic et al., 2009). Studies show that homeless children suffer three times the emotional and behavioral problems in and outside the classroom than their housed-peers (Guarino & Bassuk, 2010; Hart-Shegos, 1999). Being exposed to extensive periods of homelessness, children experience social isolation and behavioral problems, frequently demonstrating difficulty in adjusting socially to the classroom and school environments (Anooshian, 2003; Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Compared to their poor-housed peers with similar disadvantages, homeless children have been shown to experience more depression and anxiety (Bassuk, Rubin, & Lauriat, 1986; Buckner, Bassuk, Weinrub, & Brooks, 1999; Gelb & Lohman, 2002; Pellino, 2013). For example, in a 2009 study by Baggerly and Jenkins that compared homeless preschool children to their poor-housed peers, nearly 50% of homeless children displayed difficulty with depression and anxiety, compared to less than 25% of their poor-housed peers.

In the late 1990s, Bassuk, Weinreb, Dawson, Perloff, and Buckner (1997) conducted a study to determine the behavioral and emotional characteristics of sheltered homeless preschool-age children compared to their poor-housed peers. The authors wanted to identify elements that influenced such characteristics in homeless and low-income housed preschool-age children.

The study consisted of 167 preschool-age children: 77 sheltered homeless and 90 low-income housed children living with their mothers. The methods used to gather data consisted of a comprehensive interview protocol and the Child Behavior Check-List



(CBCL). The CBCL is a series of questionnaires that evaluate a child's behavioral and emotional functioning, social problems and competencies. A significant adult in the child's life, such as a parent or teacher complete the CBCL questionnaires. In this study, the children's mothers were interviewed and completed the CBCL questionnaire series (Bassuk et al., 1997). Data gathered for the study consisted of information regarding current housing situations, income, services utilized, the children's father (when possible), and parenting practices. Additional information included children's background, health and life events, and perceived stressors to which these children were exposed. Stressors included homelessness, family investigation from protective services, and placement into foster care. Assessment results indicated the higher the child scored, the more severe the behavior.

The data showed the sheltered homeless preschool children scored higher in all areas of behavior, indicating more extreme behaviors than their housed counterparts. For instance, the homeless children scored more severe difficulties at internalizing behaviors at 52.5 versus 49.9, externalizing behaviors at 54.8 versus 51.2, and scored slightly higher than their low-income housed peers, with a problem solving score of 54.4 versus 51.1 (Bassuk et al., 1997; Guarino & Bassuk, 2010). Of the sheltered preschool homeless children in the study, researchers found that 12% experienced anxiety and depression, while 16% of the children displayed evidence of extreme hostilities and aggression (Guarino & Bassuk, 2010).

Homeless children have been observed to have fewer coping behavioral skills and display less developed social skills than their housed-peers due to a lack of support (Baggerly & Jenkins, 2009). Without the ability to form supportive, meaningful

relationships, homeless children can potentially suffer dysfunctional adult relationships (Noddings, 2003). Thus, the literature supports this study; how supportive relationships developed between elementary school teachers and homeless school-age students in the classroom are important and impact the social-emotional growth of homeless school-age children and their success as adults.

### **Importance of Homeless Cultural Awareness**

The role of the classroom teacher is significant in the life of the homeless child. Literature tells us that teachers need to examine their personal beliefs toward the homeless culture and population, have an in-depth comprehension of the culture and the daily experiences of homeless children. It is important that teachers recognize homeless children come to the classroom with additional educational needs not characterized by their non-homeless peers. Teachers must take the time to reflect upon their teacher-homeless student relationship to be able to effectively work with this vulnerable population (Grant et al., 2008; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008).

Understanding the complications a homeless child faces on a daily basis is important for the classroom teacher. To accurately meet the unique needs of homeless students in the classroom, the literature states that teachers need to possess a working comprehension of the culture of poverty, the concept of being at-risk, and specifically homelessness (Hart-Shegos, 1999; Pellino, 2013; Swick, 2004). In addition, teachers need an awareness of the struggles associated with homelessness to accurately understand the emotional trauma the homeless child experiences. This knowledge will benefit the teacher in responding to and interacting with the homeless child in the classroom. It is important that teachers understand their responsibility to the child's complete education,

as well as being aware of the child's current developmental stage (Baggerly & Jenkins, 2009).

**Homeless Culture.** To understand the culture of homelessness, it is important for teachers to recognize that homeless children find themselves in a situation completely out of their control, facing uncertainties on a daily basis that most students do not (Hunt & Swiggum, 2007; Pellino, 2013; Swick, 2004). Adult level concerns for locating shelter and food can be all consuming for children and have an adverse effect on their ability to learn, much less pay attention in class.

It is important for teachers to keep in mind that the homeless child may not have slept well the night before and may be very tired upon arriving at school. For example, a report by Bowman and colleagues (2012) for the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) on the relationship between homelessness and educational development for youth showed that the primary nighttime residences of the nearly one million children identified as homeless was one of four accommodations. These living accommodations were: unsheltered, hotels/motels, temporary shelters, and doubled-up. The report in NCHE (2012) showed the breakdown of the living accommodations as follows: 4% lived in unsheltered conditions, such as in a car or similar, 5% lived in hotels/motels dwellings, 19% resided in temporary shelters that required families to move within 30 or 60 days, and the largest segment of identified homeless children (72%), lived with other family members or friends in a doubled-up situation (Bowman et al., 2012).

The following two studies demonstrate the significance in having a stable residence: In a small study over an 8-year period, Rafferty and colleagues (2004) compared the academic achievement of homeless students to their poor-housed peers.

The authors looked at standardized test scores in reading and math. They noted a six-percentile difference between both groups, with the homeless students performing lower than their peers.

Obradovic and colleagues (2009) conducted a longitudinal study in a large, urban school district similar to that of Rafferty and colleagues (2004). The study compared reading and math scores of homeless students with low-income students. The authors noted the homeless students scored significantly lower in both academic areas. However, no specific statistical data were provided. Nor did the study include any information on the social-emotional impact on the homeless children.

Though 72% of the children were living with other family members or family friends, all the homeless children in the report were residing in unfamiliar locations, away from their own home, and familiar surroundings. Understanding the conditions of shelters and hotels/motels is important. Some shelters and hotels/motels require families to move all their belongings out first thing in the morning and do not guarantee a bed(s) upon return in the evening. Other shelters provide homeless families with a limited or temporary stay of 30 to 60 days (Miller, 2011).

Additionally, stress for the homeless child in the classroom may be attributed to shelter or hotel/motel conditions, such as the lack of privacy, overcrowding, loud noises, and strict rules. Such rules may include no talking past a certain hour in the evening, therefore hindering the family from communicating if necessary. Shelters also tend to be loud, making the completion of homework difficult. As well, the safety of one's belongings and person is not guaranteed (Bassuk et al., 1986; Masten et al., 1997).

Conditions and house rules for those living in a doubled-up situation can also be challenging. Sleeping in unfamiliar dwellings can be stressful, too. It has a negative impact on a homeless child's school production.

When armed with the knowledge of a child's homeless circumstances, the teacher will have the opportunity to recognize the child's vulnerability and is better equipped to provide effective support and appropriate resources to help the child achieve social-emotional and success academic (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Pellino, 2013; Stronge & Hudson, 1999; Swick, 2004)

**Perception and Misconception.** Misconceptions and stereotypes of diverse populations significantly impact the social-emotional and educational success of students (Moore, 2013). Many Americans are either indifferent toward homeless individuals, or subscribe to the stereotypical attitude that homelessness is a reflection of laziness in the individual; and that homeless children have difficult or problematic behaviors (Hocking & Lawrence, 2000; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008). Literature says that teachers need to examine and reflect upon their attitude toward homelessness in general, and homeless children, specifically. It is important that teachers examine their perceptions and personal beliefs of the homeless culture and address any misconceptions they may have toward this population (Hock & Lawrence, 2000; Moore, 2013).

In a study conducted by Powers-Costello and Swick (2008), early childhood teachers participated in a professional development (PD) focusing on homeless preschool children and their daily life experiences. The teachers went through a process of examining and assessing their understanding and perception of the homeless culture, families with children, specifically. Upon completion of the PD, teachers were

encouraged to participate in a homeless service-learning project. Subsequently, the teachers involved in the service learning projects reported a transformed understanding of the homeless children culture and their families. Teachers reported they gained a new sensitivity for the complexities of the lives of homeless children and an appreciation for the dire circumstances under which the children were trying to complete assigned work (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008).

Following the professional development experience, teachers were able to reconstruct or realign their perception of homelessness. For instance, recognizing their responsibility to meet the unique needs of homeless students in the classroom, the teachers adjusted their instructional practice and sought out others who could assist in providing appropriate social-emotional resources for the student (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008, 2011). Though adjustments to lessons and their own behavior were subtle, teachers shared they observed a visible lower stress level in their homeless students' behavior (Moore, 2013; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008).

Researchers found that teachers have a positive influence on the behavior of the homeless students in their classroom. When homeless students' mood and social play with peers were observed, researchers noted that empathetic teachers were able to adjusted or adapt their interactions with the homeless children providing the children with a safe and stable social-emotional classroom environment (Thistle-Elliott, L. 2014).

As previous mentioned, there is a dearth of literature regarding the the interactions and relationship building practices between teachers and homeless students. In an attempt to address the topic, Powers-Costello and Swick (2008, 2011) suggested

that pre-service teachers be educated on the culture of homelessness and receive training on how to develop positive relationships with homeless students in the classroom.

Raising the awareness of the plight of homeless students gives teachers a deeper awareness and understanding of the culture of homelessness. Finding a harmonious balance between the homeless child's culture and the values of the school will enable the child to better participate in their own educational development (Pellino, 2013). With this understanding of the homeless child's situation, the teacher is apt to be more cognizant of any behavioral changes in the student, prompting the teacher to develop a warm and caring relationship with the student (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Pellino, 2013).

### **Effective Teaching Practices for Homeless Students**

Empirical evidence demonstrates that effective teachers have a direct influence on student social-emotional growth and academic success (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Educators and researchers alike agree that a balanced combination of methods, strategies, and environment constitute best teaching practices for all students (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2009; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Zemelman et al., 2005).

Studies that investigate the social-emotional and educational needs of homeless children in the classroom are quite scarce. There is research regarding the qualities of effective teachers in general (Stronge, 2007). However, little research exists specifically regarding the qualities of effective teachers of homeless students (Grant et al., 2008). In an effort to fill this void in the literature, Grant and colleagues (2008) conducted research designed to study the qualities of effective teachers working with at-risk/highly mobile students, which included homeless students.

The teacher participants in Grant and colleagues' (2008) study were six *award-winning* teachers from across the United States. These teachers won national and/or state recognition for their teaching excellence. All teachers in the study worked in schools with student populations characterized as highly mobile. In the study, authors defined *highly mobile* as children of military families (due to the highly mobile aspect of the military), migrant families, homeless families, and students at-risk of failing (Grant et al., 2008; Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2011).

The researchers learned that the effective teacher working with homeless students addressed specific areas of need in which the homeless/at-risk student was lacking. The areas of need for this vulnerable population include affective needs and technical needs (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2009)

**Affective Needs.** One area of needs to be addressed by an effective teacher is affective needs. Affective needs require the teacher to be sensitive to the social-emotional growth of the child. Researchers asked high school-age homeless and highly mobile students to identify the characteristics of teachers that made a difference in their lives. Students used such descriptors as caring, respectful, nurturing, supportive, and encouraging to describe the teachers that positively impacted their lives (Grant et al., 2008). This and other studies revealed that when teachers took a personal interest in the homeless student, took time to know the student's family, and understood the issues the child and family faced, it positively impacted the student's behavior, social interactions, and academic outcomes (Grant et al., 2008; Moore, 2013; Popp et al., 2009).

Understanding that school may be the only safe and stable place for the homeless student, the effective teacher takes time to help the child feel a sense of security and belonging,



working to alleviate the potential to be frustrated and feel isolated (Moore, 2013; Popp et al., 2009; Stronge, 2007), thereby attending to the child's social-emotional needs.

**Technical Needs.** Another area of need to be addressed for homeless/at-risk students is the area of technical needs. Technical needs are the social services and support from individuals that are in a position to meet those needs, such as social workers, resource and speech teachers, and effective caring teachers (Moore, 2013; Popp et al., 2009). The effective teacher is prepared to attend to the varied socio-economic levels of all students who walk through the classroom door. For example, the teacher will have the social resources readily available for the student when assessment demonstrates the need for such services. In addition, the teacher will have consumable foods or snacks on hand, accounting for the possibility the child has not eaten in the morning, and give the student respectful space to eat the snack or breakfast (Grant et al., 2008; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Popp et al., 2009).

Availability of and access to nutritional food is often difficult for homeless children. While research is scarce, a small case study on the health of homeless children found that 45% of children at a local homeless shelter were either overweight or at-risk for being overweight. This was due in large part to the lack of accessibility to nutritional food sources, and lack of the intake of proper, necessary nutrients (Hart-Shegos, 1999; Richards & Smith, 2007). Shelters do not have refrigeration, nor do they allow foods other than nonperishables in the establishment. Therefore, the homeless child sitting in class may not have had a good night's rest or nutritional meal prior to arriving at school. This may cause the child to focus on his growling stomach rather than learning the lessons prepared for the day (Gelb & Lohman, 2002; Richards & Smith, 2007).

Upon completion of their study, Grant and colleagues (2008) concluded that the caring and positive relationships effective teachers developed with their homeless and at-risk/highly mobile students provided them with valuable information for working with such a population. The teachers' understanding of what their homeless, highly mobile and at-risk students needed socially, emotionally, and technically was broadened. This new understanding enabled the teacher to develop and prepare long- and short-term lesson plans that met the social-emotional needs of their students. The authors viewed the trusting relationships the teachers built and continued to nurture as paramount to the success of both teacher and student (Grant et al., 2008; Popp et al., 2009).

Knowing what the homeless child is experiencing on a daily basis, and what the child needs socially and emotionally will help the effective teacher to work with students who are at-risk, highly mobile, and homeless. Relationships teachers build, cultivate, and maintain with homeless students often provide the only productive and positive life-style model to which the children of such populations are exposed (Mizerek & Hinz, 2004)

**Teacher-Student Relationships.** Studies show that children spend upwards of 25% of their waking hours at school. Given the caring nature of teachers, the thought is the educational environment is a powerful setting in which to connect with homeless children, to build attachments and caring relationships with homeless students (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2003). In recent years, education stakeholders have recognized the need to expand the current view of the educational agenda. The focus of education needs to shift from a strict academic focus to include addressing children's social-emotional competence (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The quality of early childhood relationships with teachers has recently emerged as a predictor of children's social and emotional

relationships with their peers (Howes, 2000). When a positive relationship exists between the teacher and student, it can be an indicator as to a child's level of aggression and disruptive behavior in the classroom.

In 2004, the National Research Council reported a shift in the discussion of children's education to include student social-emotional growth and behavioral problems. Instead of the focus on adjusting context (classroom, clubs, etc.) and programs to reduce student behavioral problems, the role of the classroom teacher shifted. The shift in the teachers included recognizing that a positive, caring teacher-student relationship has a constructive impact on student behavior. Engaged in supportive, positive relationships with teachers, while participating in contextual settings, can reduce frustration and disruptive behavioral problems (National Research Council, 2004; Noddings, 2003; Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2003).

Teachers set the tone of the classroom through developing supportive, positive, caring relationships with their students. When a teacher models appropriate behavior, such as respect for students, implements lessons that build students' strengths and abilities, and sets expectations that promote intrinsic motivation, the teacher creates an environment that is encouraging, engaging, and productive (Bergin, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2008; Mizerek & Hinz, 2004).

Research demonstrates that positive teacher-student relationships are influential in achieving desired student outcomes (Grant et al., 2008; Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2003; Popp et al., 2011). For example, in the study of the six nationwide award-winning effective teachers, the authors reported that the interview questions revealed the teachers put a high priority on their teacher-homeless or at risk student relationships. Through the

development of caring, positive relationships with their at-risk/homeless mobile students, teachers were able to design lessons that incorporated students' strengths, which engaged the students in learning (Grant et al., 2008; Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2003).

Sadly though, many youth described their school experience as irrelevant and meaningless, void of meaningful challenges. These patterns worsened with students in low-income schools and for those students who were at-risk of failure (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2003). Thus, incorporating into one's teaching practice relationships building activities that include caring and attachment with such vulnerable students will positively impact the child's educational experience.

Through the lens of care and attachment theories, the importance of a strong supportive, positive relationship with the classroom teacher is paramount for the homeless school-age student. Mentioned previously, homelessness is highly mobile and may cause bonds with family, neighbors, and childhood friends to be broken (Miller, 2011; Obradovic et al., 2009). Attachments with important individuals have a significant impact on future relationships—emotionally, socially, and in developing coping skills. In the case of homeless children, their ability to form secure, trusting relationships with adults and peers may be extremely difficult due to the transient nature of homelessness (Guarino & Bassuk, 2010). As research shows, homeless children often move two to three times during the school year (Bowman et al., 2012; Miller, 2011; USDOE, 2004). This continuous moving makes it difficult for homeless children to develop and maintain relationships with significant individuals. Taking time to build positive, supportive relationships with homeless students impacts the child's life well into adulthood

(Noddings, 2003). Unfortunately, the reality is that many teachers and students do not build significant relationships, especially teachers and homeless children.

### **Summary**

Research on preschool sheltered children and homeless youth, ages 12-19, shows homeless children continue to be at high risk for school failure. They are at risk for behavior problems and social isolation, as well as in other school related areas (Masten et al., 1997; Rafferty et al., 2004). The increase in this vulnerable population has huge implications for today's teachers. Teachers have a significant impact on all student success. For homeless students, the significance is that much greater due to the child's unique needs. Not only do teachers need to possess the qualities and skills of an effective teacher, they also need to go beyond their job description to build positive, caring relationships with the homeless children in their classroom, as well as with the children's families (Grant et al., 2008; Noddings, 2003; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008). Researchers of homeless children and youth conclude that teachers would do well to develop a working comprehension of the contexts and situations in which homeless children and their families exist, as well as become culturally sensitive to their circumstance (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008).

Nel Noddings (1995) says teachers need to be cognizant of their own behavior and relationships with their students. Teachers need to make certain to model what caring for another looks like and what it means to care for another.

Literature and empirical studies regarding the education of preschool homeless children, up to age 4, and homeless youth, age 12 to 19, are sparse but exist. Research specifically directed toward the study of homeless school-age children, age 5 to 11, is

even less available. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore what elementary school teachers do to meet the unique educational needs of homeless school-age students (Grant et al., 2008).

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The previous chapter outlined literature on the characteristics of homeless children with a focus on their educational experiences. The purpose of this study was to explore how elementary school teachers interact and build relationships with homeless school-age students in their classroom. To assist in understanding this phenomenon, care theory and attachment theory were examined to illustrate the importance of understanding and developing the teacher-homeless student relationship (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 2003). Risks associated with child homelessness were examined and discussed (Miller, 2011; Obradovic et al., 2009; Rafferty et al., 2004), an in-depth look at the culture of homelessness was presented (Pellino, 2013; Swick, 2004), effective teaching practices for homeless students were reviewed (Grant et al., 2008; Moore, 2013), and the significance of the teacher-student relationship was presented (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2003). The literature was integral in guiding the research questions.

Though there is scant literature describing how teachers should address the social-emotional needs of homeless students. There is even less literature that identifies how teachers build relationships and interact with homeless school-age students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Moore, 2013). More in-depth research regarding teacher knowledge of the homeless school-age culture, teacher interaction with homeless students, and practices teachers implement to build positive, caring relationships with homeless students is necessary. As a result, this proposed study asks the following research questions:

- How do elementary school teachers approach meeting the unique needs of homeless students?

With the sub-questions:

- How do teachers build relationship with their homeless students?
- How do the social-emotional needs of homeless students influence the relationship building and instructional practices of elementary school teachers?
- How do elementary school teachers advocate for their homeless students?

The proposed case study analysis focused on seven teachers from six elementary schools in a TK-8 school district consisting of 27 schools: six middle schools and 21 elementary schools. The objective was to explore what relationship building methods teachers implemented to meet the social-emotional needs of the homeless students in their classroom. This chapter begins with an explanation of case study methodology and the research supporting the application of this approach. Next, discussed in detail are school site and participant selection, data collection and storage, data analysis procedures, and limitations to this investigation.

### **Case Study Methodology**

This investigation primarily utilized qualitative research methods. A qualitative approach facilitated the exploration of a phenomenon in its real-life context, which often accessed a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2012). “Qualitative approaches to observation provide rich, descriptive information about teachers’ practices and students’ experiences in classrooms using ethnographic approaches,” (Pianta & Hamre, 2009, p. 110).



Data for this study were drawn from three sources: questionnaires, classroom observations, and one-on-one teacher interviews. The use of multiple data sources enabled the researcher to explore the phenomenon through two lenses rather than from a single perspective (Baxter & Jack, 2008). As in ethnography, triangulating multiple methods, perspectives, and sources of data adds depth, consistency, and various insights to an analysis. This enhanced the validity and credibility of the results (Yin, 2003).

The social-emotional needs of homeless students are unique. The goal of this investigation was to identify the strategies and methods teachers used to approach meeting such unique needs. In Chapter 2, a thorough review of the risks facing homeless students was presented, along with care and attachment theories. Literature regarding the homeless culture and the importance of teachers in possession of such knowledge was examined. The literature on how teachers should work with homeless students and the importance of building positive, caring relationships was reviewed. This study focused on understanding a contemporary, real-life phenomenon that takes place in many classrooms across America (Yin, 2012). Case study methodology was the appropriate approach to this investigation, which was driven by the uniqueness of the issue and the desire to understand it (Stake, 2010). For instance, the study of how teachers interact with and build purposeful, trusting relationships with their homeless school-age students is a case study format. Case study is in-depth inquiry of a “bounded system,” independent of time and place, separated out for research (e.g., activity, event, process, individual, or social phenomenon) and based on extensive data collection. The research questions in this study focus a phenomenon in a real-life context (Creswell, 2010; Yin, 2003).

**Sample and Population.** The following section outlines the justification of the school and participant selection criteria. The proposed methods utilized for data collection are explained

**Site Selection.** The school district in which this investigation took place has 27 school sites with grade levels ranging from Transitional Kindergarten (TK) to eighth grade. In the 2013-2014 school year, 16,971 students were enrolled in the school district. Through the completion of the district Transitional Residency Affidavit, 363 students were identified as homeless. These students were provided with backpacks, school supplies, sweatshirts, and physical education clothes. Accessing the school district's homeless student database, the elementary school sites with the largest number of identified homeless students enrolled were selected as research sites.

**Participant Selection.** Upon completion of site selections and identifying teachers with at least two homeless students in their classroom, teachers were contacted and invited to participate in this study. Teachers were contacted via school district email and provided with a description of the study, the participants' role, and a consent form to be signed and returned in the event the teacher agreed to participate in the study (see Appendix A). The email informed teachers that the topic of the study focused on how teachers approach and build relationships with homeless students in their classroom. All interested respondents were accepted as participants in the study regardless of: number of years teaching, previous experience teaching homeless students, and depth of knowledge of or exposure to the homeless culture and population. Upon receipt of a signed consent form, an email describing next steps in the data gathering process was sent (see Appendix B). Those steps consisted of an informal questionnaire to be completed and returned

within 5 days of receipt, two classroom observations approximately 2 to 3 weeks apart, and interview dates from which to select best time and date availability.

In order to gather enough data to thoroughly explore the research questions, being prepared for the possibility of student transiency is necessary. As pointed out, the homeless population is transient in nature (Miller, 2011). It was important to be prepared for the possibility of homeless students moving out of the area during the research period. Therefore, seven participants were enrolled and all participants in the study had more than one homeless student in the classroom to allow for adequate data to be collected.

One limitation to this investigation was the possibility of inconsistent attendance of the homeless students in the class. As there is no means in which to control for attendance, if the homeless students were not in class the day of the observation, data collection was not possible at that time. Therefore, additional observations were set up to collect such data, but not needed. All teacher participants were female. Table 3.1 provides participant demographic information.

Table 1 describes the teacher participants in this study. Participants taught all content areas—language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. All participants taught in Transitional Kindergarten (TK) through fifth grade Title I elementary schools. A Title I school is defined as a school with a 70-80% of the student population qualifying for free or reduced lunch (USDOE, 2004).

**Table 1. Participant Demographics**

## Participant Demographic Data

Teacher	Pseudonym	# Years teaching	Grade level teaching	# Students in classroom	# Homeless students in classroom	% Homeless students in classroom
T1	Ms. Lipton	3	Kinder	24	3	13
T2	Mrs. Trinity	28	1st	25	2	8
T3	Ms. Chism	4	2nd	25	2	8
T4	Mrs. Stanton	27	2nd	23	3	13
T5	Mrs. Lane	11	3rd	24	3	13
T6	Mrs. Cadden	15	4th	34	4	12
T7	Mrs. Hempton	14	4th	34	3	9
Total				189	20	

**Data Collection and Storage**

Data were collected over a 3-month period between February 2015 and April 2015. All data were gathered from participant resources with the explicit permission from the participants and in full compliance with the California State University at San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB). All electronic documents created for this study were stored on a password protected laptop computer and on an external hard drive that was kept in a locked desk drawer. As well, a copy of the working document was stored on a protected “cloud” allowing for access in the event of hardware failure. All paper documents or files created during this study were stored in a securely locked file cabinet in the home of this researcher. The following sections provide an explanation for qualitative data collection methods employed

**Instruments.** The data collection portion of the investigation lasted approximately 3 months during the second trimester of the school year and used three

primary methods of data collection: informal questionnaires, observations, and interviews.

**Appreciative Inquiry.** Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was used in developing two of the three data gathering instruments employed in this study: informal questionnaire and interview questions. This questioning format is appropriate for this investigation, as AI poses questions in a positive frame, highlighting the positive aspects of a system (Mohr & Watkins, 2002). AI allows the interviewee/participant to focus on the topic of inquiry, values the interviewee/participant's level of knowledge of the topic, encourages dialogue of "what should be," and addresses the topic in a positive manner (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). "AI is an invitation to engage in building the organization [or individual] and community that [persons] want to work and live in" (Mohr & Watkins, 2002, p. 4).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is the art of asking guided questions that encourage positive thinking and heighten potential for positive response. This process frames questions in a manner that allows for the interviewee to easily focus on and respond to the topic of inquiry in a positive fashion. AI is intended to encourage an individual's desire to imagine possibilities beyond the confines of the norm and affect positive change for the organization (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001).

Through the stories of their experiences, it is this researcher's hope the educational community grasps the importance and positive impact the classroom teacher has on the lives of homeless students. All three data instruments were developed in the format of Appreciative Inquiry.

**Questionnaire.** Each participating teacher was presented with a short open-ended questionnaire prior to the one-on-one interview. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire using their own terminology by a specific date (see Appendix C). The questionnaire took 30-45 minutes to complete. The questionnaire data were analyzed prior to the one-on-one interviews with the possibility of the participants' answers enhancing follow-up questions during the one-on-one interviews.

**Observations.** For this study, classroom observations focused on the interactions between the teacher and homeless students in the classroom (see Appendix D). Two observations per classroom were conducted during the investigation using the literature-based observation protocol developed for this study. Prior to each observation, participants and this researcher agreed to either prearranged classroom visits or drop-in visits. Observations lasted during the lesson being presented at the time of the classroom visit.

**Interviews.** Semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews with teacher participants were conducted as the third means of data collection (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). This interview format was appropriate for the research questions in this study, as it allowed for the researcher to comprehend the participants' point of view and discern meaning of their experiences and beliefs (Dilley, 2004; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Interviews were approximately 45 minutes in length, held in a location that was confidential, comfortable for and chosen by the participants.

Interviews used a series of semi-structured questions informed by the literature on care and attachment theories, along with the literature on best teaching practices for homeless students (see Appendix D). Interviews were conducted in person, recorded

electronically, and results were transcribed. In order to ensure accuracy, the researcher listened to the electronic audio files and read the transcription simultaneously. All participants verified the validity of their transcribed copy of the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis takes many forms but is, in essence, the art of taking apart a research topic and analyzing it (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2012). Often the facts are put back together into new “wholes” and new interpretations. The researcher, however, continues to revisit the research questions again and again (Stake, 2010). While gathering data, the questionnaire, observation notes, and interview transcripts were analyzed.

NVivo (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4crQbeHKhtk>) and structural coding were applied when analyzing collected data (Rowe, 2012). Through the use of NVivo coding, data collection instruments were scrutinized. Exact words and phrases based on the literature of care and attachment theories were extracted from the participants’ data. The researcher looked for patterns and themes in the language of the participants (Creswell, 2010). This coding format was an appropriate format for this investigation, as it deepens the reader’s understanding of the participants’ experience and point of view (Saldaña, 2009).

An ongoing analysis of the data enabled data sources to inform one another. The use of a qualitative analysis software program to assist in identifying and evaluating pertinent themes, codes, and procedures helped to logically piece together coded evidence into a broader theme for a deeper understanding of the issue (Yin, 2012).

The theoretical frameworks of care and attachment theories helped to identify initial open coding categories. A “constant comparative approach for saturation by

comparing data with incident and incident with category” (Creswell, 2010, p. 441) served to guide additional coding that emerged from the data. In an attempt to achieve valid findings, triangulation and member checking of the three data sources collected were used when analyzing and coding the data (Creswell, 2010).

Triangulation of evidence is meant to improve the inquiry of a study by assembling and converging or integrating different types of data sources on the same phenomenon; multiple sources of evidence such as “different individuals” (e.g., teachers and principals), types of data (e.g., interviews and observational field notes), or methods of data collection (e.g., documents and interviews) which increases the likelihood of finding thematic patterns in the data (Creswell, 2010; Stake, 2010). Triangulation supports accessing a variety of sources enhancing the validity of the findings with confidence and credibility (Creswell, 2010; Stake, 2010). Qualitative researchers are initially skeptical of their data. Therefore, they constantly triangulate or “member-check” data throughout the analysis process. Member checking of data is used to clarify what the researcher has heard or seen. In triangulating evidence, researchers develop a “win-win” situation (Creswell, 2010; Stake, 2010).

Nearly 7 hours of interviews were recorded, with the average interview lasting 45 minutes. Audio recordings were uploaded to Rev.com for verbatim transcription (<https://www.rev.com/>). Two data sets, interview transcriptions and questionnaires, were coded using NVivo and descriptive coding methods. Interview transcriptions and questionnaires were read, hand coded, and up loaded into NVivo 10 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4crQbeHKhtk>).



Observations were hand coded as per categories that emerged from the results of NVivo coding. NVivo coding uses words or short phrases directly extracted from participants' own words as codes and descriptive coding labels. The codes and labels were used to analyze the data, discover patterns, and develop themes.

Upon completion of initial coding, the researcher implemented a second and third round of data coding to narrow and combine like codes. Data patterns were observed and organized from categories into themes. The theoretical frameworks of Care Theory and Attachment Theory, along with codes derived from the literature were used to analyze data and organize themes.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this investigation was to implement a study into how elementary school teachers interacted and built relationships with school-age students who are homeless. Implementing a qualitative study format, the researcher sought to discover how teachers successfully met the homeless child's social-emotional needs. Procedures and data results were presented using instruments developed rooted in relevant literature. The goal of the study was to serve as a means to add to existing knowledge of the homeless school-age culture, improve teacher practice, and inform policy (Creswell, 2010).

## Chapter Four: Research Findings

I try to make [positive] connections with my homeless students.  
I make sure that they know I am here for them,  
and I care about them and their well-being.  
(Mrs. Trinity, elementary teacher)

### Review of Purpose and Research Questions

Due to intimate exposure to the homeless school-age population, the researcher chose the topic of teacher-homeless student relationship to investigate. The purpose of the study was to closely examine how teachers interacted and built relationships with their homeless students. The overarching question asked, *How do elementary school teachers approach meeting the unique needs of homeless students?* The sub-questions developed to further assist in the focus of this qualitative methods inquiry were:

1. What relationship building practices do teachers engage in with their homeless students?
2. How do elementary school teachers interact with their homeless students?
3. How do elementary school teachers build relationships with their homeless students?

### Data Presentation

Data were gathered using three different instruments: questionnaire, interview processes, and classroom observation, designed to capture authentic teaching practices with homeless students. Under the overarching umbrella of Care and Attachment theories, data were analyzed using codes extracted from the literature of care and attachment along with literature depicting best teaching practices for homeless students. The codes were organized into three themes: Cultural Competence, Building Positive

Social-Emotional Relationships, and Advocating for Homeless Students to Meet Basic Needs. Embedded within each theme, the sub-questions of What and How were answered.

### **Procedures**

The first theme to emerge from coded data regarded teacher participants' cultural competence with the homeless school-age population (see Table 2). As stated previously, for the purpose of this study cultural competence is specific to the homeless school-age student population, ages 5-11 years old.

**Table 2. Cultural Competence**

Codes	# References
Cultural Awareness	33
Professional Development	11
Informed of Student Homelessness	50

### **Theme 1: Cultural Competence**

Participants responded with a mix of desire to meet the needs of their homeless students in the classroom and frustration due to their lack of knowing exactly what their homeless students needed and how to specifically meet those needs. The following addresses cultural competence and how teacher participants interacted with the homeless students to meet their needs.

Participants' general competence of the homeless culture consisted of (a) adults being homeless due to a myriad of reasons and circumstance, and (b) the participants' lack of an educated, formal knowledge of the homeless school-age culture. None of the

participants had ever attended or participated in training or professional development focused explicitly on the homeless school-age culture and how to effectively meet the children's socio-emotional and academic needs.

**Cultural awareness.** All participants expressed dissatisfaction at their level of unfamiliarity with the homeless school-age culture. Teachers expressed frustration at their lack of formal knowledge regarding specific teaching practices and effectively supporting homeless school-age children. Participants stated a lack of awareness put them at a disadvantage when attempting to meet the social-emotional needs of this vulnerable population. Data gathered from interviews and questionnaires confirmed teacher participants lacked cultural awareness. At the same time, it also provided evidence of the attachments teachers made with their homeless school-age students along with their ability to care for the students' cognitive and emotional development. Data demonstrated that such a deficit of cultural awareness did not prevent participants from taking steps they deemed appropriate and necessary to meet the needs of their homeless students.

Mrs. Cadden responded in her questionnaire,

Until I started working at a low-income school, I thought that being homeless meant that someone was living in a car or on the street. I realize that [homelessness] is so much more than that. I have had students living in weekly motels [paying by the week], cars, group homes, foster care, or even with two to three other families under the same roof. I now understand [homelessness] to mean that [homelessness] is not having a place for the family to call their own.

Mrs. Trinity responded in her questionnaire, “I have very little firsthand knowledge of the homeless culture other than the work that I have done with the families at my school.”

Ms. Lipton expressed in her interview, “No, I have never attended a PD on working with homeless kids, though I would like to.”

Mrs. Hempton stated in her interview, “No, I have never been to an actual professional development specifically focused on homeless students and what you do to meet their needs. If there were professional development with a focus on homeless students in my classroom, I would attend.”

Mrs. Stanton stated in her interview, “No, I have never participated in a PD that was specifically about how to work with homeless kids.”

Though not observable, data from interviews and questionnaires showed that seven of seven participants wanted to have a working comprehension of child homelessness and would attend a professional development or training that specifically addressed the culture. Teacher participants stated that it would be useful information for them and such knowledge would benefit the homeless students in their classroom. For example: Ms. Lipton shared in her interview, “I do not know what I can or should do for my homeless students. I would love to learn specific ways to support their socio-emotional development.”

Data indicated explicit training focused on the homeless school-age culture needs to be provided teachers. All participants expressed a desire to learn more about the homeless school-age population. Knowledge gained would enable teachers to interact more appropriately and effectively to better meet the social-emotional needs of their

homeless students. The next section demonstrates such a need and desire to gain practical and meaningful knowledge of the homeless school-age culture and how to properly meet the homeless child's needs.

**Professional development.** Teacher participants were asked if they had ever participated in a professional development (PD) or training (opportunity for teachers to gain information/knowledge regarding educational topic) focused explicitly on working with homeless school-age students. All participants said they had not. Teacher participants shared they had never attended a structured, focused professional development designed to educate teachers on meeting the social-emotional needs of homeless school-age children. Data from interviews and questionnaires showed that all participants would attend a PD or training that specifically addressed the culture, legal definition, and meeting the social-emotional and academic needs of homeless school-age children.

Teacher participants expressed a desire to attend a formal training on the topic of meeting the educational needs of homeless student school-age children. For example:

Ms. Lipton shared in her interview, "I would love to learn specific ways to support their social-emotional development."

Mrs. Stanton responded in her questionnaire:

If I went to a PD on how to work with homeless kids, I would want to walk away with knowing what [being a homeless student] means in our district. What makes a kid qualify as homeless? What doesn't qualify as homeless? I would want to know what, how, and when are kids considered homeless. As a teacher, what can I do to help them, outside what I know in my heart? What are some strategic ways, what can I really do? What can I do to make a difference with these kids? . . . I am interested in knowing the whole homeless environment and culture.

Ms. Lipton stated in her interview, “I would like to know exactly what’s going on in their lives. . . . I want to know what it [homelessness] means to their learning. What does it mean to their mental, emotional, and academic development? How does [homelessness] affect their physical development? Again, if they are not eating, how’s their brain developing? I definitely want to know.”

In her interview, Mrs. Trinity shared:

Well, I think it would be good to know the basics of what qualifies as homeless. What is the definition [of homeless school-age children]? There never seems to be a clear-cut definition. What does it mean for the district? What are the district responsibilities? I would like to learn that we can do “this or that” for homeless kids. Are there [local] services we can hook them up with? I’d like to know what else is out there. Are there any psychological services for them? What services they might qualify for and how to get them the services would be beneficial.

Ms. Chism said in her interview, “I would like to just know what really defines homelessness. If a student is defined as homeless, what are their needs? One of my homeless students was [staying] at a motel. She came to school filthy . . . with scabies and lice. She also had bed bugs in her bed. I just want to know what I should know so I can meet all of my homeless kids’ needs.”

Mrs. Lane shared in her interview, “I would like to know just what the difficulties might be, know where most of them [homeless students] are living. Like my girls, I knew they were staying around in motels, but I know there are shelters, too.”

One participant spoke about attending a workshop focused on students of poverty. However, the workshop did not specifically address working with and meeting the unique needs of homeless school-age children. For example, Mrs. Hempton stated in her interview, “I did attend a professional development that touched on different cultures and

ethnicities, and one on poverty, but nothing specifically focused on homeless students. . . . If there were professional development with a focus on homeless students in my classroom, I would attend.”

Another participant talked about reading a book on poverty: Mrs. Stanton in her interview stated:

I have read parts of a book on poverty after attending a training [on poverty]. I cried through parts as I realized I was not addressing these children’s needs, as I was ignorant to the homeless culture. I still feel inadequately informed and think I just go by gut and heart. I have learned there are different levels of homelessness, ranging from: living on the street, in a car, in shelters, churches for a night or two, motels, transitional housing on up to apartments where rent is paid, but not sure how that is handled.

Though teacher participants had never attended a specific professional development focused strictly on the homeless school-age culture, they demonstrated a level of unconscious awareness in meeting the children’s needs. All participants expressed a desire to learn more about the homeless school-age population. Knowledge gained would enable teachers to interact more appropriately and effectively meet the social-emotional needs of these children.

Data indicated that teacher participants recognized their lack of knowledge regarding the homeless school-age culture and had a strong desire to know about the culture. Data also demonstrated that such deficit of knowledge did not prevent participants from taking steps they deemed necessary to meet the homeless children’s needs as best they could with their limited knowledge and resources.

With respect to meeting the social-emotional needs of homeless students, teachers, data from interviews and questionnaires showed that seven of seven participants



would attend a professional development or training that specifically addressed the culture, legal definition, and the meeting the needs of homeless school-age children. Teacher participants stated that it would be useful information for them to have, and having that knowledge would benefit homeless students in their classroom. For example, Ms. Lipton shared in her interview, “I do not know what I can or should do for my homeless students.”

Though teacher participants demonstrated a level of unconscious awareness around this vulnerable population, participants demonstrated care and attachment to their homeless students through their desire to have a comprehensive understanding of the homeless school-age culture.

Teachers shared they cannot fully address homeless student’s unique needs when they do not know a student is homeless. The next section speaks to how teachers learn of a student’s homeless status and points out the need for a system that informs teachers in a timely manner of a student’s homelessness and how the teacher can most effectively meet the student’s needs.

**Informed of student homelessness.** Teachers need to be informed of a child’s homelessness in order to build relationships and interact effectively with homeless students. When asked how teachers learned of or identified homeless students in their class, participants’ responses showed an inconsistency within the school district regarding notification of a child’s homeless status. The next section speaks to how teachers learned of a student’s homelessness and points out the need for a system that informs teachers in a timely manner of a student’s homeless situation.

Data suggested that teacher participants addressed the homeless school-age students' affective needs as best they could with the level of knowledge they possessed regarding child homelessness. Through interview statements, questionnaire responses, and the researcher's observation notes, all teacher participants spoke of providing extra support for their homeless students and demonstrated that building caring, positive relationships with their homeless students is paramount in the social-emotional success of the child.

Three participants explained they have never been formally informed about a student being homeless. One participant shared she usually learns a student is homeless from the child, the parent, or other children. Another participant stated she uses student school cumulative files to gather background information and may find the child's living status among the papers.

Mrs. Hempton shared in her interview and questionnaire, "Unless I am notified by the office, I don't go looking for a child's home status. I might find out a kid is homeless from another kid. Sometimes a student makes friends with a homeless student and will tell me about it."

Mrs. Cadden stated in her questionnaire:

Unfortunately, I don't always get notification that the student is homeless. In fact, this year, I had a boy all year long [school started in August] and didn't realize he was homeless until February. In the past, the district office notified us that a student was considered homeless. However, that doesn't happen so much anymore. It's a shame really, because there are services that the school site can offer to help out even if it is just that the student can get an extra snack or eat breakfast in the room.

In her questionnaire, Mrs. Trinity said, “In the past I received an email from the district [district office] informing me that a student is officially identified as homeless; however, that practice of notification has ceased.”

Three teacher participants explained they have never been formally notified of a child’s homeless status at all. One of the teachers, Ms. Lipton, continued to say in both her interview and questionnaire that she was not familiar with any formal manner of learning a child is homeless: “I use our district student database and student cumulative files (a file that follows a student from school to school, school district to school district) to find out information about my students. Interestingly enough, I was recently informed by a social worker that one of my students fits within the homeless category.”

Mrs. Stanton responded in her questionnaire that she usually hears of a child’s homeless status from the student him or herself, classmates that have befriended the child, or the parent directly.

Both interview and questionnaire data showed the various means, inconsistent though they may be, in which teacher participants learned of or how they were informed about a child’s homeless status. The structure of data collection did not allow for observational data to be gathered in this area.

Teacher participants took time to help homeless students feel as “normal” as possible by fostering personal connections through building positive, caring relationships and attempting to meet homeless school-age students’ needs: basic needs, such as food, clothing and shelter, social-emotional, and academics. Learning homeless students’ interests worked to engage the homeless students in the learning. Participants stated they interacted with and advocated for their homeless students to the best of their ability,

limited though their knowledge may be of the homeless school-age culture. Without being informed a student is homeless, or with a minimal working knowledge of the homeless school-age culture, teachers were challenged to address and effectively meet the basic needs of these children as per the literature.

The next theme that emerged from coded data spoke to the teacher-homeless student relationship (see Table 3). Data revealed the steps taken by participants to develop positive, trusting relationships with homeless students in their classroom.

**Table 3. Building Strong Teacher-Homeless Student Relationships**

Codes	# References
Fostering Positive Connections	83
Social-emotional Status	67

### **Theme 2: Building Strong Teacher-Homeless Student Relationships**

In interviews and questionnaires, teacher participants shared that an atmosphere of caring and empathy where students were nurtured, respected, and felt safe on a daily basis was important. During classroom observations, the researcher noted multiple methods teacher participants implemented in building caring relationships with homeless students and demonstrated their attachment to the child.

Data showed participants' awareness to care for and attach with their homeless students when working to build positive connections with the children. Three teacher participants shared:

Mrs. Cadden responded in her questionnaire, "With my homeless students, I make an effort to develop a special connection with them by having them eat lunch with me

and a friend of their choice. This gives me the opportunity to learn more about them on a personal level. I take this information into consideration in all lessons and activities I plan for the class.” While observing in her classroom right before lunch, the researcher observed in a conversation between the teacher and a homeless student. When later asked about the conversation, Mrs. Cadden shared that the student was one of her homeless students to whom she had extended a lunch invitation the day before.

Mrs. Lipton stated in her interview, “As soon as I found out that [my female homeless student’s] situation was different, she was on my radar. That ‘homeless’ label made a little red flag go up in my head, so I’ve always kept my eye on her. I know she opened up to me because she feels comfortable with me and she knows I’m not going to judge her. She just feels comfortable.” Ms. Lipton did not expound on her meaning of “kept an eye on her” or “judge her.”

Ms. Chism stated in her interview, “I am especially aware of the way I phrase my words when talking to my homeless students. I know that from day to day, they can be in a hyper-sensitive state, and I don’t want to make their day any worse.”

During a math lesson, the researcher observed Mrs. Trinity pull a female homeless student aside to check the student’s progress on her assigned task. While sitting with the child, Mrs. Trinity was overheard to ask the student, “How was your trip to the local department store? Did you get that outfit there? [Teacher pointed to the one the student was wearing.] Did you get that sharpener there, too?” Then back to the task at hand, “Okay, did you get 73?”

Teacher participants demonstrated an atmosphere of care and attachment when building relationships with their homeless students.

*Fostering personal connections and positive relationships.* Data showed that teacher participants held building relationships with students as the highest priority for a successful educational experience. Participants were asked if they built relationships with their homeless students any differently than they did with their non-homeless students and if so, how and what were the differences. The extent to which care and empathy were revealed in data demonstrated multiple steps participants took to meet the social-emotional needs of their homeless students and the importance of building meaningful, positive relationships with the children.

*Positive connections.* Data sources showed that all participants spoke about or demonstrated the importance of connecting to and building relationships with their homeless students. Teachers stated they built trusting, respectful relationships with their homeless students through developing positive connections with them. Through one-on-one conversations and taking a few minutes a day to ask personal questions, teacher participants described how they work to build positive connections and caring relationships with their homeless students.

Mrs. Trinity stated in her questionnaire, “I try to make connections with my homeless students. I make sure that they know I am here for them, and I care about them and their well-being.” During an observation, the researcher observed Mrs. Trinity direct specific praise to a homeless female student: “I need to check your work. . . . I love your beautiful work, great job.” With her homeless male student, Mrs. Trinity asked him, “How are your eyes? Did you see the eye doctor? When will your glasses come in?” The student replied he did not know, and Mrs. Trinity responded with, “I will ask your mom when I see her again.” The student smiled up at Mrs. Trinity.

Mrs. Lane shared in her interview, “Sometimes coming to school is the only consistent thing that [my homeless students] have in their lives, so the more connections I can make with them, [I am able] to find out what they’re interested in and connect on that level.”

During a classroom visit, the researcher observed Mrs. Lane smiling and laughing with one of her homeless students; they high-fived when the conversation ended. Mrs. Lane was also observed meeting one-on-one with the other homeless student; their heads leaned towards each other in a quiet conversation. The two were making eye contact, and their body language appeared comfortable and relaxed. Mrs. Lane was heard thanking the student for making time to meet with her.

Later in the same visit during a writing lesson, the researcher observed Mrs. Lane met one-on-one with another homeless student. The teacher was overheard quietly asking if the child understood the directions, the expectations, and if he needed any clarification. The teacher was wearing a microphone around her neck, and the student had an earpiece as the student is hearing impaired.

During another visit to Mrs. Lane’s classroom, the researcher observed a one-on-one meeting between Mrs. Lane and one of her homeless students. Mrs. Lane was observed to be checking on the student’s progress regarding a science activity. The researcher overheard Mrs. Lane asking him to explain his work and complimented his progress. Mrs. Lane shared in her interview, “I provide [homeless students] with additional resources such as books, whiteboards, and makers so that they can study at home.”

Mrs. Lane wrote in her questionnaire, “I believe that my homeless students and I have good relationships. They know that I care about them.” Mrs. Lane did not clarify “how” the homeless students know she cares about them.

Mrs. Hempton stated in her interview, “[My homeless students’] situation is a really private, sensitive issue. So I make a connection with that kid, and let them know that they can talk to me, but it doesn’t need to be made public.”

In her questionnaire, Ms. Lipton described how she builds caring, respectful relationships, “Building positive, caring relationships with my students is important to me. I accomplish this by taking a few minutes out of every day to engage each student, especially my homeless students, in a way that allows me to . . . learn more about their personal lives.” Ms. Lipton added, “In the same way I strive to know and establish respect with all my students, [with my homeless students] I make a concentrated effort to unobtrusively check in with their situation to make sure they are safe, warm, shown respect, and fed outside of school hours.” Ms. Lipton stated in her interview, “With my homeless students in particular, I just make an extra effort with them. I keep an “eye” on them and look for any subtle changes in their behavior, like a change in their mood, interaction with the other kids . . . things like that.”

When asked about building relationships with her homeless students, Mrs. Cadden responded in her questionnaire: “My students and I build positive classroom relationships, the kind I expect in my classroom.” In her interview, Mrs. Cadden gives the example of building relationships with her homeless students: “I invite [my homeless] kids to eat lunch with me and a friend in my room or help out for 5-10 minutes after school.”



In her interview, Ms. Chism shared:

One of my little homeless girls likes to hold hands all the time. Or she likes to run up and give [me] hugs. And so I think for her, just [saying] the little, “oh good job,” it means a lot more to her [than to some of my other students]. And so I do that with her because I know she needs . . . the hugs and to hold my hand all the time. She is often seeking attention. . . I don’t do that with all my students.

The researcher observed Ms. Chism engage with her homeless students. She crouched down and faced each student at eye level and engaged in a quiet conversation. Though the words could not be heard, body language of each student indicated a positive exchange as the students both smiled and nodded during the conversation. The teacher’s hand placed on one child’s shoulder indicated the interactions were positive. Additionally, Ms. Chism was observed involving one of her homeless students assisting her in handing out materials to classmates for a special writing assignment to be presented to the principal.

During a visit to Mrs. Stanton’s classroom, the researcher observed her subtly pull one of her homeless students aside, kneel to her eye level, and quietly talk with the child. Mrs. Stanton later shared that she noticed the child was unnaturally quiet after recess and appeared to have a “long face.” Mrs. Stanton explained the child is rarely so quiet unless there is a problem. The teacher wanted to address the problem before the student went back to work.

In her questionnaire, Mrs. Stanton shared, “This year I have noticed my homeless students are extremely below grade level [academically]. So, I make sure I pull them [into small groups or one-on-one] as often as I can to provide extra learning and support. I am also realistic about homework. I celebrate when it comes back and don’t worry

about it if it doesn't." Mrs. Stanton shared in her interview, "When I know right away [my homeless students] had a tough morning at home, either fighting with their parents or siblings, or being on their own and having to get to school by themselves, or when they walk in 20 minutes or an hour late, because they didn't get a ride to school and they walked to school, I really try to make sure that I give them a good morning hug."

Later in her interview, Mrs. Stanton shared a story that demonstrates the long-term impact of developing attachments and caring about a homeless student:

I had this one homeless girl in my class some years ago, who was just a hot mess, and we connected. I took her out for lunch one day, then to a movie. Afterwards, we went to one of those teaching stores. We bought teaching books and things. She was very bright. Right before her high school graduation, she came back and volunteered in my room. She invited me to her graduation, went on to college in Brooklyn, got a scholarship, and then she said to me when she came back for a visit, "I remember you took me shopping. I knew then that you cared about me."

Mrs. Stanton takes that extra step to give her homeless students a connection that teaches them kindness and respect that they can use in their every day lives.

One participant mentioned the importance of building a strong, positive relationship with the homeless students' parents and how she reaches out to the parents in an effort to connect and build a positive relationship with them. Mrs. Trinity said:

I try hard to build a relationship with the parents [of my homeless students] so that regardless of where they [the family] go, they understand they are entitled to [have their child] bussed back here. So, if I have that relationship with [the parent], hopefully they'll stay here [rather than] go to another school district. Part of the work . . . is making sure the parents know that this is the best place [for their child] to be.

Teacher participants demonstrated building positive and respectful relationships was important in helping homeless children experience success in their educational

career. Through multiple strategies, participants showed care and attachment for their homeless students by developing trusting, meaningful relationships and positive connections.

***Trust and respect.*** Data showed how teacher participants interacted and built relationships with homeless students within the frame of identifying homeless students' needs.

When asked about building relationships with homeless students in their classrooms, data showed all participants stated they do not approach developing the teacher-student relationship with their homeless students any differently than they do with their non-homeless students. Teacher participants stated they do not want to draw attention to a student's homeless status, and, therefore, do not overtly treat homeless students differently. However, data revealed that participants, unknowingly, did take extra steps and time to connect with and build trusting relationships with their homeless students. Participants did share it was important for them to take extra care to build trusting relationships with their homeless students.

Data from interviews, questionnaires, and observations revealed how teacher participants interacted and built trusting relationships with their homeless students. Mrs. Trinity stated in her interview, "I try to make sure that the [homeless students] aren't [treated] differently in class because nobody else needs to know their situation. It's not helping [the homeless student] to be treated differently. I work to build trusting relationships with my homeless students and their parents. It's important to me they know I am here for them." Mrs. Trinity demonstrated the development of attachment to

her homeless student through understanding the child's situation (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

In her interview, Mrs. Stanton said, "Sometimes these children come to me with lots of baggage and are not as open and trusting, so I need to really let them know I respect and care for them." Mrs. Stanton showed she was aware her homeless student may not be at a point of comfort or trust, thus Mrs. Stanton intentionally worked to build a caring, trusting relationship with the student (J. Watson, 2010).

Mrs. Hempton shared in her interview:

I don't single out my students and identify them as homeless in the first place. I don't want to single out my students unless there's a need. In other words, I want them to feel as "normal" and as part of the regular class environment. I want them to feel that way as much as possible, so if they are not having issues, and I am not hearing things [about a student being homeless], or they're not coming to me, or the parent hasn't notified me, I don't have any reason to wonder about that kid. I don't go out of my way to look at my student list of 34 kids and already start to identify who's homeless and who's not. But at the same time, I work to build a trust between the homeless student and me so they feel safe with me and in the classroom.

However, later in the same interview, Mrs. Hempton contradicts herself when she stated that she takes time to make a connection with a student when she learns the student is homeless. Mrs. Hempton stated she tells the student they can talk to her about it (their situation) if they would like.

During a classroom observation, the researcher observed Mrs. Hempton speak with each of her homeless students in a confidential manner. Though words were not heard, head nodding and a slight smile on the part of the students indicated the interaction was positive.

Mrs. Hempton's actions with her homeless students demonstrated an unconscious awareness in meeting the needs of her homeless students. Though she did not intentionally treat her homeless students any differently than her non-homeless students, her actions told another story. In fact, Mrs. Hempton did treat her homeless students differently, slight though it may have been. Simply by taking additional time to build a personal connection with her homeless students and letting them know she is available to them whenever there is a need, Mrs. Hempton did treat her homeless students differently, even if it is unintentional.

Ms. Chism stated in her questionnaire, "Other than providing additional resources, I treat my homeless students the same as the rest of my students." During a classroom visit, the researcher observed Ms. Chism pull one of her homeless students aside and engage in a quiet conversation. When asked what the exchange was about, Ms. Chism shared that she usually "checks-in" with this particular homeless student as the child is struggling with her current situation.

Like Mrs. Hempton, Ms. Chism says she does not treat her homeless students differently than her non-homeless students. And like Mrs. Hempton, Ms. Chism's actions in the classroom demonstrated that she does treat her homeless students differently than her non-homeless students, even if it is a slight difference.

Two of seven participants shared that when they did learn of a student's homeless status, they kept an "eye" on the homeless student "by watching them a little more closely . . . . If at all possible [Mrs. Trinity explained in her interview], I make every attempt to establish a relationship with the parent/parents, too."

Mrs. Trinity gave a more detailed explanation in her interview of her relationship building practices with homeless students. She also stressed the importance of connecting and building a relationship with the parent if at all possible:

In some ways, the answer [building relationships with my homeless students] is no different than [building relationships] with anybody else, and in other ways it's very different. And I don't know that it's so much in the classroom as it is caring about the kids and the watching them closely . . . the extra support outside of the classroom and the relationships [I] try to build with the parents of these children. That's a huge key, the parents; and trying to understand their situation and how to help in their situation and not push [the parents] away, or put more on them that is already obviously on them. You know, it's huge . . . . Nobody wants to be homeless. Nobody wants their child to be homeless.

Data does support participants in their statements of building trust with their homeless students (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Bergman, 2006; J. Watson, 2010). However, triangulated data does not support all teacher participants' statements of *I don't treat my homeless students any differently than my non-homeless students*. Though teacher participants believed their interactions with all their students were the same, observations and interviews revealed that participants instinctively took extra steps to meet or *check-in* with their homeless students, thus building caring, trusting relationships and providing support to their homeless students as they saw fit.

**Social-emotional status.** Triangulated data suggested teacher participants perceived meeting social-emotional needs of homeless children to be as important as meeting the child's basic and academic needs.

In her questionnaire, Mrs. Stanton described how she works to meet homeless students' social-emotional needs:

I try hard to provide each child, especially my homeless students, with what they need to succeed, socially and academically. We are accepting of each other and care about each other. I definitely need my homeless students to know they are loved and safe at [our school], and make sure I check in with all students who need more from me. Again, I specifically double check with my homeless kids to make sure they're doing okay.

The researcher observed Mrs. Stanton's homeless female student leave a small group of students with whom she was working and sit at a single-desk seat placed slightly away from the other double-desk seating structure. When asked about this physical set up in the classroom, Mrs. Stanton said, "This particular student has two seats, giving her the opportunity to manage her own behavior. One seat is at a double-desk with a seat next to another student. The single desk is for the child to access when she feels the need to be separate from the other students in order to be successful completing the assigned task."

Mrs. Lane shared in her interview:

One of my homeless boys has a few behavioral skills that he is working on. He is also absent and/or tardy a lot. I always try to work with him in a respectful manner. I allow him to journal or draw pictures for his dad when he is feeling sad. I also encourage him and redirect him to encourage positive behavior before I have to correct negative behavior. I use a lot of praise with this particular student. I also contact mom with positive messages often.

All participants stated they have strategies to "check-in" with their students to gauge their emotional status. Two of seven spoke specifically about "checking in" with their homeless students:

Mrs. Lane shared in her questionnaire, “I closely check my homeless kids, because I know they are going through tough times and I want their experience in class to be positive.” The teacher did not clarify the meaning of “check.”

Ms. Lipton stated in her interview, “In the same way I strive to know and establish respect with other students, I make a concentrated effort to unobtrusively check-in with my homeless kids’ situation to make sure they are safe, warm, shown respect, and fed outside of school hours.”

Through one-on-one conversations, the development of personal connections, participants built trusting, positive relationships with their homeless students demonstrating care and attachment toward their homeless students.

Though teacher participants stated they had no formal training regarding advocating for homeless students, data demonstrated that participants possessed a level of unconscious awareness of the homeless students’ needs that led them to advocate to a degree for homeless student needs (Table 4). Teacher participants stated they interacted with and advocated for their homeless students to the best of their ability, limited though their knowledge may be of the homeless school-age culture. The next theme speaks to advocacy and meeting homeless students’ basic needs.

**Table 4. Advocating for Homeless Students and Meeting Basic Needs**

Codes	# References
Advocacy	56
Basic Needs	41
Food and Clothing	20



### **Theme 3: Advocating for Homeless Students to Meet Basic Needs**

The desire to advocate for their homeless students is a thread that appeared prominently in teacher participant data. When asked how they advocated for their homeless students, teacher participants responded with a mix of a desire to advocate for their homeless students, along with acknowledging a lack of knowing how or to whom they could advocate. Though advocating for homeless students was not observed in the classroom, interview and questionnaire data demonstrated teacher participants did advocate for homeless students, regardless of a lack of cultural competence. The following data demonstrate how participants attempted to advocate for their homeless students.

Two of seven teacher participants stated in their interview and indicated in their questionnaire they did not know how to advocate for their homeless students but would definitely like to know how to do so:

Mrs. Cadden said in her interview, “To be honest, I don’t know what steps to take to advocate for them. It’s only from my mentor that I know there are people at the district office to contact. I start with my school counselor and hope that she can point me in the right direction.”

Ms. Lipton responded in her interview with, “One time when I was a substitute I was told there were a lot of homeless kids in this particular school. I was baffled! I thought to myself, “Okay, what does that mean? So what do I do with that information?” I had no idea what to do.” In her questionnaire, Ms. Lipton stated, “Other than to provide them with a safe place to explore and learn, and to ensure that they are at least having a

recess snack and a lunch provided by the cafeteria, I do not know what else I can or should do for my homeless students.”

Four of seven participants shared steps they deemed as appropriate to advocate for their homeless students. The following quotes are in response to the question, “How do you advocate for your homeless students?”

In her interview, Mrs. Lane said:

I am an advocate for my homeless students because I look out for their best interests, and if they need anything, I either get it for them or direct their parents where to go to get it. For instance, I know a lot of kids need glasses, and there is a program where they can get free glasses, so I make sure the family gets connected. If I don't know exactly where to direct parents to get services, I ask someone that might have the answer and share with the parent.

Mrs. Stanton responded in her interview, “I look to see what [my homeless students] need like clothing, jackets, or food. I make sure that I put their names in for [Christmas] baskets and food and the extras, and things like that. I also ask myself if they would benefit from counseling and, if so, how do they qualify for services.”

One way Mrs. Trinity advocated for her homeless students was by connecting with the office manager. She shared in her interview, “When she [the office manager] can, she can get anything for any of these families and she does. Every Christmas we give her money, or we take kids and we shop for them, or she shops. . . . I just give her money cause she's so much better at shopping than I am.”

Similarly, Ms. Chism shared in her interview, “I put my homeless students' names on the list to receive Thanksgiving dinner and Christmas dinner.”

**Meeting basic needs.** Teacher participants stated that caring and learning about homeless students' needs is paramount in the educational success of the homeless child. They recognized the importance of a child's basic needs being met prior to the child being able to learn. Participants talked about how their homeless students sometimes came to school hungry or are in need of appropriate clothing. Data showed teacher participants possessed an unconscious awareness of what to do and how to work to meet the basic needs of food and clothing for homeless school-age children demonstrating care and attachment for the children.

**Food.** In this school district, five of nine Title 1 elementary schools participate in the Breakfast in the Classroom program. The other four Title 1 elementary school sites have breakfast available for purchase before school daily. Breakfast in the Classroom is a school-wide program funded by a Child Nutrition Grant where every child on campus receives a breakfast at the beginning of the school day. Data from interviews and questionnaires showed six of the seven participants spoke specifically about meeting the food or hunger needs of their homeless students.

Three teacher participants worked at a school site that participates in the Breakfast in the Classroom program. When asked in her interview about how she interacts with a hungry homeless student, Mrs. Lane replied: "Sometimes I can tell if my homeless students are hungry just by the look on their face. I always have an assortment of breakfast items in the cupboard . . . such as granola or fruit bars for such an occasion." She added, "Because we have the Breakfast in the Classroom program, I usually save a breakfast for my homeless students as they are frequently tardy."

Ms. Chism, who is at the same school site, shared in her interview, “Before breakfast in the classroom was implemented at our school, often, first thing in the morning my homeless kids would tell me they were hungry. . . . They came up to me and said, ‘I haven’t eaten yet. Can I go to the nurse?’ and would send them for a snack.” She added in her questionnaire, “Providing [homeless students] with food and breakfast makes a huge difference in their learning.” In her questionnaire, Ms. Chism responded, “Most of my homeless students need school supplies, clean clothes, and food. I keep snack food in my classroom in case a student is hungry any time during the day. Usually it’s my homeless students who ask for snacks.”

Mrs. Cadden replied in her interview: “I love that at my school every student is given a free breakfast and lunch. Because of this, I know my homeless students are going to have at least two square meals while at school.” She stated in her questionnaire, “I save extras breakfasts as snacks during the week. If anyone needs a snack to take home at the end of the day I allow that.”

Four teacher participants worked at sites that do not participate in the Breakfast in the Classroom program. Instead, their school sites have breakfast available for purchase before the school day begins. Questionnaire replies and interview responses revealed how teachers met such needs for their homeless students.

Mrs. Stanton shared in her questionnaire, “I save food for [my homeless students] up in my cabinet. I let them sit in the back of the room to have a quick breakfast then have a quick chat with them to find out what I can do for them or what they need to have to be successful in class that day. Then I give them a toothbrush and toothpaste and let them clean up before starting their learning day.”

Mrs. Trinity responded in her questionnaire, “The students who come to school hungry are usually the ones to speak up, and I usually have some kind of snack like Goldfish or pretzels. We don’t have breakfast in the classroom.”

Mrs. Hempton shared in her interview her first experience of a student coming to school hungry. She is also at a school site without the Breakfast in the Classroom program. She commented, “It actually never dawned on me that a kid would come to school hungry. It was so out of my vernacular as a parent myself the first time a kid told me he was hungry. I thought, ‘Really? No breakfast?’ I just didn’t get it. That was early on in my career; now my students know that if they ever are hungry, if they ever have an issue that they can come to me.”

Ms. Lipton revealed in her interview that the homeless boy in her class has come to school hungry a few times, “I just make sure I have extra snacks, healthy if at all possible, in the classroom at all times for just such an occasion. He knows he can come to me and let me know if he’s hungry. I try to remember every day before recess to ask him, ‘Hey, did you bring anything [a snack]?’”

**Clothing.** Participants shared that at times homeless students come to school in clothing that is too big for them or shoes that do not match. The following data from interviews and questionnaires are teacher participants’ responses to meeting clothing needs of homeless children in their class. Three teacher participants shared how they connected with the school office for personal items to give to homeless students whenever possible.

Mrs. Chism shared in her interview:

A few years ago, I had a little first grade homeless girl come to school wearing clothes and shoes that were for a woman. She came in, broke down and collapsed in my arms. I pulled her aside, got the students busy with work so they wouldn't focus on her. . . . I told her it would be okay and that "we'll get some different clothes from the nurse and everything will be fine." I think not making a big deal out of it, keeping it private and having a solution made things okay. Just those little reassurances help them [feel safe and cared for]. The little girl was good for the rest of the day. We got clothes that fit but couldn't find shoes, so she and I spent recess and lunch together.

In her interview, Mrs. Lane shared a story about a homeless first grade student she had a few years ago: "The little girl came to school all sleepy and with her hair all messed up. Her clothes didn't match. I didn't know what to do." When asked what, if anything she was able to do, Mrs. Lane replied, "I sent her to the office in hopes they would be able to help her. Mrs. Lane did not expound on the experience further.

Mrs. Trinity spoke in her interview about what she did to support her homeless students regarding meeting basic needs: "I don't coddle anybody, but if a kid needs something, like shoes or . . . whatever, let's go. We're going to the office at recess. Let's get them something. There are usually items in the office."

Mrs. Stanton stated in her questionnaire, "Shopping at a local department store for their 'extras' also lets them know how much I love and care about them." Mrs. Stanton described 'extras' as clothing, personal items, and school supplies her homeless students may need. This is something the teacher participant chooses to do on her own for the homeless students in her class to help them feel "normal" or more like the other students in the class. Mrs. Stanton, like other teachers, pays for such "extras" out of her own pocket.

In addition, Mrs. Stanton shared in her interview:

I make sure that they have what they need at school. For instance, the other day, my little [homeless] guy came to school without a shoe. He only had one shoe. And it wasn't his shoe. So we got a voucher . . . measured his foot, and went over to [a local shoe] store and got him some shoes and things. A few days later, the shoes were gone. His big brother had the shoes. Those are the things that frustrate me so much.

In this instance, the Mrs. Stanton shared she was able to get a purchase voucher from the school office to purchase the shoes for the student, and the office clerk was able to make the purchase.

All participants shared they were not certain how to specifically respond to or what they should do to meet the basic needs of homeless students. Yet, data revealed participants followed their instincts or unconscious awareness of the situation and did what they could to help their homeless students feel “normal” and a part of the class. Once aware of a student’s homeless status, participants said they engaged in relationship building by providing the student with resources necessary to be successful in school. Homeless students in the classroom got a bit of “extra” support from the teachers, be it time, attention, school supplies, or personal items when appropriate.

Data from interviews, questionnaires, and observations showed how teacher participants interacted and built relationships with their homeless students with respect to identifying homeless school-age children’s needs. Literature on Care and Attachment theories support the interactions participants implemented when connecting with homeless students in a personal manner and providing a means for food and or clothing support (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; M. Watson & Ecken, 2003).

Interestingly enough, some teachers were not aware their engagement with their homeless students was different than with their non-homeless students. Triangulated data supported that all participants took steps to build caring, trusting, respectful relationships with their homeless students and created attachments that provided the children with a positive adult connection outside of the child's immediate family.

### **Summary**

Key findings in data demonstrated that care and attachment were prevalent in all the themes that emerged from the data. Data revealed that teacher participants did not possess an educated competence of the homeless school-age culture. However, the lack of such competence did not prevent participants from instinctively advocating for their homeless students, adjusting or modifying social-emotional expectations, and acknowledging a need for formal training when working to meet the needs of homeless students in the classroom.

Prominently shown throughout data was the need for educational leaders to provide elementary teachers with explicit training to gain best teaching practices when educating homeless school-age children. Such training is needed to inform teachers of available resources they may access when advocating for homeless students, and how to effectively meet the unique needs of homeless students in the classroom. Data also showed what participants did to build relationships with homeless students in the classroom and how they interacted with the students.

Implications for policy, leadership, and future research on the topic of building relationships and meeting the unique educational needs of homeless school-age children are addressed in the next chapter.



## **Chapter Five: Discussions**

### **Summary of Dissertation**

Chapter 5 offers a discussion of findings of data and suggestions for practice, policy, and future research with a focus on leadership.

### **Statement of Problem**

Research shows the number of homeless school-age children (ages 5 years to 11 years or Kindergarten through fifth grade) is staggering, and yet, child homelessness continues to increase annually (Bassuk et al., 2011). Studies show the lack of cultural competence regarding the education of homeless school-age child on the part of the classroom teacher continues to persist. Unfortunately, teachers' lack of informed awareness can lead to insensitivity to the daily struggles homeless children face; thereby, increasing the difficulties the children may encounter within the classroom setting (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Continued on-going education of the child homeless culture is needed for the classroom teacher. Such continuous training will help to alleviate the negative impact of homelessness on children's educational experience, Teachers need to comprehend the multiple hazards associated with child homelessness that put children at social-emotional risk; teachers need to understand the struggles and trauma homeless school-age children experience on a daily basis. This information enables teachers to take appropriate steps toward build caring, trusting relationships with their homeless students. They create meaningful attachments that studies show has a lasting, positive impact on the homeless child's life (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Grant et al. 2008; Guarino & Bassuk, 2010; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Gaining cultural awareness and recognizing the unique social-emotional needs of homeless school-age children has the potential to move teachers toward effectively addressing and meeting such unique needs.

### **Review of Purpose and Research Questions**

Due to intimate exposure to the homeless school-age population, the researcher chose the topic of teacher-homeless student relationship to investigate. The purpose of the study was to closely examine how teachers interacted and built relationships with their homeless students. The overarching question asked, *How do elementary school teachers approach meeting the unique needs of homeless students?* The sub-questions developed to further assist in the focus of this qualitative methods inquiry were:

- What relationship building practices do teachers engage in with their homeless students?
- How do elementary school teachers interact with their homeless students?
- How do elementary school teachers build relationships with their homeless students?

### **Overview of Significant Findings**

Data revealed three prominent themes that impact the teacher-homeless student relationship: Cultural Competence, Building Positive Social-Emotional Relationships, and Advocating for Homeless Students to Meet Basic Needs. These findings are significant as they confirm the fact the teaching profession is entrenched in relationships characterized by teachers caring for and being attached to their students. To build interpersonal relationships with homeless students, the literature on Care and Attachment

theories and best teaching practices regarding homeless students states teachers need to care about and be attached to their students. Data showed that teachers built caring, trusting relationships with their homeless students, even while working from a deficiency of formal training regarding the homeless school-age culture and meeting the child's unique needs.

Participants shared anecdotes, experiences, steps taken to provide homeless students with food and clothing; teachers were observed in quiet one-on-one conversations with their homeless students where body language depicted the exchange to be positive, friendly, and comfortable. Body language such as eye contact, smiles, an adult hand on a child's arm and the child smiles not pulling away were indicators the interactions were friendly and welcomed on the part of both individuals (Amos, 2015; Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Bretherton, 1992; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Noddings, 2007).

Based on the findings cited in Chapter 4, implications in Chapter 5 are tied back to the theoretical frameworks of Care and Attachment theories; the literature presented in Chapter 2; and the researcher's interpretation of the data. The sub-questions of *what* and *how* teachers met the needs of homeless students, and the overarching research question—*How do elementary school teachers approach meeting the unique needs of homeless students*—are answered throughout each theme.

Sub-questions 1-3:

- What relationship building practices do teachers engage in with their homeless students?
- How do elementary school teachers interact with their homeless students?

- How do elementary school teachers build relationships with their homeless students?

In Chapter 4, data showed that teachers in this study were frustrated at their lack of formal, specific knowledge and training regarding cultural competence of the homeless school-age culture.

### **Theme 1: Cultural Awareness**

Literature stated that teachers should have an awareness of childhood homelessness and a working comprehension of the homeless school-age culture. Such level of awareness allows the teacher to meet the unique educational needs of the homeless child in the classroom (Grant et al., 2008; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008). Limited personal exposure and inadequate formal training of childhood homelessness puts classroom teachers at a disadvantage when recognizing the unique social-emotional needs of the children (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008; Reyhner et al., 2011). Research demonstrated that teachers in this study do not have the knowledge or training literature deems necessary to meet such unique needs. However, the lack of exposure or cultural comprehension did not prevent teachers from attempting to meet the special social-emotional needs of homeless children in the classroom.

Teacher participants shared frustration at not having been offered training that would allow them to successfully meet the social-emotional of their homeless children. Participants shared irritation for not knowing explicitly how to effectively and accurately meet the particular social-emotional educational needs of these children.

Literature supports the need for teacher education to shift to a format of formal training that includes specifically addressing the topic of homeless school-age children's social-emotional competence (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

**Professional development.** Teacher participants shared they did not possess comprehensive information about the child homeless culture, information that would assist them in effectively meeting the unique needs of homeless school-age children. Participants in the study spoke of the need for specific, formal training and education about the homeless school-age culture. Not knowing what they *should* or *could* do to efficiently support homeless students in the classroom, teachers expressed a desire to learn the legal definition of child homelessness. Teachers proposed that such knowledge would be helpful when addressing specific actions they could take to appropriately meet the unique needs of homeless children.

A questionnaire, interview, and observations provided evidence of participants' eagerness to offer effective, high quality education for their homeless school-age children. Literature supports this finding stating when teachers are aware of the child homeless culture, they are better equipped to effectively meet the educational needs of these children (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Pellino, 2013; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008; Stronge & Hudson, 1999; Swick, 2004).

Data in this study provide evidence for education administrators to move forward in researching or designing professional developments that provide support, information, and strategies on effective and best teaching practices for homeless school-age children. Education administrators should then offer such information available in teacher trainings.

**Learning of a child's homeless status.** The study revealed that teacher notification of a child's homeless status was inconsistent within the school district. This is important to recognize as not having accurate knowledge of a child's homeless status can hinder a teacher's ability to provide appropriate, effective, and timely assistance (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Learning a child's homeless status appeared prominent in data. Miller and Bourgeois (2013) reminds us that without proper identification of a child's homeless status, the classroom teacher is at a disadvantage to take appropriate steps in building a caring and supportive relationship with the child. Murphy and Tobin (2011) found that when the classroom teacher was unaware of a child's homeless situation, there was the potential for a display of insensitivity on the part of the classroom teacher; thus, increasing the homeless child's chances for failure in school. Studies on attachment theory show that when a homeless child has a meaningful attachment with the classroom teacher, the student is motivated to take social risks and work to develop meaning connections with their peers (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Thus, without meaningful attachments made with the classroom teachers, the homeless child is at significant risk for low self-esteem and school failure. Care theory states that caring about another individual, such as a homeless student, speaks to meeting the needs of the whole child (Bergman, 2004).

Literature about child homeless identification exists for educators to follow. The McKinney-Vento Act (2001) speaks to meeting the educational needs of homeless children. Title 1, Part A lays out the responsibilities of educators in supporting this population in meeting all their educational needs (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; NCHE, 2013;

USDOE, 2004). The word *educators* is not defined, and, unfortunately, Title 1, Part A or any other part of the McKinney-Vento Act does not specify who within the school site is responsible for identifying homeless children and notifying the classroom teacher. As well, McKinney-Vento does not specify who specifically is responsible for meeting the child's social-emotional or basic needs.

The McKinney-Vento Act states that it is the school district's responsibility to identify children who are experiencing homeless (Bowman et al., 2012; USDOE, 2004). School district personnel are then responsible to notify the classroom teacher with the child's homelessness. Along with wanting to possess a comprehensive understanding of the homeless school-age culture, teacher participants expressed a desire to have a clear definition of child homelessness.

## **Theme 2: Building Strong Teacher-Homeless Student Relationships**

The theme of fostering personal connections is an element of care and empathy. This theme directly demonstrates how teacher participants care for their homeless students and develop meaningful attachments with them; thus displaying the main principles of Care and Attachment Theories. Literature connected with Care Theory states that a strong, caring relationship with a classroom teacher contributes to the successful social-emotional growth of homeless students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Pianta et al., 2003). The literature associated with Attachment Theory in the context of the teacher-student relationship is described as a relationship where the teacher is warm and supportive, provides the student with a sense of connectedness and security, which encourages the child to develop confidence to explore new and different situations in and

outside the classroom (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999; Murray & Greenberg, 2000; M. Watson & Ecken, 2003).

Teachers demonstrated caring and attachment for homeless students by going above and beyond their descriptive job obligations and built significant, meaningful relationships with their homeless students. The interactions of the teachers supported the literature that states the homeless student has a more successful and healthier educational experience when a positive relationship exists with the classroom teacher (Mizerek & Hinz, 2004). The relationship developed between the teacher and homeless student provided the child with, perhaps, the only positive child-adult relationship the child may have aside from the relationship with a parent (Mizerek & Hinz, 2004; Moore, 2013).

Teacher participants demonstrated care and attachment characteristics through building trusting connections, recognizing a need for personal items and asking others to help in providing such items. Teachers made a point to have healthy breakfast and snack food in the classroom for a homeless child who came to school hungry. These actions demonstrated that teacher participants engaged in relationship building practices, interaction and implementation of relationship building practices with their homeless students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003).

**Fostering personal connections and positive relationships.** The theme of fostering personal connections was seen in three approaches: developing and building positive connections, building trust and respect with homeless students, and addressing the homeless child's social-emotional needs. Data showed that teachers in the study exhibited characteristics of Care Theory through the development of positive, caring



relationships between the teacher, and the homeless child (Jennings & Greenberg, 2008; Soto, 2005).

Attachment Theory was also presented characterized by the trust built between teacher and homeless student, along with the responsiveness and involvement the teacher provided the child (Murray & Greenberg, 2000). Teachers in the study exhibited sensitivity toward their homeless students social-emotional development and growth through several means. Teachers invited students to have lunch with them, asked about the child in a personal context, and took time to learn the child's personal interests. These findings are significant, as the interactions and relationship building techniques demonstrated characteristics of an effective teacher, and specific behaviors on the part of both teacher and student, characteristics of both care and attachment theories were present (Bretherton, 1992; Grant et al., 2008). Meeting with the homeless child in a one-on-one format, and taking time to learn about and get to know the child gives the teacher the opportunity to gauge the child's emotional state and monitor it appropriately (Grant et al., 2008).

**Trust and respect and social-emotional status.** Data showed it was important to participants to build trust and respect with their homeless students. Being aware of the child's sensitive and tenuous circumstances, teachers shared it was important to the teachers their homeless students knew they could confide in and rely upon their classroom teacher. These data connected to the literature about the significance of trusting relationships teachers built with their homeless students and continued to nurture as considerable to their success (Grant et al., 2008; Popp et al., 2009).

Teachers recognized the possible fragile social-emotional state in which homeless students arrived at school. Data showed participants took steps to meet the delicate social-emotional needs of the student once informed of the child's homeless status. One participant provided two classroom seats for one of her homeless students, which allowed the child freedom to move from a single-desk setting, where she worked by herself, to a group setting allowing her to work with her peers when she felt capable. This action on the part of the teacher provided the homeless child the opportunity to work in the setting which best met her needs at the time: if the child was not in an emotional state to work with others, she knew she could work elsewhere to complete her work. This type of arrangement on the teacher's part is supported in the literature under care and attachment theories (Guarino & Bassuk, 2010, Noddings, 2003).

### **Theme 3: Advocating for Homeless Students and Meeting Basic Needs**

Literature stated that it is important for the teacher of homeless students to be aware of a child's homeless status (Hunt & Swiggum, 2007; Pellino, 2013; Swick, 2004). Unfortunately, learning of a child's homeless status did not present itself in a uniformed manner for participants. Therefore, advocating for their homeless school-age student proved to be challenging for teachers.

Advocacy manifested itself as a theme in data through codes distinguished by teachers wanting to meet the homeless students' basic needs and provide extra support whenever possible. Teachers in this study sought whatever assistance and support they believed necessary and beneficial for the children to be successful social-emotionally. These actions support the literature of both Care and Attachment Theories (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Bretherton & Munholland, 1999; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Without any formal training or direction, teachers in the study advocated and provided extra support for their homeless students to the best of their ability. Participants worked to meet the child's basic needs of food and clothing. Miller (2012) reminds us that students who have eaten quality food are more apt to learn and participate in class, as opposed to the student who came to school hungry. Teachers made certain to have nutritious snacks and/or breakfast food in the classroom to give their homeless students when they came to school hungry. Participants provided extra support for their homeless students through assisting the children in obtaining appropriate clothing; clothing that fit rather than clothes too big, too small, or tattered.

Teachers in the study asked office managers for food and clothing assistance, spent their own money on food and clothing, and even asked their own family members to help provide their homeless students with necessary basic needs. This is relevant as literature shows that nutritious food can be difficult for homeless school-age children to access (Aratani, 2009; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Popp et al., 2009), and that prior to any appropriate social interaction or learning to take place, basic human needs must be met (McLeod, 2007).

Participants demonstrated attachment and care with homeless students by providing healthy food and appropriately sized clothing (Murray & Greenberg, 2000; M. Watson & Ecken, 2003). Teachers recognized and addressed homeless students' social-emotional needs to the best of their limited ability. Advocating as they did, teachers exhibited characteristics of Care theory and Attachment theory (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Bergman, 2004; Guarino & Bassuk, 2010; Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

## Limitations

**Generalizability.** Generalizability was not the goal of this investigation. Rather the intent of this study was to encapsulate the experiences of the participants and add to the existing literature regarding homeless school-age students and their educational and relational needs.

The need for research of the homeless school-age culture is significant as the only literature on this age group consists of families living in shelters and the shelter experience, not the classroom impact on the child. This study is limited in range as the examination of the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of participants was a small representation of the total number of elementary teachers in the school district. Out of the 50 invitations sent to participate in the study, only 7 teachers accepted. Inviting teachers from all elementary schools in the district rather than only Title 1 elementary teachers would broaden the potential participant pool. However, the focus of this study was the relationship between the teacher and the homeless students in the classroom. If teachers without homeless students accepted the invitation to participate, an additional screening process would have to be developed and implemented to determine appropriate participant qualifications. That being said, a survey sent to all Transitional Kindergarten through fifth grade teachers in the district asking if they had a homeless student (or homeless students) in their classroom would help narrow the potential participant pool to candidates appropriate for the study.

Another limitation to this study is the fact it is a single-case study. Widening the research parameters to include multiple of TK-5 school districts would move the study from single-case to multiple-case study. Increase in the potential participant pool would

allow for a broader evidence base to be gathered and a comparison between school districts possible, adding another dimension to data results. A multiple-case study would require an expansion of the data collection window.

Additionally, including input from homeless students, and perhaps their parents, regarding the child's educational experiences, would enrich data giving another perspective of the problem from which to view results. However, including 5- to 11-year-olds in such research is delicate at best

**Positionality.** As a district Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) Teacher Instructional Coach, this researcher visits and observes in classrooms regularly throughout the school district. Though such presence in the classroom is not foreign, sometimes it is viewed as punitive. Teacher participants were reassured that presences in the classroom was strictly for research purposes, that it was purely to collect data for this study and was in no way connected with any position in the school district.

In addition to being district PAR Teacher Coach, this researcher has previously held the position of District Homeless Liaison. Recognizing the potential for biasness, it was important to remain objective and focused on the research questions throughout this study. To aid in accomplishing this, the researcher routinely implemented member checking while triangulating data to help minimize biases and strengthen positionality (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2010).

### **Implications of the Study**

**Implications for Policy.** The McKinney-Vento Act (2001) needs to include policy protocol outlining appropriate language and methods in identifying homeless school-age students. Federal policy needs to require school districts provide continued

training and professional development for administrators, teachers, staff members, and employees on how to effectively work with this unique population.

Recently the McKinney-Vento Act was amended to include language that specifies that the school district Homeless Liaison receive training for their position. This step has the potential to provide classroom teachers working with homeless students support not previously offered. To enhance the Homeless Liaison's training, a stipulation describing specific strategies to inform teachers of a child's homeless status needs to be put in place. Such a strategy would provide consistency within the practice of providing support for teachers.

A closer look at legislation protecting the privacy and safety for foster children needs be closely examined and used as a model to provide similar protection for homeless children. Confidentiality on the part of all educators in contact or working with homeless children needs to be written into the McKinney-Vento Act. Homeless children's personal status information is just as sacred as that of foster children's.

**Implications for Leadership.** As research shows, there are 2.5 million children in America identified as homeless. Recognizing that not all homeless children are likely identified, there is a strong possibility the number of homeless children is higher. With this in mind, the question begs, *“Why are there no mandated education, training, or professional developments in place for teachers and other educators to work effectively with homeless children?”*

Considering all the Title I and McKinney-Vento funding made available to school districts with low socio-economic and low academic performance, one would presume such funding would be available to support teacher education about homeless children.

As recently as 2014, a revision to the structure of federal funds received by school districts was modified. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the Local Control Accountability Plan were set in place to allow school districts to disperse federal funds as best fits their population needs. Again the question, *if funding restrictions have been modified, why are funds not being used to properly educate teachers working with homeless students in the same manner as Special Education and English Learners?*

Professional development and on-going training for all classroom teachers needs to be set in place. This training must include opportunities for teachers to examine their own beliefs toward the homeless population in a safe, non-judgmental environment. The training must include specific information about the child homeless culture, strategies, and tools for teachers and other educators working directly or indirectly with the population. Additionally, individuals within the education community whose positions put them in continuous contact with homeless students need to receive similar training. It would allow such persons to understand their impact on homeless students and how best to positively connect with the students.

In addition, education and information about the child homelessness and culture needs to be included in university teaching programs. Educating incoming teachers about the child homeless population is just as important as the education regarding Special Education and English Learner students. As stated in the literature, teachers need to have a sensitivity of the homeless school-age culture. This responsiveness provides teachers the opportunity to create a positive foundation for the educational experience for their homeless students.

School district administrators need to revisit the McKinney-Vento Act and review their responsibility to the education of homeless children (2001). Administrators need to fully understand and be familiar with the educational responsibilities of school districts toward homeless school-age children. Items administrators should to look at and consider:

- Best strategies to identify homeless school-age children throughout the school district
- Establish protocol to inform appropriate education staff and personnel of a child's homeless status, keeping information confidential at the same time
- Provide professional development and on-going training for all teachers on the appropriate education of homeless school-age children
- How to work effectively with the child homeless population
- Provide on-going information and training to all staff and individuals involved in the daily education of homeless school-age children— individuals such as school counselors and psychologists, office personnel, cafeteria and daily supervision staff, district bus drivers
- Establish appropriate transportation protocol between school districts following the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act when a homeless school-age child lives or moves out of school of origin walking distance or out of the school district boundaries.

**Implications for Future Research.** The need to meet the social-emotional needs of the homeless school-age population is significant. It was prominently revealed in data that the teachers in the study lacked an awareness of the importance of building caring,



positive relationships with homeless students, though instinctively each teacher worked toward developing such relationships with their homeless students. Data and literature both spoke to the need for on-going, comprehensive training for teachers and other education personnel in meeting such needs. Diving deeper into what elementary classroom teachers know about child homelessness, how they develop relationships with their homeless students, and how they interact with their homeless student would be quite informative when designing professional developments and trainings for current teachers. Such research would also inform curriculum for pre-service or incoming teachers.

Future study on this topic needs to consider several aspects. Regarding policy, a look at changes to policy about educating all school personnel needs to be examined. Implementation of policy and accountability for implementation of policy also need to be examined.

Expanding the research focus from the teacher-homeless student relationship to include the relationship of the homeless child with office staff, bus drivers, and other educational personnel would be of great benefit. An expanded knowledge of the child homeless culture provides administrators with information from which to build professional developments for teachers to appropriately meet the social-emotional needs of homeless school-age children.

An additional consideration for research is to broaden the single case study to a multiple-case study. Implementing a multiple-case study will offer educational leaders a wider view of the homeless school-age culture and the teacher-homeless student phenomenon. Access to a bevy of data and information affords educational leaders the

opportunity to provide teachers and staff with on-going comprehensive training that would assist them in better serving homeless children's overall well-being.

A final consideration for future research on this topic is a longitudinal, in-depth study of the social-emotional impact of homelessness on school-age children. What practices do teachers use to meet the children's social-emotional needs? What strategies and practices are best to implement to meet the social-emotional needs of homeless children? Such a study would provide a greater understanding of how children experience homelessness and their state of being when entering the classroom. It would provide empirical data for future use by other researchers, including individuals or organizations within a community who work to provide homeless school-age children with social-emotional support and food, shelter, and safe surroundings.

Again, such understanding would work to provide a positive, safe, and secure educational and childhood experience for the homeless school-age child.

## **Conclusion**

Homeless children are among the most vulnerable and unseen populations in the United States. In the span of one year, the number of identified homeless children increased by one million. In the 2012-2013 school year, over 1.5 million homeless children were enrolled in American schools. In the 2013-2014 school year, the number of homeless children enrolled in American schools was 2.5 million. The numbers of homeless children in America continue to increase every year. Literature regarding homeless students speaks of the personal and educational trauma homeless children face on a daily basis. It also speaks to the need for teachers to have competence of the child homeless culture when working to meet the unique social-emotional needs of homeless

children. Though data showed teachers lacked an educated cultural competence, it also demonstrated teacher participants possessed an unconscious awareness in meeting the needs of homeless children. Participants reflected on their teaching practice in an effort to meet the homeless child's unique educational needs; adjusted and modified expectations for homeless students when appropriate; advocated to meet the children's basic needs, as well as sought community resources for the child and family when appropriate.

The purpose of this study was to examine how elementary teachers built relationships and interacted with homeless students in the classroom. Care and Attachment Theories, along with literature about homeless students in the classroom, were used as the framework from which codes were derived and organized into themes. Investigative instruments were developed in the Appreciative Inquiry format. This qualitative study sought to learn how teachers met the unique educational needs of homeless school-age children.

Data from this study can be used to move in-depth research regarding the social-emotional education of homeless school-age children further. As one participant stated, "No one wants to be homeless."

## **Appendix A: Email Invitation to Participate in Qualitative Study**

Dear School District Teacher,

I am a student in the Joint Doctoral Program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD). I am conducting a research study that seeks to explore the relationship building approaches teachers implement in meeting the social-emotional and academic needs of homeless students in their classroom. You are being contacted because you have been identified as having at least one homeless student in your class.

Through this research I hope to bring an awareness of the homeless culture to the classroom teacher; the need for teachers to have a working comprehension of the homeless culture, and the understanding of the need to meet the unique social-emotional and academic needs of homeless children. I hope to demonstrate a connection between the importance of the interactions of teachers with homeless students and the students' social-emotional development and academic outcome. I believe this study has the potential to positively affect educational practices to improve the experiences and outcomes for homeless students and for teachers.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will observe twice in your classroom, ask you to complete an informal questionnaire, and ask you to participate in a one-on-one 45-minute interview. Classroom observations will occur twice during the research period for approximately one hour in length or the length of the lesson. The informal questionnaire will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. You will have the choice of either an electronic or a hard copy document of the questionnaire. The one-on-one interview will be a conversational style and last approximately 45 minutes. You may choose to have the interview take place at your school site or off campus-which ever makes you most comfortable. During the interview, you will be asked about your first-hand experience with homeless students, your relationship building and interactions with your homeless students, and your reflective practice regarding your teaching of homeless students. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped and transcribed. You will be provided a copy of the transcript to check and clarify the information.

Your confidentiality will be respected throughout this process. Pseudonyms for schools, teachers, and students will be used to minimize the risk of identification. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview and to eliminate any comments or references you feel may be identifiable or have negative connotations. Your responses will not be linked to your name or address.

As a thank you for participating in my study, I would like to offer you a gift card to a local retailer in the amount of \$20. I hope you will agree to participate in this research project. If you would like to participate, please reply to this email by February 9, 2015. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

Valerie Lynch  
Doctoral Candidate  
CSU San Marcos and UC San Diego  
lynch@cajonvalley.net, 619-840-6223

## **Appendix B: District Teacher Informed Consent**

Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

### **Consent to Act as a Research Subject**

#### **How Elementary Teachers Build Relationships and Interaction with Homeless Students in the Classroom**

##### **Invitation to Participate**

Valerie Lynch, a student in the joint doctoral program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD), is conducting a study that seeks to explore how elementary school teachers build relationships and interact with homeless students in meeting the social-emotional and academic needs of homeless students in their classroom. You are being contacted because you have been identified as a teacher who has at least one homeless student in your classroom.

The objective of this study is to explore how elementary school teachers build relationships and interact with homeless students in the classroom.

##### **Requirements of Participation**

You will be asked to allow me to observe twice in your classroom, complete an informal questionnaire, and participate in a one-on-one interview. The interview will have a conversational style and will last approximately 45- 60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked about your first-hand experience with homeless students, your relationship building approach with your homeless students, and your reflective practice regarding your teaching of homeless students. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped and transcribed. You will be provided with a transcript of the interview for checking and clarifying purposes.

##### **Risks and Inconveniences**

There are minimal risks to participating in this study. These include:

1. Loss of personal time necessary to participate in the informal questionnaire, one-on-one interview, and review of the interview transcripts.
2. Psychological risk is possible as interview questions may elicit painful memories related to educational experiences.
3. Potential breach of confidentiality.

##### **Safeguards**

1. Interview sessions will be set for 45 minutes, restricted to 60 minutes.
2. Your interview data will be kept confidential, available only to the researcher for analysis purposes. Only the researcher and transcriber will listen to and transcribe the information you provide. The audiotapes will be destroyed following final analysis, no later than July 2015.

3. Pseudonyms for schools, teachers, and students will be used to minimize the risk of identification.
4. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview and to eliminate any comments or references you feel may be identifiable or have negative connotations. Your responses will not be linked to your name or address.
5. During the interview, if you are experiencing a negative emotional response, the interview will be stopped and you will be directed to appropriate resources.
6. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time. If the length of the interview becomes inconvenient, you may stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide not to participate.

### **Benefits**

Although your participation will yield minimal or no direct benefits to you, I believe this study has the potential to positively affect educational practices to improve teacher interaction and relationship building with homeless students and positive educational outcomes for homeless students. Participants may receive a copy of the study upon request.

### **Questions/Contact Information**

This study has been approved by the California State University San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about the study, you may direct those to the researcher, Valerie Lynch, [lynch@cajonvalley.net](mailto:lynch@cajonvalley.net) 619-840-6223, or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Suzanne Moineau, [smoineau@csusm.edu](mailto:smoineau@csusm.edu), 858-212-8116. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB at 760-750-4029. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

- I agree to participate in this research study.
- I agree to have the interview audio taped.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

This document has been approved by  
the Institutional Review Board at  
California State University San Marcos  
**Expiration Date: February 5, 2016**

## Appendix C: Questionnaire

- How long have you been teaching?
- What grade level do you teach? What grade levels have you taught?
- Describe the relationship skills you implement in your classroom. How do you build relationships in your students?
- How do you build relationships with your homeless students?
- What do you view as important with respect to empathy and caring for students?
- What evidence do you have of your relationship skills with students?
- What evidence do you have of your relationship skills with your homeless students?
- What reflective practices do you engage in with respect to your teaching?
- What role do the needs of your students play in influencing your relational practices? Please describe.
- Describe your familiarity with or understanding of the homeless culture.
- How do you identify homeless students in your classroom?
- Have you had homeless students in previous classes? If so, how many homeless students have you taught?
- Describe what you know regarding the needs of your homeless students.
- Describe your first experience with a homeless student in your classroom.



## Appendix D: Observation Instrument

Teacher Behaviors	Evidence
<p><b>Relationships Skills:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-caring, warmth/warm, emotionally supportive</li> <li>-respectful</li> <li>-authentic</li> <li>-sensitive</li> <li>-trusting, empathy, sympathy</li> <li>-nurturing</li> <li>-responsive to student needs</li> <li>-dependable</li> <li>-attentive</li> <li>-interested in child</li> <li>-consistency</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Positive Social Model:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-encouraging</li> <li>-trustworthy</li> <li>-respectful</li> <li>-culturally responsive</li> <li>-supportive of student autonomy</li> <li>-peer relationships</li> <li>-values students responses, input, opinions</li> <li>-ability to see different perspectives</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Positive Learning Environment/Classroom Management:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-caring, warm, nurturing</li> <li>-safe, reliable</li> <li>-sensitive to student needs</li> <li>-responsive to student needs</li> <li>-harmonious, fair</li> <li>-non-punitive</li> <li>-high learning expectations</li> <li>-offer choice</li> <li>-provide students with the opportunity to help each other</li> <li>-values student responses</li> <li>-dependable</li> <li>-attentive</li> <li>-ability to see different perspectives</li> </ul>	

## Appendix E: Interview Questions

- Has a homeless student in your class come to school hungry? If so, how did you find out about it? How did you handle it?
- What are the things that you value about yourself with respect to working with homeless students?
- What role do the social-emotional needs of your students play in influencing your instructional design? Please define.
- Describe how caring for your students impacts your teaching practice; your relationship building practices.
- Describe a time you believed you did or said something that positively affected a homeless student socially or emotionally.
- Has your homeless student(s) ever shared feelings and/or experiences with you? Please describe.
- What about your teaching practice makes you successful with homeless students?
- Tell me a story about a time you felt your teaching was meaningful for your homeless student(s).
- Have you ever participated in a professional development about working with homeless students in the classroom? If so, what knowledge did you gain? Have you had the opportunity to utilize the knowledge to the benefit of a homeless student in your classroom?
- Describe how you are an advocate for homeless student(s).

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