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# Do I Belong? Factors Contributing To The Development Of Social Belonging Of Children Who Are Homeless In Southeastern United States Shelters: A Multi-Case Study

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DO I BELONG? FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF
SOCIAL BELONGING OF CHILDREN WHO ARE HOMELESS IN
SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES SHELTERS:
A MULTI-CASE STUDY

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

This qualitative multiple case study explored the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless age's five to seven. Previous empirical research has shown the importance of children who are homeless developing belonging in the classroom and other research has shown the negative effects when belonging does not develop. However, little research has focused on what contributes or impedes children's ability to develop belonging in the classroom while they are homeless. My study filled a gap in the literature by identifying these contributing factors. This study was conducted in two family shelters and two schools in the southeastern United States. The participants included five mother/child pairs, five teachers associated with each child, and two counselors (one from each school).

The data analysis was conducted on two levels, within-case and across cases. With-in case analysis was conducted for three cases (a) children; (b) mothers; and (c) teachers and counselors. Themes and subthemes emerged for each of the cases. Cross-case analysis revealed both similarities and differences between the cases. The themes that emerged from all three cases included (a) acceptance; (b) stability; (c) interaction; (d)

support; (e) deterrents to social belonging; and (f) understanding of social belonging. Narrative descriptions of the overarching themes created a picture of the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless.

Through this qualitative study, school administrators, teachers, counselors, and mothers may have a better understanding of what aids and what impedes the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless, especially children age's five to seven. This study provided teachers and counselors with practical ways to increase the likelihood of belonging developing in the classroom. Lessons learned can be applied by teachers to any classroom but especially to classrooms with children who are homeless.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family especially my husband, Greg, and my boys,

Drake and Brice. It is also dedicated to the children from the shelters who allowed me

into their lives, may you always feel you 'belong' in my heart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

**Overview**

Studies show that in the mid-1970's most homeless were older single males who

had either physical or mental illnesses and/or were substance abusers (Choi & Snyder,

1999). These demographics are changing as reported in 2010 by the U. S. Department of

Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The number of homeless persons in families

has increased by 20 percent from 2007 to 2010, and families currently represent a much

larger share of the total sheltered population than ever before. The proportion of homeless

people who are using emergency shelter and transitional housing as part of a family has

increased from 30 percent to 35 percent during this same period. According to the

National Coalition for the Homeless (2009b) the fastest growing population among the

homeless, at 42 percent, is families with children and that these families remain in the

shelter an average of 70 days, longer than single men or woman. It can be a long hard

road to residential stability and community connection for families who have experienced

homelessness. The National Center of Family Homelessness (2011) also reported that

42% of the homeless population is less than 6 years of age. One in every 50 children in

the United States experiences homelessness.

According to the US Conference of Mayors (2004), the request for emergency

shelter for homeless families with children increased in 21 (78%) of the 27 surveyed

cities. It is estimated that 1.35 million  to 1.5 million children from 600 thousand families

in the United States will experience homelessness today and another 3.8 million will live

doubled-up, overcrowded, or in otherwise precarious housing situations (Bassuk, 2010;

The Institute for Children and Poverty, 2009; HUD, 2009). The National Center on

Family Homelessness (2011) defined the most common family that is homeless as a

single mother in her mid-to-late 20s with one to three children often younger than 6 years

old.

**Statement of the Problem**

In a recent study conducted by the National Center on Family Homelessness

(2011) the state in which this dissertation research was conducted ranked 50th, the worst

state in the nation for child homelessness. This ranking was based on a number of factors:

(1) the number of children who were homeless (adjusted for population size) (2) the

child's well-being (3) the risk of homelessness and (4) state policies for helping the

children and families who are homeless. For further clarification regarding this 50th state

it was reported that 28,081 children were considered homeless. A child's well-being was

determined by examination of the health problems of children below the poverty line,

child food security, and educational proficiency in math and reading for children in

grades 4th and 8th. The risk of homelessness for children was determined by examining

the state's foreclosure rate, minimum wage, households paying more than 50% of income

on rent, female headed household, children without insurance, and children living in

poverty which was reported at 24%. The state policy ranking was also determined by the

number of housing units available for homeless families, the absence of a state housing

trust fund, the lack of a 10-year state planning effort that focuses on children and

families, and an overall ranking of inadequate for state planning. This state's ranking was 32nd in 2006 but dropped to 50th in 2010. This drop can be attributed to the drastic reduction in rank for both child's well-being, ranked 19 in 2006 but dropping to 50 in 2010, and state policies, ranked 19 in 2006 but dropping to 44 in 2010.

To illustrate the growth in homelessness for children, in 1989 the U.S. Department of Education reported an estimated 272,000 homeless school-age children, about one-third of whom did not attend school on a regular basis during the academic year. In 2010 the U.S. Department of Education estimated that there were over 800,000 homeless students. These statistics showed that between 1989 and 2010 the estimated number of school-age children who are homeless increased by over 528,000 children.

Research studies concerning the educational issues facing children who are homeless indicated that these children are more likely to have developmental delays, struggle academically resulting in educational underachievement, experience increased depression and anxiety, and display behavioral difficulties (Bassuk & Rosengurg, 1990; Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; Buckner, Bassuk, Weinreb, & Brooks, 1999; Kurtz, Jarvis & Kurtz,1991; McChesney, 1993; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011; Obradovic et al., 2009; Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Rescoria, Parker, & Stolley, 1991; Ziesemer, Marcoux, & Marwell, 1995). Other research studies have been conducted to explore the barriers to school enrollment faced by children who are homeless (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006; Stronge, 1993). These barriers included issues such as residency, transportation to school, guardianship, and lack of medical records. Studies also investigated the psychological consequences of homelessness for children

(Attles, 1997; Rosenman & Stein, 1990; Stronge, 1993; The Institute for Children and Poverty, 2008; Yu, North, LaVesser, Osburne, & Spitznagel, 2008).

In a study conducted by Rescoria et al. (1991) it became apparent the urgent need for children who are homeless to be enrolled in a stable and supportive school program. Results from the study showed that providing a high quality early childhood program for youngsters who are living in shelters helps to counteract some of the negative effects of homelessness. Similarly, the study by Ziesemer, et al., (1995), found that homelessness not only led to a potential risk for children to succeed in school but also in their community and social environments.

According to Anooshian (2000) and Timberlake, Sabatino and Anlua (1994), success in school for children who are homeless seems to also be connected with successful social interactions like attending class and interacting with teachers and peers. When children are able to navigate the school environment they establish a sense of accomplishment, self-esteem, and belonging. "Friendships contribute to children's successful adjustment to school, and this impact, in turn, may have a long-term effect on drop-out and delinquency rates" (Ramsey, 1991, p. 4).

The goal of developing social belonging is to aid children in finding their own ways to interact comfortably with their peers and for the children to feel good about themselves while they are developing this belonging (Ramsey, 1991). Research studies devoted to social issues facing children in general revealed that several factors are needed for children to develop into well-adjusted children who are able to function in a social society. These factors included a stable environment, security, emotionally positive time spent together as a family, involvement with a caring community, and access to basic

needs (Garbarino, 1992). Most if not all of these factors are unattainable for children who are homeless (Johnson, 1992; Kozol, 2006; Rafferty, Shinn, & Weitzman, 2004; Tower, 1992).

Research specifically related to social belonging in the school environment was conducted by Bulkeley and Fabian (2006) and Sedgwick and Young (2008). They found that factors such as creating caring communities, providing peer mentoring, and teachers getting to know students all led to a sense of belonging and well-being among the students (Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Sedgwick & Yonge, 2008). According to Capps (2003) "A student's sense of belonging in the school or classroom is defined and dependent upon how he or she is personally accepted, respected, and supported by his or her peers, teachers, and others" (p. 3). Research showed that children who are homeless struggle with feelings of rejecting and lack of acceptance by their teachers and peers (Gibbs, 2004; Menke, 2000; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008; Walsh, 1992; Whitman et al., 1990). Also in a study by Goodenow (1993) it was determined that tardiness and lack of school attendance had negative correlations to a student's sense of belonging.

Research studies reveal that social belonging is important for the development of well-adjusted children. Research studies have also been conducted that explore the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging for children who have homes. This is important because research indicates that peer relationships for housed children is an important aspect in the school environment and has implications for children's academic and social adjustment (Buhs, 2005; Chen et al, 2010; Flook, Repetti, & Ullman, 2005). However up to date there are no known studies that focus on factors contributing to the social belonging in the school environment of children who are

homeless. "Research on the lived social and educational experience of homeless children and how these experiences intersect, is almost nonexistent" (Shankar-Brown, 2008, p. 5). Ample research is available that suggests many children who are homeless struggle with academic achievement and inappropriate behaviors which are areas that have been found to be important for the development of social belonging. For this reason, this study investigated which factors contributed and which impeded the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to explore the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the school environment for elementary school-aged children who are homeless living in two shelters in a southeastern metropolitan city, as viewed by the children, their parents, their teachers, and counselors. Social belonging in the school environment was defined as the feeling of acceptance, ability to fit in, and to feel like we have a place in the world (Maslow, 1970).

## Research Questions

### Central Research Question

The central research question guiding this study was, what factors may contribute to the development of social belonging in the school environment for elementary children, ages 5 to 7, who are homeless?

**Sub-questions**

In addition to the central question these additional questions refine the central

question by providing greater specificity to the questions in the study (Creswell, 2008).

1. How do the children, parents, teachers, and counselors, in general, define
   social belonging?

2. What do the parents, teachers, and counselors think social belonging in the
   school environment means to children?

3. What strategies do parents, teachers, and counselors engage in to encourage
   the development of social belonging in the school environment?

4. What factors impede the development of social belonging in the school
   environment?

5.  What repercussions are evident for children who are homeless when there is a
   lack of development of social belonging in the school environment?

6. What specific activities do children engage in during the school day that
   encourages the development of social belonging?

## Theoretical Framework

As researchers we all have our own set of beliefs about the world around us. It is

through this theoretical lens that our research is guided and influenced. It is what helps us

to develop our research question and collect and analyze that data. This research was

grounded in Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological

systems theory. Both theorists address issues that relate to those researched in this study

of the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the school environment of children who are homeless.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is a theory that parallels many other theories in human developmental psychology. His theory is often represented in the shape of a pyramid with the largest and most basic needs located at the bottom. Maslow's theory suggests that basic needs must be met before individuals will desire higher level needs. It is at these higher levels that individuals encounter the need of social belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow's theory was incorporated into this study to help explore the hierarchy from children's basic needs to their ability to develop social belonging. According to Maslow, children who do not have adequate housing and don't feel safe cannot progress up his hierarchy to achieving the higher need of social belonging.

In bioecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979) used a multidimensional approach that emphasizes the interrelatedness of a human's behavior and their social environment and how that environment plays a vital role in a person's life. Bronfenbrenner believed that the development of children cannot be understood without exploring the social world surrounding the children and understanding that people are both shaped by and shape their own social context. Bronfenbrenner believed that humans function as "an active agent in, and on, its environment" (p.634). This theoretical framework allows for exploration of "how issues such as homelessness are expressions of, and responses, to ecological conditions" (Toro, Trickett, Wall, & Salem, 1991, p.1209). According to Bronfenbrenner, by observing both human behavior and a person's

social environment, a better picture can be drawn to understand factors that contribute to the development of social belonging.

Both Maslow's and Bronfenbrenner's theories are discussed in further detail in chapter two. Relationships between their theories and this study are discussed including Maslow's emphasis on meeting needs in succession and Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on environmental influences. Because this study explored how the living situation of children who are homeless impacted their development of social belonging both positively and negatively, Maslow's and Bronfenbrenner's theories were utilized.

## Assumptions

Qualitative research attempts to seek out and explore the lived experiences of real people in their natural surroundings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following assumptions formed the basis for data collection, analysis, and reports of the data in the study:

1. It was assumed that the participants would willingly participate in this research.

2. The information obtained from the participants in this study represented their "truth space" (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003, p. 369).

3. Participants answered questions truthfully.

4. Participants acted naturally during observations.

5.  I withheld any biases during time spent with the participants.

**Limitations of the Study**

Any study is not void of limitations. This discussion of the limitations is an effort to shed light on the boundaries encountered that restricted research.

1. By nature, qualitative research, is subjective because researchers must rely on subjective judgments of participants to shed light on the subject being studied (Hatch, 2002). The participants in this study were asked to share their thoughts and perspectives on factors that help and/or impede the development of social belonging. The researcher was the instrument of data collection and analysis, which could have resulted in potential bias in the interpretation of the results.

2. The population in the study, families living in a shelter in a southeastern metropolitan city, may have been unwilling to discuss matters they felt should be kept private. This could have lead to gaps in the information obtained from these participants.

3. As part of qualitative inquiry, the interviewing process involves finding out what other people are thinking (Patton, 1990). It is important to ask the right questions in order to make appropriate conclusions. Some questions pertinent to this study may have been overlooked and may have resulted in not covering all possible participant experiences.

4. Two shelters were originally selected for this study but it was not possible to recruit participants from one of these shelters. Participants were then recruited from an additional shelter. The two shelters providing participants are more similar than the shelter that did not participate. Due to less diversity of

participants, additional experiences with the phenomenon under study may not have been explored in the study.

5. Because of the nature of qualitative research, this study was limited to two shelters and two schools in the Southeastern United States, therefore the results of this study may not be generalizable; however, its findings may be found to be transferable to similar settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Significance of the Study**

Research suggests that the sense of belonging in the school environment is an important factor for children. Battistich and Hom (1997) indicated that students who had a sense of belonging in school were more motivated academically, absent less often, and engaged in less disruptive behaviors than students without this sense of belonging.

In two different studies conducted by Graham-Bermann, Coupet, Egler, Mattis, and Banyard (1996) and Rescola, Parker, and Stolley (1991) it was found that children who are homeless often do not  receive daily social support and this lack of support results in behavior problems, aggression, and acting out. What is not known is how this lack of social support is displayed in the school environment in relation to social belonging.

The majority of existing research on children who are homeless was conducted during the 1980s and 1990s. This research partially filled this gap because it provided current data on the issues associated with children who are homeless.  Additionally, little captures the current issues that children who are homeless face when investigating factors that contribute to a child's sense of social belonging in the school environment. This

study explored those factors thus adding to the literature concerning this social aspect of homelessness.

By exploring these factors; parents, teachers, counselors and other personnel who work with children who are homeless can better understand what social belonging means to these children and help in the development of their belonging in the school environment. The children can also benefit from this study by understanding how others in their life view the development of their social belonging in the classroom.

Even though homelessness is not a new concern, the significant increase in number of homeless families and children is a relatively new issue. Children who are homeless are forced to endure distressing experiences that affect them developmentally, academically, and socially (Ziesemer, Marcoux, & Marwell, 1995). This study attempted to contribute to the knowledge base by using a qualitative multi-case study approach to ensure a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless. With this understanding parents and school administrators including counselors and teachers can be better equipped to help children transition socially into the school environment.

## Definition of Terms

*Audit Trail:* An audit trail provides an account of the all research decisions and activities throughout a study. It is used to suggest a study's trustworthiness and represents a means of assuring quality in qualitative studies.

*Case:* For this study there were three separate cases. They included the children, the mothers, and the teachers and counselors. The cases were different from groups which are discussed below.

*Case Study:* Creswell (2007) defined case study as a specific tradition of qualitative study bounded by time and space and includes detailed, in-depth collections involving multiple sources of information rich in context. A case study examines a specific event, institution, person, or social group from a holistic view of the situation (Merriam, 1998).

*Family Emergency Shelter:* A designated facility in which intact homeless families reside is considered a family emergency shelter. Families may be headed by a single parents/guardians or two parents/guardians. The primary goals of this facility are to secure the immediate safety of homeless families by providing temporary shelter and basic resources such as food and clothes, and to assist homeless families make the transition to permanent housing (Shankar-Brown, 2008, p. 22).

*Gatekeeper:* The gatekeeper is an individual who provides access to a research site (Creswell, 2007). For this study, the gatekeepers were the principal and assistant principal.

*Group:* For this study, a group consisted of a child, the child's mother, the child's teacher and counselor. There were five groups represented in this study.

*Homeless Children and Youth:* According to The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act 2001:

> (An) Individual who lack(s) a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.
> The terms include: children and youth who are: sharing the housing of other
> persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; living in

motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative

adequate accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters;

abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement. Children and youth

who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not

designated for , or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for

human beings. Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces,

abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar

settings (Section 725. Definitions)

There are multiple other definitions that affect who are counted as homeless.

*Homeless Family:* A household that includes an adult 18 years of age or older and at

least one child, living without permanent shelter is considered a homeless family. (U. S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and

Development, 2009).

*Member Checking:* Member checking was a form of verification procedure in which the

participants review their interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the transcription

(Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

*Multiple Case Study:* This type of case study includes the study of several cases in which

detailed descriptions and themes are developed for each case. Then analysis is conducted

across the cases to compare themes of the cases.

*Private School:* For this study, a private school is described as a Christian based school

that requires a fee to attend. Students attend from areas outside the school district.

 *Qualitative Research:* Qualitative research is an inquiry approach for exploring and

understanding a central phenomenon through intense contact with participants or life

situations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This type of research aims at an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through studying a relatively small number of people or sites and presenting data from the participants' point of view (Hatch, 2002).

*Stress:* Stress was defined as "a dynamic, mutually reciprocal, bidirectional process between an individual and the environment that is appraised by the individual as taxing or exceeding one's resources and endangering one's well-being" (Menke, 2000, p.693).

*Social Belonging:* Ability to form enjoyable companionship with others and feel part of a group was the definition of social belonging. Also according to Maslow (1970) it is defined as the feeling of acceptance, ability to fit in, and to feel like we have a place in the world.

*Socialization:* Socialization involves the "self" merging with "others"" (Tatta, 1997, p.42). It is the process by which an individual is brought into and conditioned to belong to a particular group.

*Public School:* For this study, the public school is defined as a school located in the city limits of a large city which is open to the public for those living within the school district.

*Triangulation:* Triangulation involves the building of checks and balances into a design for corroboration of evidence through different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 1987).

*Well-being:* Because well-being is a subjective and value-based concept it had been defined in both broad and narrow terms. Seaberg (1990) gives his definition

> Providing food, clothing, and shelter; providing medical care; providing a non-abusive (physical, sexual, and emotional) family environment; providing for emotional nurturance and affection; providing for socialization to normative

behavior and the complimentary supervision needed to accomplish this; and

facilitating acquisition of formal education toward later self-efficiency (p.271)

**Organization of the Study**

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter includes the statement of

the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework,

assumptions, limitations of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms,

organization of the study and a summary. Chapter two provides a comprehensive review

of literature focusing on academic issues, daily struggles, and social aspects for children

who are homeless. Chapter three discusses qualitative research, multiple case study,

philosophical assumptions, site and participants, data collection, data analysis,

establishing, ethical considerations, the role of the researcher, and summary. Chapter four

details a within case description of each of the 17 participants and an analysis of the

interviews, observations, and documents which were used to identify themes that

emerged regarding factors contributing to the development of social belonging in the

classroom for children who are homeless. This chapter also contains a cross-case analysis

of the children, their parents, and teachers and counselors to detect similarities and

differences among the groups. Chapter five provides a summary of the study, a summary

of the findings in light of the research questions, implications for practice,

recommendations for further study, and a conclusion.

**Summary**

Chapter one has introduced the issue of homelessness and how homelessness is an increasing problem for families and especially children. Factors contributing to the development of social belonging for children with homes have been investigated and include a stable environment, security, emotionally positive time spent together as a family, involvement with a caring community, and access to basic needs. Little research has explored whether these same factors are necessary for the development of social belonging for children without homes. Also not explored in depth is how the presence or absence of these factors affects social belonging in the classroom for children without homes.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITURATURE

**Organization of Literature Review**

A comprehension review of the literature regarding factors contributing to the development of social belonging in the classroom for children ages 5 to 7 was completed using the following databases: Dissertation Abstracts International, Dissertations and Theses, the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Educator's Reference Complete, Social Services Abstracts, PsycINFO, the Academic Search Premier, Academic OneFile, and the World Wide Web. While searching the databases the following terms were used: "homelessness",  "homeless children", "homeless children + education", "homeless children + barriers",  "homeless children +  Maslow", "homeless children + Bronfenbrenner", "homeless children + belonging", "young children + belongingness", "young children + sense of belonging", "young children + bonding", "young children + attachment", "young children + developing belonging", "classroom belonging", and  "creating a sense of belonging in the classroom".

This review of literature begins with an overview of the importance of belonging for children. Then it continues by exploring the consequences of homelessness for children including academic issues and daily struggles. Finally it examines how the consequences of homelessness for children may impact the social aspects of a child's development thus impacting his or her sense of belonging. The chapter concludes with a

detailed explanation of Maslow's and Bronfenbrenner's theories and their connection to this study.

**Importance of Belonging for Children**

Before exploring the factors that contribute to social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless we must first define the meaning of social belonging, examine why social belonging in the classroom is important, and then explore how researchers believe social belonging develops. A summary of the empirical literature can be seen in table 1 below.

Osterman's (2000) review of educational literature found that social belonging brings to the surface other terms such as belongingness, acceptance, relatedness, sense of school or classroom membership, and sense of community. Goodenow and Grady (1993) defined social belonging as the ability to "feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others" (p.61). In a dissertation by Casillas (2010), discussed later, she defined belonging in the classroom as "close teacher-child relationship, positive peer relationships (i.e., peer acceptance), positive feelings about attitudes (i.e., school liking), lack of negative affects while in school (i.e., low levels of loneliness), and beliefs that peers are supporting and accepting" (p. 14).

So why do we even care about social belonging as it relates to the classroom? Baumeister and Leary (1995) conducted an extensive literature review to investigate if there was adequate empirical evidence to determine that the need to belong was a fundamental human motivation. Based on their review of over 300 citations they determined that the need to belong was linked to emotional patterns, cognitive processes,

behaviors, health, and well-being. Being accepted led to positive emotions, such as contentment, calm, elation, and happiness. Baumeister and Leary state, "human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quality of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (p. 497). They believe that relationships formed by the children fulfill a basic psychological need. An example of this is Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs that suggests that belonging needs of love, security, and trust, must be met before learning can occur. Following are additional studies that confirm Baumeister and Leary's findings concerning the importance of social belonging in the classroom.

In a study conducted by Battistich and Hom (1997) they "examined crossectional relationships between students' sense of the school community and the prevalence of problem behaviors among fifth and sixth grade students" (p.1997). Questionnaires were administered to 1434 students. Results indicated that students who had a sense of belonging in school were more motivated academically, absent less often, and engaged in less disruptive behaviors then students without this sense of belonging.

In Goodenow and Grady's (1993) study 301 junior high students were administered the Psychological Sense of School Membership assessment to determine their sense of belonging. The researchers found value of school work, expectancy, and persistence were all significantly correlated with the student's sense of belonging.

The Child Development Project (CDP) emerged after a group of researchers studied the need for student belongingness (Solomon et al., 1996). The longitudinal study was first conducted with approximately 300 children as they began Kindergarten. The second study included students in 24 different schools.  The purpose of the study was to

assess the effects of a program meant to enhance students' sense of community.  The outcome from both studies indicated that schools with CDP showed a higher positive relationship between sense of community and motivation.

In contrast, according to Baumeister and Leary (1995), when belonging needs are not met children felt isolated and lonely. Failure to establish a sense of belonging resulted feelings of rejected, exclusion, anxiety, depression, grief, and loneliness. Bronfenbrenner (1986) said, "To be alienated is to lack a sense of belonging, to feel cut off from family, friends, and school" (p.430). He also commented that feelings of alienation are not uncommon for children. Children often feel alienated from one of their microsystems (family, friends, or school), but feelings of alienation from several microsystems at the same time or consistently leads to more serious problems for children.

The purpose of a study conducted by O'Neil et al. (1997) was to examine to the extent to which social status in the classroom predicted academic achievement. The sample consisted of 345 children in Kindergarten through second grade. The student's sociometric status and school records were assessed. The results suggested that peer rejection assessed as early as Kindergarten and social rejection that is stable for 2 years were associated with deficits in work habits and academic achievement.

According to a study by Crick and Ladd (1993) children are typically selected by their peers based on other's assessments of a child's social competence. Their study consisted of 338 children in 3$^{rd}$ and 5$^{th}$ grade. Children in the study completed a sociometric questionnaire and three other instruments not specified. The purpose of the study was to assess the children's feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, social avoidance, and the attributions for social outcomes. The results of the study indicated that rejected

children, more than controversial or neglected children, reported significantly higher levels of social distress including loneliness. The rejected children also were more likely to blame their peers for their social difficulties explaining that it was due to the actions of others that they did not feel like they belonged.

With empirical data confirming the importance of social belonging for children and especially in the classroom, what does research say is the best ways to ensure children feel a sense of belonging in the classroom? In a dissertation conducted by Dathatri (2008) children from three different preschools were observed during times of structured and routine activities. Sample size was not given. The purpose of the study was to explore how children navigate the cultural context of the classroom through social negotiating and moral understanding in their interactions with peers. The results indicated that students must learn to adjust to the classroom culture and learn to engage with others in order to develop a sense of belonging. Findings suggest it is important that, "teachers talk with children about feelings, etiquette, sharing, appropriate behaviors, expectations, right and wrong, and the child must learn these social rules and develop effective strategies for engaging with others in order to successfully adjust to the classroom environment" (p.279).

The purpose of Divoll's (2010) dissertation was to "Identify and describe how elementary teachers make students feel known and respected by creating a relationship-driven classroom community" (p.7). The sample for this study consisted of 10 4th graders and their teacher. Data was collected through interviews, observations, questionnaires, and artifacts. Divoll found that in order to create classroom relationships that allow

students to feel known, teachers should maintain a calm demeanor, engage in a student-friendly teaching style, engage in teacher sharing, and learn about your students.

Casillas's (2010) dissertation focused on the importance of social belonging for Latino children. Her sample consisted of 280 Latino children in grades 3 and 5 and their teachers. Data was collected through questionnaire, sociometric data, and This Child's School Adjustment measure. Results from this study indicated that teacher-student relationships and peer perception was associated with school engagement.

Educational survey data from 6,883 students in the 6th grade and 6,868 students in the 8th grade was utilized for Ma's (2003) study. The purpose of the study was to "explain the differences among students and schools regarding students' sense of belonging to the school" (p.340). The dependant variable was the students' sense of belonging and the independent variables were classified into student and school characteristics. Results indicated that having friends in class, interacting with peers, participating in class activities, and obtaining good grades indicated a sense of belonging.

Morgan (2003) conducted a study to "examine the influences of classroom peer group acceptance and participation in friendship in elementary school children" (p.4). The participants consisted of 258 children in the 2nd grade and 182 children in the 5th grade. Each student answered questions from a peer acceptance measure, Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, and Psychological Sense of School Membership assessment. The statistically significant results included the association between group acceptance and self-concept, group acceptance and school belongingness, and friendship and school belongingness with regard to the second graders only.

**Table 1**

*Summary - Importance of Belonging for Children*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Basttistich and Hom (1997)** | -Questionnaires | 1434 fifth and sixth grade students | Examine crossectional relationships between students' sense of the school community and the prevalence of problem behaviors. | Students who had a sense of belonging in school were more motivated academically, absent less often, and engaged in less disruptive behaviors then students without this sense of belonging. |
| **Baumeister and Leary(1995)** | -Review of educational research | 300 citations | Investigate if there was adequate empirical evidence to determine that the need to belong was a fundamental human motivation. | Need to belong was linked to emotional patterns, cognitive processes, behaviors, health, and well-being. |
| **Casillas (2010)** | -Questionnaire -Sociometric questionnaires -This Child's School Adjustment measure | 280 Latino children in grades 3 and 5 and their teachers | Focused on the importance of social belonging for Latino children. | Teacher-student relationships and peer perception was associated with school engagement. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Crick and Ladd (1993)** | -Sociometric questionnaire -Three other instruments not specified. | 338 children in 3rd and 5th grade | Assess the children's feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, social avoidance, and the attributions for social outcomes. | Rejected children, more than controversial or neglected children, reported significantly higher levels of social distress including loneliness. |
| **Dathatri (2008)** | -Observation | Children from three different preschools (sample size not given) | Explore how children navigate the cultural context of the classroom through social negotiating and moral understanding in their interactions with peers. | Students must learn to adjust to the classroom culture and learn to engage with others in order to develop a sense of belonging. |
| **Divoll (2010)** | -Interviews -Observations -Questionnaires -Artifacts | Ten 4th graders Teacher | Identify and describe how elementary teachers make students feel known and respected by creating a relationship-driven classroom community. | In order to create classroom relationships, teachers are the biggest factor. |

| Goodenow and Grady (1993) | -Psychological Sense of School Membership assessment | 301 junior high students | Determine sense of belonging in the students. | The researchers found value of school work, expectancy, and persistence were all significantly correlated with the student's sense of belonging. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Ma (2003) | -Educational survey data | 6,883 students in the 6th grade and 6,868 students in the 8th grade | Explain the differences among students and schools regarding students' sense of belonging to the school. | Having friends in class, interacting with peers, participating in class activities, and obtaining good grades indicated a sense of belonging. |
| Morgan (2003) | -Peer acceptance measure -Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale - Psychological Sense of School Membership assessment | 258 children in the 2nd grade and 182 children in the 5th grade. | Examine the influences of Explore classroom peer group acceptance and participation in friendship in elementary school children | Association between group acceptance and self-concept, group acceptance and school belongingness, and friendship and school belongingness with regard to the second graders. |

| O'Neil (1997) | -Student's sociometric status<br>- School records | 345 children in Kindergarten through 2nd grade. | Examine to what extent social status in the classroom predicted academic achievement. | Peer rejection assessed as early as Kindergarten and social rejection that is stable for 2 years was associated with deficits in work habits and academic achievement. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Osterman (2000) | -Review of educational research | | Reviews research about the sense of acceptance within the school community. | Students' experiences of acceptance influences multiple dimensions of their behavior. |
| Solomon et al. (1996) | | Study One-300 children as they began Kindergarten through grade 6 Study two- students in 24 different schools. (sample size not given) | Assess the effects of a program meant to enhance students' sense of community. | Schools with CDP showed a higher positive relationship between sense of community and motivation. |

In summary, empirical studies substantiate that social belonging is important to many aspects of a child's life. Research also gives some indication of how to foster social belonging in the classroom. Several aspects indicate a gap in the literature. First is the lack of current data on the subject of social belonging. Many of the resources cited were studies conducted in the 1990's. Another gap in the literature is the lack of studies

focused on younger children. Only three of the cited studies mentioned working with children under the age of seven. Finally what is lacking in the data is research specific to children who are homeless. In a following section I will cite a few studies pertaining specifically to children who are homeless but a gap still exists.

## Consequences for Children in Homeless Situations

Children in homeless situations often times experience stresses that consequently affect both their academic achievement and their daily lives. Nunez (2010), the president of Institute for Children and Poverty and well known author on homeless issues stated, "For most children homelessness is not a brief or singular experience, but a period fraught with educational and emotional setbacks that can last for years" (p.95). Children who are homeless are more likely to deal with struggles related to academic advancement due to problems with educational placement and academic support; and they encounter more social-emotional issues due to their living situations (Stronge, 1993).

The Institute for Children and Poverty (2009) also reported that children who are homeless were nine times more likely to repeat a grade, four times more likely to drop out of school, and three times more likely to be placed in special education classes than their housed peers.

Besides the academic struggles children who are homeless face, they also encounter a plethora of daily stresses that can cause consequences for their social and emotional development. Often times children who are homeless experience stresses including family violence, death, imprisonment of a parent, parental substance abuse, physical or sexual abuse, residential instability, placement into foster care, and dangerous

environments (Buckner, Bassuk, Weinreb, & Brooks, 1999; Menke, 2000; Nunez, 2010). Due to these experiences children often exhibit more aggressive behaviors; this aggression often times leads to difficulties with developing peer relationships (Ladd & Burgess, 1999).

As mentioned earlier, mobility for children who are homeless is greatly increased and is another stress the children must endure. In a report from the Institute for Children and Poverty (2009) research concluded that "housing instability almost always results in educational disruptions for school-age children, and evidence suggests that housing instability and homelessness early in life (ages 0-5) creates potent and potentially long-lasting effects for young children" (p.2). These frequent moves are due in part to limits to length of shelter stays, searches for employment and housing, and escaping abusive families (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009a). Even when children were able to live in a shelter, this environment was not always comforting for the children (Bassuk & Gallagher, 1990). Often times another stress these children experience is the uncertainty of the school environment. Julianelle and Foscarinis (2003) believe, "When children and youth do not expect to remain in a school for an appreciable time, making friends or investing in schoolwork can seem like a pointless and painful endeavor" (p. 44).

Besides the stress of being homeless these children also have higher rates of emotional issues including clinical depression, anxiety, behavior problems, and lower self-esteem than the general population of children (Bassuk & Rosenberg, 1990; Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Rosenman & Stein, 1990). Nunez (2010) reported that "nearly half of all school-age children, and one in four under the age of five,

experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, or aggression after becoming homeless" (p. 100).

The everyday lives that these children experience make attending school and succeeding in school both academically and socially challenging (Stronge, 1993; Strong & Helm, 1991). The following sections examine closer the issues pertaining to these academic and social challenges.

**Academic Issues**

For children who are homeless academic development is jeopardized from the very beginning by the barriers of access placed on this population.  Once children who are homeless are enrolled in school they then have to deal with the barriers of success in the school environment. A summary of the empirical literature can be seen in table 2 below.

**Barriers and resolutions.** According to Stronge (1993), homelessness and traditional educational policies have combined to pose formidable barriers to the education of children who are homeless, consequently placing them among the most at risk of school failure, if not outright school exclusion. Stronge's study included the review of "policies and practices ascribed to traditional public schooling that may impede the provision of appropriate educational opportunities to homeless students" (p.340).  The methodology for this study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase "State education agency coordinators of homeless education were surveyed to elicit their perceptions regarding the severity of educational barriers related to access and success for

homeless students in their respective states" (p.345). The survey was sent out to the 50

states, Puerto Rico, U.S Virgin Islands, and District of Columbia. Forty-five of 53

surveys were returned. The survey was a Likert-type questionnaire that included 30 items

and two open-ended questions. In the second phase a case study was conducted in the

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) for an 8-month period regarding the provision of

educational services to homeless students in the district (sample size not given). The case

study was based on information from records maintained by the CPS. A repeated

measures analysis was used on the survey responses. Survey questions were divided into

two categories, those related to acquiring access into school and those dealing with

success once admitted. Results showed that barriers related to residency were

problematic. Most states required students to attend in their district of residence, but

homeless families moved frequently which made it difficult to convince school districts

that they were residence of that district.

　　Stronge and Helm (1991) conducted a study in which the purpose was to ascertain

the impact of selected problems, namely residency and guardianship requirements, on the

provision of educational opportunities to homeless children and youths. Specifically, the

study sought to identify existing legal entanglements, from both state and local policy

sources, that resulted in the denial of a free, appropriate public education of these

students. Data was collected from two primary sources: a statewide survey of homeless

education service providers (number of surveys unknown), and a review of applicable

case law. The reviews revealed eight such proceedings, five of which reported were

referenced in this research. Additionally, interviews were conducted with administrators

and teachers in 369 cities and 20 county seats. Descriptive statistics were used for

analysis. Results indicated that the primary, but not only, "barrier to educating children

of homeless families derives from state statutory residency requirements and the

difficulty of determining residency for homeless families who may move from one

temporary shelter or location to another" (p.215). Homeless families may move or be

moved frequently by the social services agency responsible for locating housing for them.

Once the families have left their previous permanent residence, they have difficulty

convincing local school districts that they are residents in the district where they may be

very temporarily living. At the same time, the districts in which the families previously

lived often refuse continued educational services to their children because they no longer

reside within the district. It was reported by the Nunez (2010) and the Institute for

Children and Poverty (2009) that 45% of children who are homeless to not attend school

regularly due to frequent moves and illness.

In a report by Mawhinney-Rhoads and Stahler (2006) they discussed that many

school districts did not consider living in a car or in temporary shelter as appropriate

proof of residency. In response to this barrier Congress passed The Stewart B. McKinney

Homeless Assistance Act (1987) and then The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless

Assistance Amendments Act (1990). These acts stated that students had the right to

remain in their school of origin or immediately enrolled in the school of current

residence.

Guardianship was another barrier identified by Stronge's (1993) research. In most

states a legal guardian was required to enroll a child in school, however many children

who were homeless lived with family members who were not their guardians or were

runaways with no legal guardian (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006). This issue was

also address in The McKinney Act (1990) which allowed for social workers to act as legal guardians when needed.

Another issue related to school access was student records, specifically medical records (Stronge, 1993). "Homeless children, who are often transient and carry minimal belongings, frequently, lose medical records. Additionally, many children in homeless families do not receive adequate access to health care professionals and therefore will not have required vaccinations" (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006, p. 292). The McKinney Act (1990) addressed this issue and required that schools have procedures in place to assist homeless families with obtaining records. Stronge and Helm (1991) were quoted as saying "The McKinney Act (1990) is neither written nor funded to be regulatory or seriously enforced" (p. 216).

Even when the previous barriers were addressed and children were admitted to school, transportation became a barrier. Mawhinney-Rhoads and Stahler's (2006) report indicated that even when students were allowed to stay in their original school after moving, buses did not run outside the district to provide transportation to the school. The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Amendments Act (1990) addressed this issue when it stated that homeless students who moved outside the district should be provided transportation at the parent's request.

This was found to be true in James and Lopez's (2003) case study. The purpose of their study was to determine the feasibility and benefits of the McKinney-Vento act concerning the ability to transport children who were homeless to their school of origin after they moved from the district. The study took place in two Texas school districts (size of sample not given). In order to track the children a policy called "One Child, One

School, One Year" was implemented. Through the collection of district records it was determined that when children were provided transportation to their school of origin; school attendance improved by 63,340 days, 604 students had 10-19 absences a year, and state funding increased by $1.8 million. James and Lopez also pointed out that "despite these new provisions, Congress did not provide additional resources for districts to offset any additional costs of fulfilling these new requirements, thereby leaving districts with the challenge of responding to these new requirements" (p. 126). As of 2010 the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth and First Focus (NAEHCY) still cited transportation to the school of origin as a major barrier to educating children who are homeless.

In 2002 Congress again revised the McKinney Act and required all school districts to have a designated homeless education liaison to build awareness in the schools and community. According to NAEHCY (2010) 70% of school district reported enrolling an increasing number of students experiencing homelessness since 2007- 08. 39% of these school districts reported enrolling more homeless students in the first six months of the 2009-2010 school year than the entire previous year. The National Coalition for the Homeless (2009b) reported on the status of the McKinney Act's revisions and revealed, "While almost all states have revised laws and policies to improve access to education for homeless students, significant barriers to enrollment and attendance remain, including guardianship, and immunization requirements, transportation problems and school fees" (para. 1). Even when barriers to educational access were addressed, barriers to educational success still existed (Masten, Sesma, Si-Asar, Lawrence, Miliotis, & Dionne, 1997).

**Developmental delays and academic achievement.** Schools are faced with

growing numbers of very poor mobile children who have been or will be homeless.

Research indicates that these homeless and highly mobile children are at great risk for

developmental delays and academic underachievement. Masten et al. (1997) stated that

the purpose of their study was to "examine the educational risks associated with

homelessness among elementary school-aged children in a Midwestern city, as part of an

ongoing effort to identify and address the needs of mobile children" (p. 27).  This study

addressed two main questions.  "First, do children who have recently lived in a shelter

have substantial academic delays as assessed from multiple perspectives?  Second, is

academic achievement related to behavior problems and adaptive functioning in the

classroom?" (p. 30). The recruiting sample included 73 children, 37 boys and 36 girls

aged 6-11 years old staying in a Minneapolis shelter and focused on the 60 students who

were African American. Multiple methods were used to gather information pertinent to

school success, including individual tests, school records, teacher and parent ratings, and

parent interviews.  After leaving the shelter, the children were also tested using the

*Wechsler Individual Achievement Test Screener*.  Descriptive statistics were used to

analyze the data.  Results indicated that children faced with homelessness often have

serious educational problems that extend beyond the barriers of education that can derive

from residential instability.  Many of the African American children recently homeless in

this study were substantially behind in academic skills and their teachers often reported

classroom adjustment problems.  Early reports of educational problems among homeless

children suggested high levels of grade retention, absenteeism, and lower scores on group-administered achievement tests.

The purpose of the study conducted by Whitman, Accardo, Boyert, and Kendagor's (1990) was to standardize and systematize observations on developmental status of homeless children to provide a more solid research knowledge base on which to design and implement programs for these children. The testing program was conducted with the dual purpose of carrying out research on children in a shelter and providing individual programming for the children. This study assembled a sample of 107 children representing 54 families who were living in an emergency shelter in St. Louis, Missouri. Their ages ranged from five months to 18 years. An evaluation battery included the following screening instruments: Slossom Intelligence Test-Revised (cognition), Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (language), Beery Test of Visual Motor Integration (visual-motor integration), and The House-Tree-Person test (emotional status). Tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results indicated that 35% scored at or below the borderline/slow-learner on the Slosson Intelligence Test indicating a greater risk for developmental and language delays for the children who were homeless than for the general population. "The problematic responses to these children's special needs in early childhood and formal education settings did not appear to take into account sufficiently for the complexities of the impact of homelessness" (p. 518). Whitman et al. also reported that frequent moves resulted in many school transfers, with learning times being lost each time. Often students were not enrolled in school for several months while in temporary shelter. This lost school time resulted in academic underachievement, grade

retention, and gaps in learning experiences. Even when children went to school, they found it difficult to find space and time to do homework.

Rescoria, Parker, and Stolley's (1991) study was conducted to assess the intellectual ability, academic achievement, and emotional/behavioral adjustment of children living in shelters.  The primary sample of this study consisted of 83 homeless children between the ages of 3 and 12 years who resided in one of 13 shelters in Philadelphia and a comparative domicile group.  Each shelter child was given a screening which took 30 minutes.  Once selected the children were given 10 assessments to obtain information about verbal and non-verbal intelligence, academic achievement, visual-motor development, and emotional/behavioral functioning.  Assessments that dealt with cognitive functioning were analyzed using descriptive statistics.  Emotional/behavioral functioning was analyzed qualitatively.  Student's wishes were divided into themes to be analyzed.  The results of this study indicated that homelessness for preschoolers was particularly damaging. "Preschool children living in shelters were much less likely to be enrolled in any kind of early childhood education program.  Shelter children were significantly more delayed in receptive vocabulary and visual-motor development" (p. 218).  They also had significantly higher rates of behavioral/emotional symptoms.

Bassuk and Gallagher (1990) conducted a study to determine possible developmental delays for those residing in a shelter. This portion of the study was conducted with 81 children ages five and less. After administering the Denver Developmental Screening Test it was determined that almost half of the 81 preschoolers suffered developmental delays in language development, fine motor coordination, gross motor skills, and personal/social development.

In a longitudinal study conducted by Obradovic et al (2009) data was collected over a three year span. The purpose of the study was to examine achievement patterns in homeless and highly mobile children. The sample consisted of 14,754 children who had completed standardized achievement tests in math and reading at any point during the three school years included in the study. Data was first analyzed examining the relationship between risk exposure and academic achievement over time. The second analysis examined the academic achievement of the homeless and highly mobile children against the national norms. The results indicated that homeless and highly mobile children face a higher risk for school failure than children from low-income but residentially stable families.

Ziesemer, Marcoux, and Marwell's (1995) believed homelessness for young children may represent a larger, more devastating problem than first thought. The purpose of their study was to form the foundation of knowledge necessary for appropriate school- and agency-based interventions by addressing three questions.

> (1) What are the demographic, academic, behavioral, health, and self-perception characteristics of homeless students? (2) Does the academic and behavioral functioning of homeless students differ from that of low socioeconomic status and mobile non-homeless students of the same gender, grade, and race as the homeless population? (3) Are the effects of homelessness on students' academic and behavioral functioning temporary? Or do students continue to function at the same level a year or more after they have experienced homelessness? (p.143).

This study analyzed the school experiences of 169 elementary students who experienced homelessness between September 1987 and January 1990 in Madison Metropolitan School District.  Data was collected using the Teacher Report Form that included ratings of academic performance, an adaptive functioning scale, and a problem behavior index. Results showed that two-thirds of the students were perceived as performing below grade level. It was also found that the effects of homelessness were not short lived. Results indicated that children's behavior and academic achievement were similar during their homelessness and more than one year later, "homelessness is indeed one event along the continuum of a child's experience of poverty rather than a temporary phenomenon with short-lived effects" (p.149).

Rubin et al. (1996) conducted a study with 102 homeless and 178 housed children, ages 6-11, and their mothers in New York City.  The purpose of the study was to compare cognitive and academic functioning of housed children and children who were homeless. The mothers were interviewed to determine demographic information and the children were given seven different assessments. Multivariate regression analysis was used to determine results. They found that children who were homeless had lower academic achievement scores in reading, spelling, and math and over 20% had repeated a grade as compared to 8% of housed children.

Attles (1997) conducted a study of seven school-aged children living in shelters to examine the impact of homelessness on academic achievement. Children in the study were assessed through the California Achievement Test. The results indicated that the homeless children experienced difficulty with language, sustained attention, physical coordination, and developmental delays.

**Table 2**

*Summary - Academic Issues for Children Who are Homeless*

| Citations | Method | Sample | Purpose of Study | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Attles (1997)** | -California Achievement Test | 7 homeless children In grade 5 sometime in the last 3 years | Examine the impact of homelessness on academic achievement for school-aged children | The homeless children experienced difficulty with language, sustained attention, physical coordination, and developmental delays. |
| **Bassuk and Gallagher (1990)** | -Denver Developmental Screening Test | 81 preschoolers ages 5 or less | Identify gross developmental delays | Preschoolers suffered developmental delays in language development, fine motor coordination, gross motor skills, and personal/social. development |
| **Fasten et al. (1997)** | -WIAT-S -WISC-III -School records -Teacher's Report form -Parent interview | 73 shelter children ages 6-11 years | Examine the educational risks associated with homelessness as part of an ongoing effort to identify and address the needs of mobile children. | Homelessness appears to be a marker of cumulative educational risk levels that are both likely shared by other children living in extreme poverty. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **James and Lopez (2003)** | -collection of school and district records | 2 school districts of unknown size | Determine the feasibility and benefits of the McKinney-Vento act concerning the ability to transport children who were homeless to their school of origin after they moved from the district | Difficult but feasible. School attendance improved by 63,340 days, 604 students had 10-19 absences a year, and state funding increased by $1.8 million. |
| **Obradovic et al. (2009)** | -Northwest Achievement Levels Test | 14,754 homeless and highly mobile children grades 2, 3, 4, and 5 | Examine achievement patterns in homeless and highly mobile children. | Homeless and highly mobile children face a higher risk for school failure than children from low-income but residentially stable families. |
| **Rescoria et al. (1991)** | -10 different assessments were given in the areas of verbal and non-verbal intelligence, visual-motor development, and emotional/ behavioral functioning - Parent interview | 83 shelter children ages 3-12 years | Assess the intellectual ability, academic achievement, and emotional/behavioral adjustment of children living in shelters. | Shelter children were significantly more delayed in receptive vocabulary and visual-motor development. |

| Rubin et al. (1996) | -Parent interviews -PPVT-R -WRAT-R -Depression inventory -Anxiety scale | 102 homeless children 178 housed children ages 6-11 years | Compare cognitive and academic functioning of housed children and children who were homeless. | Children who were homeless had lower academic achievement scores in reading, spelling, and math and over 20% had repeated a grade as compared to 8% of housed children. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strong (1993) | -Survey -Case study of Chicago Public Schools | 45 state education agency coordinators; record from Chicago Public School. (Sample size not given) | Review policies and practices ascribed to traditional public schooling that may impede the provision of appropriate educational opportunities to homeless students | Barriers related to health and educational records were the most problematic. Other barriers included residency, guardianship, and school transfers. |
| Strong and Helms (1991) | -Statewide survey -Review of applicable case law | Homeless education service providers; Administrators, teachers, and county seat representatives. (Sample size not given) | Ascertain the impact of selected problems, namely residency and guardianship requirements, on the provision of educational opportunities to homeless children | The primary barrier to educating children of homeless families derives from state statutory residency requirements and the difficulty of determining residency for homeless families who move often. |

| Whitman et al. (1990) | -Screening test in cognition, language, visual-motor integration, and emotional status | 107 shelter children (ages not given) | Standardize and systematize observations on developmental status of homeless children to provide a more solid research knowledge base on which to design and implement programs for these children. | The results indicated that 35% scored at or below the borderline/slow-learner indicating a greater risk for developmental and language delays for the children who were homeless than for the general population. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Ziesemer et al. (1995)** | -Teacher Report Form -Self-Perception Profile for Children -Health data | 169 elementary children experiencing homelessness | Form the foundation of knowledge necessary for appropriate school- and agency-based interventions for children who are homeless. | Two-thirds of the students were perceived as performing below grade level. Results also indicated that children's behavior and academic achievement were similar during their homelessness and more than one year later. |

In summary, these studies indicated that school enrollment barriers for children who are homeless include issues related to residency, guardianship, student records, and transportation. Once in school students still struggled to achieve academically with studies indicating that children who are homeless were at a greater risk for school failure. Multiple studies confirmed that children who were homeless often scored lower in

reading, spelling, and math resulting in a higher level of grade retention. The gap in the

literature exists for the youngest of the children. From the 11 studies cited only 2

included children 5 years old and younger. Since the National Center of Family

Homelessness (2011) reports that 42% of the homeless population is less than 6 years of

age, more research is needed to determine the academic issues and developmental delays

that may be present for this younger homeless population.

**Daily Struggles**

Literature on children who are homeless reports more daily struggles than can be

mentioned in this study. The day to day struggles for children who are homeless run the

gamut from the most basic needs mentioned by Maslow which include food, water, and

shelter to the same struggles housed children face which may include need for peer

acceptance. A summary of the empirical literature can be seen in table 3 below.

**Stresses.** Neiman (1988) hypothesized that a single stressor for children who are

homeless was not an indicator of risk for children who are homeless but when two

stressors occurred, the risks quadrupled. This idea was explored by Menke (2000) who

was also concerned that the stresses experienced by children were accumulative. The

purpose of Menke's study was to compare homeless, previously homeless, and never

homeless poor school-age children and what coping behaviors they may use to handle

stress.  A cross-sectional, three group research design was used consisting of interviews

with 132 children. Results showed that stressors for all three groups included peers,

school, self, family, health, environment and violence. Specific for the children who were

homeless was the stress of not having a home which included the lack of privacy, lack of freedom, rules of the facility, and everyday uncertainties. Toomey and Christie (as cited in Menke, 2000) also reported that children who are homeless expressed stresses in their life to include the lack of certain clothing, games, and fad items which caused them to feel less accepted by their peers.

Graham-Bermann, Coupet, Egler, Mattis, and Banyard's (1996) study tested an ecological model on the impact of several areas including social relationships and stress on child adjustment. The data was collected using a one hour interview for each participant and multiple assessments. The participants consisted of 60 children ages 7 to 12 years old and their mothers who resided in a homeless shelter and 61 children and their mothers in low-income housing. Multiple scales and inventories were used during the interview to collect information from the participants. Factor analysis was used to analyze the data. Their results showed that a lack of social support was significantly associated with stress and adjustment difficulties in the children who were homeless.

**Mobility and ability to meet basic needs.** "At a time when children should be developing a sense of safety and security, trust in their caregiver, and freedom to explore the world, they are severely challenged and limited by unpredictability, dislocation, and chaos" (Bassuk, 2010, p.498). With each change of residence, school, and relationship they are unable to understand the concept of order, place, and security (Nunez, 2010). The following studies view mobility not as an acute short-term issue at the time of moving but as an issue with longer-term consequences for well-being.

Bartlett's (1997) ethnographic study of three families took place over a year and a half time span. The study consisted of interviews and observations of the mothers. This allowed for "familiarity with family members, household routines, social networks, changing circumstances, and on-going problems" (p.122). The purpose of the study was to research the effects of housing, and housing-related problems. One by-product of their housing problems was frequent mobility. Bartlett found that children who are homeless move sixteen times more often than the average family which caused school transfers, enrollment problems, and excessive absences.

Mead (1934) hypothesized that the family was the fundamental unit for social development and that school was an extension of the family. This is a very important concept when many times both the family and the school are not stable in the life of children who are homeless. Wood, Halfon, Scarlata, Newacheck, and Neissin (1993) wanted to know "the impact of frequent family moves on reported rates of delay in growth and development, learning disorders, school failure and frequent behavior problems in US school-age children" (p.1334). In their study they administered The 1988 National Health Interview Survey to 9915 participants ages 6 to17. Univariate and multivariate were used to compare variables. Results showed that relocation was "significantly associated with an increased risk of failing a grade and with multiple, frequently occurring behavior problems" (p. 1337).

In a dissertation by Tatta (1997) she described experiences of how elementary children who are homeless are socialized into a transitional school setting. Her study was conducted through conversations and observations of children at play who were homeless. Children ranged in age from 5 to 10 years. She also interviewed teachers,

family advocates, and classroom aides. She found that moving from school to school created a multitude of problems for the children. First she found that due to their mobility the homeless may encounter the daily struggles of finding food and having clean bodies and clothes. This often times caused the homeless to be shunned. Another problem mobility caused was that the children who were homeless continually lost established friendships. Each new school meant new curriculum, teachers, friends, and rules. She found that when children lose both their school and their home they lose their sense of security and safety. Tower (1992) echoed this in her report when she stated "even when children are assured of food and at least temporary housing… they are usually aware of the lack of permanence in their situation, and the resulting predicament results in feelings of insecurity" (p. 43).

Walsh (1992) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study focused on children who are homeless. Her five year study consisted of 55 children ages 4 to 18 years old. The purpose of the research was to allow children, through their stories to speak. Walsh examined the children's self-concepts in the areas of academics, social, and athletic competence, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct. Her findings confirmed that the self-concepts of the children were affected by their homelessness. One stressor the children identified was constant mobility. With multiple moves every year these children felt like they were on the outside looking in because they were always the new kid at school. "Moving to a new school in the middle of the school year challenges the interpersonal skills of most children. Doing this repeatedly grade after grade leaves a child feeling on the fringe" (p.153). They also expressed the stress associated with the loss of their home, possessions, pets, and friends. Children in the study often expressed

feelings of sadness disappointment in their caretakers for the inability to meet their basic needs.

In a similar qualitative study Kozol (2006) observed families living in the Martinique Hotel in New York City. The case histories were collected through interviews with the residents of the hotel including both children and adults. He found that parents may try to provide a sense of love and belonging but due to repeated moves, lack of extended family support, and virtually no personal belongings there is a lack of the sense of being rooted. Housed children may give little thought to their basic needs but the homeless are very aware of these needs. While children who are homeless may not be completely without food and shelter it is uppermost in their minds.

When children live in cars, tents, or shelters their sense of safety and security may be jeopardized. These are the basic needs that Maslow discusses as necessary for progression through his hierarchy.

**Shelter life.** In a study discussed later, Buckner, et al. (1999) found that families live in cars, parks, or other nonpermanent situations, but most children in these families consider homelessness synonymous with living in a shelter.

During the qualitative portion of a study by Bassuk and Gallagher (1990) mentioned earlier, it was determined that shelter life can be volatile and it is not uncommon for mothers to argue with each other about their children's behavior. "Anecdotal accounts from shelter staff and homeless mothers suggested that, in general, the pressures of shelter living exacerbated the children's difficulties and may even make them worse" (p. 24).

In Walsh's (1992) study mentioned previously she found that moving to a shelter is not always a welcome experience. "Because it represents the loss of their home, the move to the shelter is remembered by nearly all the children as a significant and, often, painful event" (p.23). Another aspect of shelter life that was mentioned in Walsh's study was the issue of the loss of privacy and living with too many people. Often times having to interact with so many other children is difficult for children who have not learned proper social skills. Walsh explained:

Living with other people who whom they share the current circumstance of homelessness can lead children to question whether they share their characteristics. This can be threatening to children, who do not want to be identified with people who behave in ways they find distasteful, but who nevertheless are associated with them because they are part of the group in the shelter (p.58).

In a dissertation by Anglin (1998) the purpose was to explore the social, educational, and developmental delays children who are homeless face. The participants consisted of 20 families which included 49 children ranging in age from 4 to 17. Data was gathered through interviews and observations. When exploring the social aspects of homelessness, shelter life came to the forefront. Anglin concluded that children need toys and other materials to provide an emotional lift and safe outlet of emotions. Shelters do not always provide these opportunities. "The lack of play or exercise for homeless children, therefore, leaves them devoid of significant physical release that would help to foster discipline and even the power that might have made them less afraid" (p.129). Educational delays were also associated with shelter life when it was pointed that the

majority of the children in this study found it difficult to concentrate on homework while living in the shelter. Without the safety and security of a home, Maslow (1999) would say basic needs were not being met.

**School atmosphere.** When examining the school atmosphere it was found that teachers set the tone either negatively or positively in the classroom. In a study conducted by Tower and White (1989) time was spent working with and interviewing educators, mothers and children at the Salvation Army. The purpose of the study was to explore ways teachers could understand homeless students and their families and the issues concerning these families. The results of the study emphasized the importance of teachers taking a proactive stance when children who are homeless are in their classroom. References to Tower (1992) and Tower and White (1989) are found throughout this literature review with additional results from their studies.

One challenge teachers experience is treating all children the same. Barton (1998) stated that the way teachers viewed students who were homeless impacted their teaching style with these children, indicating that a teacher's attitude about a child who is homeless in their classroom played a part in the student's success or failure both academically and socially. These conclusions were drawn from Barton's ethnographic study of three female students ages 12 to 13. Data was collected using fieldnotes, journals, video and audiotapes, and interviews. The purpose of the study was to understand issues and concerns that children who are homeless bring to learning and doing science. According to a study previously mentioned Whitman et al. reported, "Stereotyping and labeling by teachers and peers is a common phenomenon" (p.519).

Because of the fear of being labeled the children often times try to hide that they are homeless because they are very aware of the social stigma of being homeless. They experience shame, are negatively labeled, and ostracized by their peers (Tower, 1992).

The school atmosphere can be a positive one when teachers build relationships with their students. In a dissertation conducted by Quinn-Schuldt (2010) the purpose was to identify and explore the teacher-homeless student attachment relationship. Data was collected from 17 teachers through observations, interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and journals. The teachers were chosen from elementary, middle, and high schools. Results indicated key elements to developing a relationship included: being more than just a teacher, provide a stable classroom environment, a better understanding of homelessness, and willingness to develop a relationship. "In a world that demands that they endure and respond as adults, school allows them to be children" (Walsh, 1992, p. 151).

Tatta (1997) also found that the atmosphere of the classroom played an important role in the socialization of children who are homeless into the classroom environment. She found that a structured and predictable environment was beneficial for the children. Teachers and aides were also viewed by the children as caregivers even taking time to bathe the children and wash their clothes if necessary. Teachers promoted a sense of belonging through their care and concern.

Another challenge facing teachers of children who are homeless is instilling in them the importance of an education. According to Nunez (2010), 45% of parents who are homeless read at a sixth grade level and do not possess a high school diploma or GED. When exploring the educational component of Anglin's (1998) study mentioned earlier, it was found that many times parents are dropouts themselves and don't see the

need for education therefore the importance of an education is not passed on to their children. From the 49 children in the study, 75% had repeated one or two grades. Anglin challenged educators play a pivotal role in providing an environment that was a respite from the stress and strains of homelessness.

**Behavior problems and emotional issues.** Throughout the research it is often times found that emotional issues and behavioral problems go hand in hand. In a study addressed earlier by Rescoria, et al. (1991) it was found that the lack of social support for children who were homeless was associated with more behavioral problems, aggression, and acting-out than poor housed peers.

Yu, North, LaVesser, Osburne, and Spitznagel (2008) explored the issue of homeless families having more behavioral and psychiatric problems then non-homeless families. The purpose of this study was to "examine the relative contributions of homelessness and maternal factors to psychiatric and behavioral disorders and cognitive problems among homeless children, compared to a sample of housed children" (p.2). This study was a part of a larger epidemiologic study. The sample consisted of 157 children who were homeless and their mothers and a comparison group of 61 housed children and their mothers. Chi-square and t-tests were used for analysis. The study found that children who were homeless were four times more likely than housed children to exhibit disruptive behaviors in the areas of oppositional defiant, attention deficit/hyperactivity, and conduct disorders. School may be where children act out problems from the other areas of their life or they may withdraw from peers (Ramsey, 1991).

Another part of Bassuk and Gallagher's (1990) study previously mentioned was to evaluate "psychological effects of shelter living on the behavior patterns of childhood" (p.2). This part of the study was conducted with an unknown number of children ages 6 to 18 years old who were administered the Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale. It was determined that one third of the children required psychiatric referrals and evaluations. Fifty-five children ages 3 to 5 years old were also tested given the Simmons Behavior Checklist while their mothers completed a behavior questionnaire concerning their children. It was determined that the children in the study suffered from aggression, shyness, and withdrawal. The authors reported that "increased aggressiveness may be a way for homeless children to express anger at their circumstances and at their parents for being unable to protect them" (p. 27).

Not only are the number of families that are homeless growing but this number includes an alarming number of preschoolers. The purpose of Bassuk and Rubin's (1987) study was to pursue systematically collected clinical information about homeless children to determine their needs of these families. The sample consisted of 82 families with 156 children residing in Massachusetts family shelters. Data was collected by interviewing all family members including preschoolers. Interviewers helped participants complete various standardized instruments to assess the children. Children five years of age and under completed The Denver Developmental Screen Test and The Simmons Behavioral Checklist. Children over five years of age completed The Children's Depression Inventory and The Manifest Anxiety Scale. Mothers completed The Achenbach Behavior Problem Checklist. After the interviews a 55-item questionnaire was completed by each participant. Information was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results

indicated that a majority of children living in Massachusetts family shelters were suffering from severe anxiety and depression. Despite variations in validity of the various research screening instruments, the results consistently showed that approximately one half of the shelter homeless children needed a psychiatric referral and evaluation.

In Buckner, Bassuk, Weinreb, and Brooks' (1999) study they point out that the problems children living in low-income families have increased numbers of acute and chronic stressors. The purpose of their study was to look at the relationship between depression, anxiety, and problem behaviors in association to housing status. For this section of the quantitative study 80 children who were homeless and 148 children who were never homeless, in the Worcester, Massachusetts area were studied. Interviews were conducted and analyzed using both t-test and chi-square tests. Housing status was determined to be associated with internalizing behavior problems and there was a significant difference on the Child Behavior Checklist test with 47% of the children who were homeless versus only 21% of children who were never homeless needing clinical referrals.

Zima, Wells, and Freeman (1994) were also concerned with the rising population of families with children who were homeless. The purpose of their study was to look at emotional, behavioral, and academic problems among children in shelters and identify characteristics of the children with such problems. This quantitative study collected interviews from 18 emergency family shelters in Los Angeles County CA from February through May 1991 including 169 school-age children and their parents. Data was analyzed using standard measures of depression, behavioral problems, reading, and receptive vocabulary. It found that children in the homeless shelter were 1.5 times more

likely than the normative general population to required clinical evaluations for serious

emotional and behavioral problems.

In a study by Bassuk and Rosenberg (1990) they stated that "the majority of

homeless family members are children, and there is general agreement that their situation

is desperate" (p.257). The purpose of this study was to compare the psychosocial

characteristics of families with children who have homes headed by woman and families

with children headed by woman who do not have homes. This quantitative study of 86

children who were homeless was compared with 81 poor children living in homes in

Boston. Data was collected using personal interviews and standardized tests administer to

the children and the mothers. It was found a statistically significant difference in the

Anxiety Scale that almost one third of the homeless school-aged children needed

psychiatric evaluations compared to one tenth of the children with homes.

**Table 3**

*Summary - Daily Struggles for Children Who are Homeless*

| Citations | Method | Sample | Purpose of Study | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Anglin (1998)** | -Observations -Interviews | 20 mothers 49 children ages 4 to17 years old | Explore the social, educational, and developmental delays children who are homeless face. | Social and educational delays were associated with shelter life. Education is not always a high priority for the homeless. |
| **Bartlett (1997)** | -Observations -Interviews with mothers | 3 families (specific demographics not given) | Research the effects of housing, and housing-related problems. | One by-product of housing problems was frequent mobility. |

| Barton (1998) | -Fieldnotes<br>-Journals<br>- Video and audiotapes<br>-Interviews | Three female students ages 12 to 13 | - Understand issues and concerns that children who are homeless bring to learning science. | -Homelessness needs to be considered when determining science lessons in order to make it relevant for the students. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bassuk and Gallagher (1990) | -Observations<br>-Parent questionnaire<br>- The Denver Development Screening Test<br>- Simmons Behavior Checklist | -55 shelter children ages 3 to 5 years old<br>-unknown number of children ages 6 to 18 years old | Evaluate the psychological effects of shelter living on the behavior patterns of childhood. | - Children ages 3 to 5 years suffered from aggression, shyness, and withdrawal.<br>-One third of the children ages 6 to 18 required psychiatric referrals and evaluations. |
| Bassuk and Rosenburg (1990) | -Parent interviews<br>- The Denver Development Screening Test and Simmons Behavior Checklist (children under age 6)<br>-Children's Depression Inventory, Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale, and Child Behavior Checklist (children 6 and older) | 86 homeless children 81 housed children (only mean age of 6.4 was given) | Compare the psychosocial characteristics of families with children who have homes headed by woman and families with children headed by woman that do not have homes. | Almost one third of the homeless school-aged children needed psychiatric evaluations compared to one tenth of the children with homes. |

| Bassuk and Rubin (1987) | -Interviews - The Denver Developmental Screen Test and The Simmons Behavioral Checklist. (age 5 and younger) - The Children's Depression Inventory and The Manifest Anxiety Scale (ages 6 and older) - Achenbach Behavior Problem Checklist (mothers) | 82 families with 156 children residing in family shelters (preschool and older) | Collected clinical information about homeless children to determine their needs. | Results indicated that a majority of children living in family shelters were suffering from severe anxiety and depression. Approximately one half of the shelter homeless children needed a psychiatric referral and evaluation. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Buckner et al. (1999) | -Parent interviews -Child Behavior Checklist -Children's Depression Inventory -Life Events Questionnaire | 80 homeless children 148 never homeless children Ages 6 and older | Look at the relationship between depression, anxiety, and problem behaviors in association to housing status. | Housing status was determined to be associated with internalizing behavior problems. 47% of the children who were homeless versus only 21% of children who were never homeless needing clinical referrals. |

| Capp (2003) | Psychological Sense of School Membership -Teacher survey | 2000 students (ages not given) 700 teachers | Examine the role teachers played in creating an environment where a sense of belonging existed. | Students had a better sense of belonging when they were involved in athletics, clubs, and other student groups and when the teacher encouraged a community environment in the classroom. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Graham-Bermann et al. (1996) | -Parent and child interviews -Network of Relationships Inventories -Child Behavior Checklist -Perceived Competence Scales for Children - African American Women's Stress Scale | 60 children and their mothers who resided in a homeless shelter and 61 children and their mothers in low-income housing Children ages 7 to 12 years | Test the impact social relationships and stress have on child adjustment. | The presence of stress was directly associated with negative adjustment for children. |
| Kozel (2006) | -Interviews -Observations | Residents of all ages at the Martinique Hotel homeless shelter | To give voices to the homeless. | Provide awareness to the plight of the homeless. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Menke (2000)** | -Interview | 132 children Ages 8-12 years | Compare homeless, previously homeless, and never homeless poor school-age children and what coping behaviors they may use to handle stress. | Stressors for all three groups included peers, school, self, family, health, environment and violence. Specific for the homeless children was not having a home which included the lack of privacy, lack of freedom, rules of the facility, and everyday uncertainties. |
| **Quinn-Schuldt (2010)** | -Interviews -Focus groups -Observations -Artifacts -Journals | 17 teachers elementary middle and high school | Identify and explore the teacher-homeless student attachment relationship. | Results indicated key elements to developing a relationship. |
| **Rescoria et al. (1991)** | -10 different assessments were given in the areas of verbal and non-verbal intelligence, visual-motor development, and emotional/ behavioral functioning - Parent interview | 83 shelter children ages 3-12 years | Assess the intellectual ability, academic achievement, and emotional/behavioral adjustment of children living in shelters. | Children had significantly higher rates of behavioral/emotional symptoms. |
| **Tatta (1997)** | -Observations -Interviews | -Elementary teachers -Teacher's aids -Family advocates -Children ages 5 to 10 years | Explore how elementary children who are homeless are socialized into a transitional school setting. | High mobility rates cause difficult school transitions. Positive classroom atmosphere aided in socialization of children who were homeless. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tower and White (1989)** | -Interviews | -Teachers of children who are homeless (grades not given) -Mothers and children in the shelter (ages not given) | Explore ways teachers could understand homeless students and their families and the issues concerning these families. | Teachers must take a proactive stance to help children who are homeless when they are in their classroom. |
| **Walsh (1992)** | -Observations -Interviews | 55 children who were homeless ages 4 to 18 years old | Examine children's self-concepts in the areas of academics, social, and athletic competence, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct. | Homelessness affected the children's self-concept. |
| **Wood et al. (1993)** | - National Health Interview Survey | 9915 participants Ages 6 to17 | Explore the impact of frequent family moves on reported rates of delay in growth and development, learning disorders, school failure and frequent behavior problems in school-age children | Frequent relocation was associated with higher rates of child dysfunction, more grade retention, and behavior problems. |
| **Yu et al. (2008)** | -Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children/Adults -Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test | 157 homeless children and their mothers 61 housed children and their mothers Children ages 5-16 years | Explore the issue of homeless families having more behavioral and psychiatric problems then non-homeless families. | Homeless children were four times more likely than housed children to exhibit disruptive behaviors in the areas of oppositional defiant, attention deficit/hyperactivity, and conduct disorders. |

| Zima et al. (1994) | -Parent interviews<br>-Children's Depression Inventory<br>-Child Behavior Checklist<br>-Peabody Picture Test | 169 school-age children (ages 6-12) and their parents | Look at emotional, behavioral, and academic problems among children in shelters and identify characteristics of the children with such problems. | 78% of homeless children suffered from depression, a behavioral problems, or severe academic delay. |
|---|---|---|---|---|

In summary, it was found that the presence of stress and high mobility for the children who were homeless was directly associated with negative adjustment of the children. The increased rates of relocation led to higher rates of child dysfunction, grade retention, and behavior problems. Children who were homeless were also more likely to exhibit higher levels of anxiety and depression which correlated to the need for more psychiatric referrals and evaluations. Although the previous research expresses the daily struggles of the children who are homeless, there is little research that explores how these struggles impact the development of social belonging in the school environment Of the 19 cited works only 5 placed any focus on children in the classroom. And as mentioned earlier few studies, 6 of the 19, included younger children but none of the studies focused exclusively on younger children.

## Social Aspects- During Times of Homelessness

Because young children are concrete thinkers they choose friends based on physical characteristics like appearance (Ramsey, 1991). As addressed in the section on stress, children who are homeless often feel stress about their lack of ability to appear like

everyone else and they feel rejected by their peers. With peer rejection so prevalent,

making friends becomes a very difficult task (Tower, 1992).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) points out that when children feel a disconnect between

their school and life outside of school their social experiences may be impaired. A

summary of the empirical literature can be seen in table 4 below.

**Making Friends**

According to Eddowes and Butcher (2000) friends are an important part of

childhood because they provide opportunities for listening, speaking, and expressing

ideas. Friends promote opportunities for working and relating effectively with other

children and they foster healthy social and emotional growth. This is echoed in Walsh's

(1992) study discussed earlier when she states that "Making and having friends is a

significant part of the world for most children. Friends provide companionship, helping to

fend off feelings of being alone and isolated" (p.133). Unfortunately, homelessness

affects relationships because the loss of friends is often the first casualty for children who

become homeless and many children experience difficulties making new friends. Shelter

rules and situations within the shelter are not always ideal for friendships.

Medcalf (2008) observed Josie (age 5) and her family (two sisters, one brother,

and her mother) in an ethnographic study. Observations were conducted in the school's

classroom, on the playground, in the lunchroom and in the halls. The purpose of the study

was to research language development for extremely poor children. At the time of the

study Josie and her family moved in and out of shelters multiple times. One of Medcalf's

findings indicated that making friends and participating in class discussions were hard for

this population. They preferred to not have any attention drawn to them so they isolated themselves. "Often, these children become close to some individual person, such as a peer or a teacher, only to be yanked away from that person at a moment's notice" (p. 27). This made the children very reluctant to make new friends.

Ramsey (1988) conducted a study involving 45 children from middle SES and 49 children from low SES ranging in age from 3 to 7 years old. The purpose of her study was to learn whether low and middle SES children use different strategies in hypothetical social situations and if there are differences in the relationships between specific strategies and levels of peer acceptance. The children participated in social strategies interviews and sociometric interviews. The children's teachers were also asked to rate their student's social competence. Results from this study found that low SES children more frequently responded to the hypothetical situations with aggressive action while middle SES children consistently responded with reassurance and sharing. The teacher's rating consistently ranked low SES children less socially competent.

**Social Isolation**

Homelessness can often lead to social isolation for the child. To become fully immersed in their social environment, children must learn how to gain entrance into peer groups and how to initiate interactions with individuals. If children constantly fail to make contact, which is common for children who are homeless, they become increasingly isolated (Ramsey, 1991).

According to Tower (1992), an example of how children isolate themselves and rob themselves of normal peer relationships is when children go to great lengths to hide

the fact that they are homeless. Supporting Tower's claim is Walsh's (1992) study. Walsh reported that some children who are homeless go to great lengths to keep their homelessness a secret due to their embarrassment. Some children worry that teachers would not like them if they knew they were homeless. Others trust their teachers but worry that their teacher would tell other teachers who would then tell other children. The children also isolate themselves for fear that teachers will find out they are homeless and make them move to another school.

Gibel (1996) was concerned with the possible negative stereotypical connotations associated with homelessness. In a quantitative study with 158 white housed students ages 12 through 18, Gibel investigated the attitudes of this sample toward their non poor housed peers, poor housed peers, and homeless peers. Data was collected using the Attitudes and Belief Scale, a Semantic Differential Scale and the Social Distance Scale. It was found that the sample had significantly more positive attitudes toward non poor housed peers and poor housed peers then they were toward homeless peers.

In a study conducted by Anooshian (2003) social isolation was of concern because most help for children who are homeless was only available in social settings. The purpose of this study was to explore the causes and consequences of isolation and social rejection for children who are homeless. The sample consisted of 93 families moving in and out of homelessness in a Northwestern city. This research consisted of interviews with a target child, a mother, and a sibling. Factor and regression analysis was used to determine research results. It was concluded that "measures of loneliness, preferences for being alone, and peer victimization reliably predicted measures of intellectual development, especially for children with extensive experiences with

homelessness" (p.129). In the study Anooshian was quoted as saying, "In addressing relationship problems, it is important to recognize that isolation is not synonymous with physical distance or separation from others; the concern is with the scarcity of social attachment and high-quality social interactions experienced by homeless children" p.80-81).

Children who are homeless sometimes lack social competencies that can cause peer attitudes toward this population to be negative. Fifty-one children who are homeless in third, fourth and fifth grade participated in a study by Venhorst (1995). All the children completed the Social Skills Rating System, The Child Anxiety Scale and The Reynolds Child Depression Scale. Mothers were asked to complete the Social Skills Rating System and the Child Behavior Checklist. The children's school records were also included in the study. The purpose of the study was to investigate social skills among children who are homeless. Results from the study revealed that mothers identified their children as having low social skills. Many of the children also rated themselves below average in social skills. If handled correctly, school can be a safe place for children who are homeless to learn social skills.

## Social Belonging and Well-being

Eddowes (1992) believed that, "Consistency, continuity, and sameness contribute to the child's sense of well-being" (p.100). When children become homeless it is not only a house that they lose. They also may lose friends, possessions, pets, other family members, their school, and a sense of belonging.

According to Tower (1992) children's perception of themselves decreased and feelings of shame increased after they became homeless. Bassuk and Rubin's (1987) study mentioned previously also found in their research that children who are homeless became frustrated with the social and emotional baggage of their unstable housing situation. The ever changing and chaotic environments of the shelter, the loss of privacy, structure and routine; and the acute stress experienced by the mothers added to the children's distress decreasing their well-being.

In the results of Tatta's study (1997) mentioned earlier, she found that family ties and siblings play an important role in helping children who are homeless maintain a sense of belonging. Siblings supported and protected each other as they were shuffled between shelters and between schools.

As discussed earlier and brought to attention again in this study, homeless children may not attend school regularly. A quantitative study of 400 homeless 6 to 11-year olds and their mothers was conducted by Timberlake, Sabatino, and Anlua (1994) to view the impact of school attendance on self-esteem and loneliness. Data was collected using two structured scales during two separate interviews. Chi-square, t-tests, and analysis of variance were used. They found there was a "statistically significant difference between children attending school half-time or more and those not attending school. Children who attended school felt less lonely and had higher self-esteem than those who did not attend" (p.9).Timberlake and colleagues also stated:

Homeless children have experienced poverty and deprivation in such a way that they have lost environmental constancy not only in generic terms of food, clothing, and shelter but also in terms of their personal space, possessions, and

relationships. They have lost a sense of belonging and a sense of self as cared and valued. In addition to these internal and external losses, homeless children have experienced negative reactions and isolation from others for being poor and different. Together, the losses, isolation, and negative responses assault a homeless child's self-esteem and stimulate increased feelings of loneliness (p.11)

In a study conducted by Percy entitled *Children From Homeless Families Describe What is Special in Their Lives* (as cited in Menke, 2000) it was reported that school-aged children who were homeless identified factors that helped them deal with homelessness included, having special people in their lives, feeling cared for, having fun, and having people to depend on. In other words what helped the most for children who were homeless was the sense of belonging.

Anglin's (1998) study found that more than anything children wanted to experience safety, enjoy their own bed, and play with friends. "When a child has no place with which to identify, no quiet place to do homework, and no sense of belonging, the child misses the golden age of childhood, an era of emotional awakening and growth" (p.111).

**Table 4**

*Summary - Social Aspects for Children Who are Homeless*

| Citations | Method | Sample | Purpose of Study | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Anooshian (2003)** | -Interviews | 93 homeless families Including a child (ages 6 to 12 years) Sibling (ages 5 to 17 years) and their mother | Explore the causes and consequences of isolation and social rejection for children who are homeless. | Loneliness, preferences for being alone, and peer victimization predicted measures of intellectual development, especially for children with extensive experiences with homelessness. |
| **Bassuk and Rubin (1987)** | -Interviews - The Denver Developmental Screen Test, The Simmons Behavioral Checklist. (5 and younger) - The Children's Depression Inventory and The Manifest Anxiety Scale (6 and older) - Achenbach Behavior Problem Checklist (mothers) | 82 families with 156 children residing in family shelters (preschool and older) | Collected clinical information about homeless children to determine their needs | Well-being decreased due to frustration with social and emotional baggage |

| Gibel (1996) | -Attitudes and Belief Scale –Semantic Differential Scale -Social Distance Scale | 158 housed Caucasian students ages 12 to 18 years | Explore possible negative stereotypical connotations associated with homelessness. | Less positive attitude toward homeless peers than toward non-poor housed peers and poor housed peers. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Medcalf (2008) | -Observations | Josie (5 years old) Two sisters (8 years old) One brother (7 years old) Mother | Research language development for children who are homeless. | Making friends and participating in class discussions were hard for the children who were homeless. |
| Ramsey (1988) | -Social strategies interviews -Sociometric interviews -Teacher social competence ratings | Low and middle SES children ages 3 to 7 years old | Learn whether low and middle SES children use different strategies in hypothetical social situation. Determine if differences exist in the relationships between specific strategies and levels acceptance. | Low SES children responded to the hypothetical situations with aggressive action. Middle SES children responded with reassurance and sharing. Low SES children less socially competent. |
| Tatta (1997) | -Observations -Interviews | -Elementary teachers -Teacher's aids -Family advocates -Children ages 5 to 10 years | Explore how elementary children who are homeless are socialized into a transitional school setting. | Found that family ties and siblings play a role in classroom socialization. |
| Timberlake et al. (1994) | - Two structured scales not specified | 400 homeless 6 to 11-year olds and their mothers | View the impact of school attendance on self-esteem and loneliness | Homeless children who attended school had significantly higher self-esteem. |

| Vanhorst (1995) | - Social Skills Rating System -The Child Anxiety Scale -The Reynolds Child Depression Scale - Child Behavior Checklist -School records | 51 third, fourth and fifth grade homeless children and their mothers | Investigate social skills among children who are homeless. | Mothers identified their children as having low social skills. Many of the children rated themselves below average in social skills. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Walsh (1992) | -Observations -Interviews | 55 children who were homeless ages 4 to 18 years old | Examine children's self-concepts in the areas of academics, social, and athletic competence, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct. | Homelessness affected the children's self-concept. Children hid their homelessness due to embarrassment. |

In summary, the literature provides evidence that making and keeping friends is difficult for children who are homeless. They suffer from social isolation due to their embarrassment of being homeless. Children's sense of well-being also decreased during their homelessness. The gap in the literature continues to be the lack of research conducted exclusively with young children. Only one study focused on children ages 3 to 7 but they were not necessarily homeless. Literature specifically addressing homelessness, children, and a sense of belonging in the classroom is practically nonexistent.

**Theoretical Framework**

Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs begins with the need for food and shelter then moves to the next level of safety and security. Maslow believed that lower level needs must be met before higher level needs can be met. The need for shelter, adequate food, and appropriate clothing are not always met for the children who are homeless. When children who are homeless spend all their energy focused on the basic necessities of life it makes it hard for them to progress in Maslow's hierarchy. Medcalf (2008) said, "Many homeless children come to school focused solely on survival and fulfilling their basic needs. Before school personnel can begin to help these children start the learning process, they must help them meet the basic necessities for survival and well-being" (p. 27).

Once the basic physiological and safety needs are met, Maslow (1970) believed that humans move to level three, the need for belonging and love. This focuses on our desire to be accepted, to fit in, and to feel like we have a place in the world. "The needs for safety, belongingness, love relations and for respect can be satisfied only by other people. This means considerable dependence on the environment" (Maslow, 1999). Maslow believed that the absence of these elements can lead to social anxiety, loneliness, and depression. Children who are homeless that are able to miraculously escape concerns over their physical needs being met, Maslow's first two levels, often suffer from what Maslow referred to as the need for belonging and the need for affection (Tower, 1992). Children who become separated from their family due to homelessness may lose their sense of love. It is at this level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs that the development of

social belonging will be discussed in this research by exploring factors that allow and inhibit the development of social belonging for the children who are homeless.

According to Maslow (1970), when level three is not met children cannot progress to level four which includes the development of self-esteem and esteem for others. "Certainly children who do not fare well on Maslow's first three levels are unlikely to achieve adequate self-esteem and self-actualization. Their inability to have even their most basic needs satisfied translates into a variety of problems" (Tower, 1992, p. 45).

In this research I also explored factors that contribute to the development of social belonging as viewed through Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. In a previously mentioned study by Graham-Bermann et al. (1996) it was determined that environmental stress was a significant contributor to adjustment for the children who were homeless. In this study I will also explore the influence of environment as a factor contributing to the development of social belonging for children who are homeless.

 According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) the innermost level of the environment is called the microsystem and has the most direct effect on children because it involves the interpersonal relationships experienced by the individual in a face-to-face setting including a child's immediate surroundings, such as family, friends, and school (Bergen, 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).  The microsystem as defined by Bronfenbrenner is "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (p. 22).

The second level of the environment is called the mesosystem and is the connection between two or more microsystems such as home and school (Bergen, 2008;

Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that development is enhanced when there is a strong link between microsystems. This is an issue children who are homeless may face when there is a lack of connection between their school environment and home environment or home environment and friends due to constant mobility. Participant interviews were used to explore whether the link between microsystems is a factor that contributes to the development of social belonging in the school environment for children who are homeless.

The third level of the environment is the exosystem which is a setting where children are not directly a part of but may still influence their present and future development (Bergen, 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Examples may include a parents' job, shelter rules or school board decisions (Shankar-Brown, 2008). Often children must leave shelters early in the morning and not return until long after the school day ends. These rules then effect children even though they are not directly involved in the decision making process.

The macrosystem is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) next level and consists of cultural values, customs, laws, and resources. Although this system is the most distant from the children, this layer has a strong influence on the other layers. Laws such as The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act 2001 have a direct impact on children who are homeless. Also the cultural values in the homeless community have an effect on the children being raised in that culture.

Bronfenbrenner eventually added the chronosystem which includes a historical context that affects the setting (Bergen, 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The chronosystem focuses on the changes over time in the environments in which a person is living

(Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It also focuses on life transitions. These transitions can be normative, for example school entry, or nonnormative, for example moving. "Such transitions occur throughout the life span and often serve as a direct impetus for developmental change" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 724). Also important on the impact of the environmental changes is the children's age.  The age children become homeless and the length of time they remain so are included in the chronosystem.

This research focused on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how these needs may be contributing factors to the development of social belonging in the school environment for children who are homeless. It also predominantly focused on Bronfenbrenner's microsystem as the children's social belonging in the school environment was investigated. This study would be incomplete though, if it did not also recognize that a relationship exists between the children's school environment and shelter environment in the mesosystem. It is through the exploration of these systems that this study explored contributing factors associated with the social belonging in the classroom for this population.

## Summary

This literature review first pointed to the importance of social belonging for children and the repercussions that exist when there is a lack of social belonging. Next this literature review was used to expose the urgent issues associated with children who are homeless. The reality for the children who are homeless is that they are more likely to suffer from academic, behavioral, and social and emotional problems. The victims of homelessness are the innocent children who may never reach their potential physically,

emotionally or academically. A home is a person's connection to schools, friends, and family. Without a home, children may not feel the security they need to proceed through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

The literature review also showed that children who are homeless have a variety of challenges and they express themselves in different ways when coping with these challenges. Research showed that most children who are homeless live in poverty with substandard living conditions.  These children face stresses everyday that most children cannot even imagine including negative peer and teacher attitudes and unstable shelter life. They move from place to place making it difficult to make friends and stay enrolled in school. Friends are meant to help you through the ups and downs, to share joys and sorrows, and to share secrets. Children who are homeless do not have this opportunity that they so desperately need because making and keeping friends, enjoying social activities and being part of a peer group may elude them. They are unable to invite friends home after school because they have no home to which to invite them, shelter rules do not allow them to invite guests, or children do not want others to see how they live. They miss their old friends with whom they no longer have contact and are too embarrassed to make new friends. This embarrassment has led some children to experience social isolation. Social belonging was shown to be an important developmental issue. Conditions related to homelessness may create challenges for children to develop social belonging.

Previous studies cited left a gap in the literature because few studies involved younger children who were homeless and did not focus on social belonging in the classroom for children who were homeless. This study focused on factors that contribute

to and impede the development of social belonging in the school environment for the children who are homeless. Furthermore it included the perspectives of the children ages 5 to 7 and other key people in the children's lives.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

**Qualitative Research**

Chapter three includes the description of research methodology along with the methods and procedures that were used to gather and analyze data needed to answer the study's research questions. A qualitative methodology and specifically a multi-case study research design was implemented to explore the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the classroom for 5 to 7 year old children who are homeless in a metropolitan southeastern city in the United States. The views of the children, their parents, the teachers, and the counselors who work with this population were explored.

A qualitative research approach, "seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). A qualitative approach is used when the research problem can best be explored through an in-depth understanding of the issue or issues from the viewpoint of individuals who have direct experience in the context or setting (Hatch, 2002). According to Creswell (2008), in a qualitative approach a researcher is dependent on the views of the participants; asks broad, general questions; uses the words from participants during collection of data; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner. Qualitative research is used to gain insight into the participant's views. It helps explain and provide understanding of the

phenomena through intensive collection of narrative data from interviews, observations, and pictures (Borland, 2001). Qualitative research includes empathetic understanding and deep consideration for the participants and enables the researcher to view social interactions in greater depth and detail (Huberman & Miles, 2005; Shank, 2006).

A key tenet of qualitative research is that absolute truth is impossible to establish. Truth is bound by the place in which it is observed, the context, and a point in time (Borland, 2001). By studying both the research participants and their environment, qualitative researchers are able to develop deeper understandings of the phenomenon being studied.

One advantage of using qualitative research for this study was that it allowed for a more in-depth understanding of social belonging for children in the school environment who are homeless because a voice was given to those who have firsthand experience with this population. This is an advocacy/participatory worldview because the hope of this study was to hear the voices of a marginalized group. The researcher also hoped to raise the consciousness of the educational administrators concerning the issue of social belonging in the school environment for the children who are homeless. Using a qualitative research approach allowed the issues to be viewed from a human standpoint and not from a statistical or numerical perspective. According to Stake (1995) qualitative researchers strive to understand the human experience rather than the cause and effect. Qualitative researchers work with fewer cases than quantitative researchers in order to "study the experience of real cases operating in real situations" (Stake, 2006, p.3). Each case is seen as unique and is not compared using a number of variables but by observing people in their natural setting.

Social belonging is a complex phenomenon and understanding it in-depth requires a combination of naturalistic methods. According to Stake (1995), when conducting observations in the natural setting, it is important to be unobtrusive in the participant's environment. The researcher tries to observe what would happen even if he or she had not been present. Using this qualitative approach I had the ability to interview the children and observe them in their natural setting where social activities occurred. I was able to observe the children in their context of the classroom, lunch room, and other areas social activities occurred which allowed me to better understand what may contribute to the development of social belonging in the school environment for these children who are homeless. Because an in-depth understanding involving the participant's voice was important, qualitative research was the most appropriate approach for this study.

Boxill and Beaty (1990) provide an example of how the qualitative approach was used in their study pertaining to the interactions that take place between mothers and children in public night shelters. They chose qualitative methodology because it provided them the "means of describing and critically analyzing the mother/child interaction among homeless women and their children" (p.52). Because qualitative research places a high value on insightful understanding of human experiences, they were able to better observe the human experiences of their participants using naturalistic methods. Data was collected using participant/observations and open-ended interviews which produced descriptive text data. Analysis of this data emphasized and facilitated the understanding of a particular human experience within a specific context. The interviews were intended to elicit the participant's understanding of their relationships rather than a particular piece of information or singular response. Similar to Boxill and Beaty's study, this study also

relied on the observations and the voices of the participants to capture the understanding of the issue being studied.

**Multiple Case Study Approach**

For this research I implemented a multiple case study approach. Case studies have been used by qualitative researchers in the fields of psychology, education and the social sciences (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003). Several respected researchers view case study as a strategy for inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

In qualitative research, a case study involves the study of a "bounded system" which focuses on either the case or the issue that is illustrated by the case and provides understanding of the case in an in-depth manner (Stake, 1995). My study was "bounded" in several ways. First my research was bounded by setting. This research took place in two shelters and in two schools in the Southeastern part of the United States. Second my research was bounded by time. This study took place between August and February. Due to the transient nature of the participants, the time frame was crucial. Third my research was contextually bounded by focusing on children who are homeless. Yin (2003) states that a case study is most appropriate in situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon studied from its context.

In qualitative research a better understanding of a particular case is desired so a case study does not follow specific guidelines but allows the research to evolve (Yin,

2003). Merriam (1998) explains that "the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than specific variables, in discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19).

A multiple case study examines several individual cases and links them together. Each case has its own unique people and problems, but the interest of the multiple case study is in the phenomenon exhibited in those cases (Stake, 2006). According to Stake a series of organized procedures, not guidelines, are required to implement a multiple case study. These procedures include (1) selecting an issue to be researched; (2) developing a central research question; (3) determining data sources and gathering data; (4) organizing, examining, and analyzing the collected data; and (5) reporting the findings using a cross-case analysis. Because my intent was to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the classroom, the multiple case study approach was used to study five groups of participants who had firsthand knowledge concerning this issue. A central research question and sub-questions were developed that answered "what" and "how" questions.  Specifically I tried to understand "what" factors contributed to the development of social belonging in the school environment for children who are homeless and "how" the living situation of these children impacted their development of social belonging both positively and negatively. According to Merriam (1998) a case study explores these questions in order to explain the reasons for a problem. Extensive data was gathered through multiple sources including interviews, observations, and a collection of artifacts (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin 2003). Data was organized and analyzed for each case. The first case included the children, the second case their parents, and the third case the teachers and counselors who work with these children in the school setting. Once the individual cases were

analyzed, I compared the perspectives of these three cases on the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the school environment to determine the similarities and differences. For these reasons a multiple case study was utilized.

## Philosophical Assumptions

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) qualitative researchers approach research with a philosophical assumption in which the researchers bring their own set of beliefs, paradigms, or worldviews to the research project. These assumptions are used to inform the conduct and writing of any qualitative study. Creswell (2007) believed that good qualitative researchers should keep philosophical assumptions to a minimum because they influence the process of inquiry.

A social constructivism worldview will guide this research.  Qualitative research and the beginning of constructivism can be traced back to Kant (1966). He believed that reality is constructed by the research participant. For this reason a constructivist's goal of research is to incorporate the participants' views of the situation as much as possible. According to Creswell (2007), in this worldview, participants seek understanding of the world in which they live allowing the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing the meanings of experiences into a few categories.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), philosophical assumptions guide qualitative research. The first assumption is ontological and explores the nature of reality. According to Hatch (2002), reality is constructed by participants who experience their world from their own vantage point. Different realities may exist for the researcher and the reader. Kant (1966) believed that one cannot separate an objective reality from the

research participant who is experiencing, processing, and labeling reality. I too, like Hatch, believe that participants can have different interpretations of a similar experience causing multiple views. Because of the opportunity for multiple views it was my responsibility to listen to the participants and report these views in my findings. I used quotes of the participants to provide specific concrete evidence, from the participants' viewpoint and in their own words, to support the themes that emerged.

The epistemological assumption examines the way knowledge is achieved and explores the interaction between the participant and the researcher. Kant (1966) and other constructivists believe that the participant and researcher can influence one another and I too believe this to be true. It is impossible and undesirable in a case study for researchers to be distant and objective (Hatch, 2002). I spent time with the child participants before the one-on-one interviews. This time included spending one night a week for seven months with the children in order for the children to feel comfortable with me. We engaged in different activities including homework, eating together, playing outside and reading together. This allowed for a more relaxed experience for the participants and led to a better opportunity to explore the participants and their experiences in their own setting. Specific time was not set aside for the mothers but they were aware of the time I spent with their children and this aided in the mothers feeling more comfortable around me. Additional time spent with the teachers and counselors was limited to initial telephone calls and e-mails. Observations were conducted with each child in his or her school environment and were important because they allowed me to gain an "insider's" view into the experiences of my participants. Due to the time that participants and I spent together we were able to be more relaxed around each other during the research process.

An axiological assumption focuses on the belief that all research includes the value system of the inquirer, the paradigm used, and the social and cultural norms for either the inquirer or the participant (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). An axiological assumption allows the researcher to acknowledge his or her own values and the participant's values. I believe it is difficult to not bring my own beliefs and biases into research but I addressed this issue by exploring both the interpretations of the participants and my own interpretations. I also "bracketed" my personal experiences and reported my values and biases as recommended by Creswell (2008). During my research I first collected my data from study participants and then determined what could logically be derived from this data. Any conclusions made from the themes that emerged were my interpretations and do not imply that other conclusions could not be made as well. In qualitative research it is also assumed that researchers will provide details of the findings before other readers can transfer findings to other settings (Stake, 1995). Research is described more on an individual case basis than on the ability to generalize. I believe this to be true because my interpretations might be different from other researchers exploring the same phenomenon as each researcher brings his or her own values and biases to the research. Finally, with regard to causal linkage, constructivists assume there is no distinguished cause and effect because everything is being shaped simultaneously (Stake, 1995). I find this assumption harder to agree with because I believe there may be evidence of cause and effect relationships with regard to behaviors and the ability to establish factors contributing to the development of social belonging in the school environment; however it might be impossible to establish that evidence in this dissertation due to time restriction and design of this study.

## Sampling

Participants for this study were purposefully selected. According to Patton (2002), the goal of purposeful sampling is to allow researchers to be intentional when selecting individuals, those referred to as the "best informants", and intentionally selected sites to learn or understand the phenomenon of interest. Purposeful sampling provides a constructive framework for thinking about whom to interview (Hatch, 2002). More specifically homogeneous sampling, which involved selecting sites and participants that possessed similar characteristics, was utilized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each site included the child's shelter and the respective school and each participant (parent, teacher, and counselor) was associated with that specific child.

According to Stake (1995) and Yin (2003), case study research requires a detailed description of the setting and the participants because the context is crucial to understanding the participants and their experiences. Since my research took place in a real-life context, it was important to first develop a deeper understanding of the setting and the participants so that the research findings were placed in their social and cultural context. This was also necessary in order to incorporate Bronfenbrenner's theory into my research.

This research was first conducted utilizing three groups of participants. After initial coding and theme development it was determined that more groups were needed before redundancy would be met. After two more groups were added and the additional information was coded and themed it was determined that the research had reached saturation.

**Sites**

This study was conducted in two family shelters and two schools in the southeastern section of the United States. For this study the shelters were named Family's Hope Shelter and Family's Joy Shelter and the schools were named School of Hope and School of Joy respectively. These shelters were chosen because of previous relationships established with the children at each location. They were also chosen because the environments were more stable than other shelters which allowed for a more continuous study. Families did not have to vacate each day in hopes of returning to an open spot each night. Both shelters allowed for extended stays as long as the strict guidelines, set by the shelters, were followed. Residents could lose the privilege to live in the facilities if rules were broken. Family's Hope shelter was a large facility where residents lived in dorm style rooms that had shared connected bathrooms. Mothers and their children all lived in the same room. Residents did not prepare their own meals but ate cafeteria style. Family's Joy was a transitional housing facility for those who had moved out of the Family's Hope shelter. This was an apartment style facility in which a woman and her children may have their own rooms and families prepared meals for themselves. The School of Hope was located in the city limits of a large city and is open to the public for those who live within the school district. The School of Joy was a private Christian school that required tuition to attend. Students attended from areas both inside and outside the school district. Tuition for Family's Joy children was paid though scholarship funds provided through the school.

Parent and child interviews were conducted at the shelters and teacher and counselor interviews were conducted in the schools. Observations of the children were

conducted in the school environment. This provided a better understanding of the school environment and a contextual understanding of the children's behavior. These observations allowed for more thick rich descriptions during the study's reporting phase (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Sample**

After reaching saturation, this study consisted of 17 participants which is considered, by Creswell (2007), an acceptable number of participants for a multiple case study. These participants included three mother/child pairs from Family's Hope shelter, two mother/child pairs from Family's Joy shelter, three teachers and one counselor from School of Hope, and two teachers and one counselor from School of Joy. Each of the five teachers was connected to each of the five children as their primary classroom teacher. All 17 participants who were asked to join the study agreed to participate and completed the study.

**Recruitment**

The shelter's director, who represents both shelters, and the school's principals were asked to take on the role of a gatekeeper. The role of a gatekeeper is to assist the researcher in gaining entrance into the site and help researcher identify the participants (Hatch, 2002). The director identified qualifying residents who were English speaking, non-court ordered residents of the shelter, and who had a qualifying child age five to seven. The IRB required that mothers were self appointed to the shelter rather than court ordered to avoid legal issues. The recruitment letters for the mothers containing the

details of the study were given by the gatekeeper at the shelter to qualifying mothers at two homeless shelter locations (Appendix A). Copies of the mother and child interview questions (Appendices I and J) were attached to the recruitment letters in order to allow participants to view questions before consenting. I then called those mothers identified by the director as interested in participating in the study. After the mother participants were enlisted, consent forms were explained to the participants during a face-to-face meeting and then signed (Appendix F). These forms explained the research process and included a place for the mother to provide consent for me to interview her child, her child's teacher and counselor and observe her child in school. All consent forms were signed and dated at least 24 hours before observations were conducted. Once the mother/child pairs were identified, principals from the children's respective schools were contacted for permission to conduct observations of the children and interview the teachers and counselors in their school environment. After an initial verbal consent from the principals, a recruitment letter (Appendix B) and gatekeeper consent form (Appendix C) were e-mailed to the principals. Once written permission was received from the principals, teachers and counselors were contacted by phone to participate. Next, recruitment letters were e-mailed to those teachers and counselors identified with the children participating in the study (Appendices D and E). A copy of the interview questions (Appendices K and L) was attached to the recruitment letters in order to allow participants to view questions before consenting. After teacher and counselor participants were enlisted, consent forms were explained to the participants during a face-to-face meeting and then signed (Appendices G and H).

## Data Collection

### Data Sources

According to Yin (2003), a requirement and strength of case study is to collect multiple sources of information for investigation. For details of data collected see Table 5 below. Interviews are important because they can uncover the meaning behind participant experiences and how they make sense of the world (Hatch, 2002). Hatch also argues that observations help researchers understand the culture, setting or social phenomenon of the study from the participant's perspective. Observations present researchers with opportunities to both observe and participate, which then allow the researchers to better experience the participant's reality (Huberman & Miles, 2005). The observations allow researchers to generate a picture that could be used to support information gathered during interviews. According to Stake (2006) and Yin (2003), interviews and observations are the most meaningful and essential sources of information for a case study. An additional data source is unobtrusive data which may include artifacts, documents, personal communications, and records. In my study artifacts included children's drawings depicting events from their school day. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) triangulation of the multiple data sources is crucial because it provides validation of one piece of information to be validated against another piece of information. Triangulation encourages credibility and accuracy. This study involved the gathering and the triangulation of a variety of information through interviews, observations, and the collection of artifacts.

As the researcher I was immersed in the study. I was able to spend time with the children once every week in a role other than interviewer/observer. This allowed me to spend time with the participants building a rapport with them. During my weekly visits with the children I also tried making contact with the mothers. Sometimes this included conversations and sometimes just a wave. The mothers were able to see me spending time with their children. I was least immersed with the teachers and counselors because they were not part of my weekly visits to the shelters.

**Table 5**

*Data Collected*

|  | **Children** | **Mothers** | **Teachers** | **Counselors** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Group One** | 2 interviews<br>1 classroom observation<br>1 lunchroom observation<br>1 PE observation<br>1 after-school program observation<br>1 artifact | 1 interview<br>1 parent/child interaction observation<br>2 follow-up interview | 1 interview<br>2 follow-up interview | 1 interview<br>2 follow-up interview |
| **Group Two** | 2 interviews<br>1 classroom observation<br>1 lunchroom observation<br>1 PE observation<br>1 after-school program observation<br>1 artifact | 1 interview | 1 interview<br>2 follow-up interview | (same counselor as group one) |

| Group Three | 2 interviews 1 classroom observation 1 lunchroom observation 1 PE observation 1 after-school program observation 1 artifact | 1 interview 1 parent/child interaction observation 2 follow-up interview | 1 interview 2 follow-up interview | (same counselor as group one) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group Four | 2 interviews 1 classroom observation 1 lunchroom observation 1 PE observation 1 artifact | 1 interview 1 parent/child interaction observation 2 follow-up interview | 1 interview 2 follow-up interview | 1 interview 2 follow-up interview |
| Group Five | 1 interview 1 classroom observation 1 lunchroom observation 1 artifact | 1 interview 2 follow-up interview | 1 interview 2 follow-up interview | (same counselor as group four) |

**Process**

The data collection process began in August and continued through February. In order to gain entry into the Family's Hope shelter and the Family's Joy shelter I communicated on multiple occasions with the director of the after school program/shelter's liaison. I also spoke with school personnel affiliated with the children from the shelters for initial approval. Before data collection began, an interview protocol was developed that consisted of semi-structured open-ended questions that allowed participants to answer both factual and opinion questions (Yin, 2003). These questions were similar to questions developed for this study's pilot study (Ott, 2011). The pilot

study explored factors contributing to the development of social belonging for children who are homeless from the perspective of two afterschool directors and two school liaisons who worked at the shelters involved in this study. Questions used during that study were beneficial and helped lead the pilot study to determine themes and ultimately answer the central research question (Appendix O).

The next step in the data collection process included interviews with participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis. The interviews were an important aspect of this qualitative research because they allowed for the participant's voices to be heard. The participant's own words were used for rich thick descriptions during the reporting of the study findings. Consenting mothers, teachers, and counselors were asked to participate in the initial audio-taped interview that lasted 30-60 minutes. Mothers were interviewed at their convenience at the shelter in a room unoccupied by others. Teachers and counselors were interviewed at their convenience at school in a room unoccupied by others. Member checking was conducted in two phases. First, interview summaries were sent by e-mail or handed to each of the adult participants for their feedback and clarification. Second, after data had been analyzed and themes established, I again contacted the adult participants either in person or through e-mail. For this second phase participants were asked for their feedback concerning the themes that were identified through the analysis.

According to Hanna, Risden and Alexander (1997), elementary aged children are able to answer questions and are not generally self-conscious about being observed. Children in this study were involved in two audio-taped interviews that lasted 10-15 minutes each. This amount of time was the maximum time children were willing to sit

and answer questions. Children were interviewed at their convenience at the shelter. During the first of the two audio-taped interviews, three child interviews were conducted with a mother present and two interviews were conducted with the child without his or her mother. During the second audio-taped interview the children drew pictures of their day and described the events they drew. Children were never removed from class at any time for an interview.

Once initial interviews were conducted with a mother/child participant pair then the observations of the children began. Observations were important to demonstrate better understanding of the participants. As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), during this study, observation protocols were used (Appendix M) for recorded notes in the field and were both descriptive and reflective in nature. Protocols were used to paint a picture of the setting, participants, activities, events, and personal reactions (Bogden & Biklen, 1982). I observed the children of both shelters in their school environments to witness firsthand the social behaviors of the children who are homeless. Children from both schools were observed at least one time each in the classroom, at PE, and at lunch. Children at School of Hope were also observed during an afterschool program. An afterschool program was not available for observation at School of Joy. The purpose of the observations was to view the child's ability to initiate activities, interact with the teacher, communicate verbally and non-verbally with classmates and teachers, identify any deficits in their social abilities. These observations allowed me to view the student's ability to fit in, whether they felt accepted, and if they felt part of their environment which is Maslow's definition of social belonging. At no time were children removed from the classroom during the observation. These observations allowed comparison of

firsthand knowledge with the information collected in the interviews and provided additional information that interviews, particularly with children, did not provide. The observations were helpful when reporting on the interrelatedness of human behavior and the social environment as discussed in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical perspective.

The participants were not in danger and did not experience any discomfort. They were informed of their right to discontinue the task anytime during the interview or observations if they felt in danger or discomforted. My research was focused on the participating/consenting children. When asked by children the reason for my visit, I said "I am a college student and have come to see what children do while they are in school". While other children who were not study participants were present, their actions and responses were not reported.

On the same day as a classroom observation, the child was interviewed for a second time. These interviews were conducted during the shelter's afterschool program in a private room. During this follow-up interview the child was asked to draw a picture depicting his or her day. The child was then asked to describe this activity and how he or she felt about his or her day at school. Because I had observed the child that day I was able to compare the responses to what I actually observed. With this comparison I was able to get a better understanding of how the children described belonging and how this sense of belonging was portrayed by them in the school environment.

After completing the 21 interviews, 17 observations and collecting the 5 artifacts, I believed that this sample provided enough data to reach saturation for this study. However it was not until after all the data analysis was completed that this assumption was determined as truth.

**Data Analysis**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), data analysis is open-ended and inductive. This is in contrast to the focused and deductive analysis common in conventional inquiry. Qualitative researchers collect and analyze data simultaneously to allow for an emergent design (Hatch, 2002). Each phase of the process may shift after data collection has begun and questions may change. This allows the study to emerge from the participant's view. The analysis conducted is holistic in nature which views the entire case rather than specific aspects of the case (Yin, 2003). When conducting data analysis in a multiple case study, researchers must analyze the data at two levels: within-case and across cases (Stake, 2006). With-in case analysis begins by preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or discussion (Creswell, 2007). For this study with-in case analysis was conducted for each of the three cases of participants individually: children, mothers, and teachers/counselors. After the analysis of each case was completed, I then conducted a cross-case analysis in which I analyzed the responses of three separate cases against each of the other cases. This analysis is not simply a matter of listing the finding from each case but is a comparison of the themes and sub-themes from each of the cases which aids in the development of categories that emerge through the cross-case analysis.  According to Stake, the cross-case analysis allows for the ability to identify uniformity and disparity across the cases.

Data collection and analysis inform or drive each other. This is completed in a zigzag process which requires data collection and analysis to continue back and forth throughout the process. I followed Creswell's (2003) six step process as I moved through the data analysis and interpretation. In step one I organized the data which involved transcribing the interviews and typing up the fieldnotes. I then read and organized the data into key ideas. In step two I read through the data several times to develop a sense of the data and to grasp the overall meaning from the interviews and observations. In step three I begin the detailed analysis with the coding process. I used NVIVO 9 by QSR International to help in the organization and analysis of the data. During this step each transcribed interview was analyzed line-by-line and open coding was used to record key concepts. Open coding helps form initial categories of information about the issue being studied (Creswell, 2008). In step four, while keeping the research questions in mind, I searched for repetitive words or phrases that helped me identify codes which lead to themes. In step five I constructed a narrative using the detailed description of the themes. I utilized information from the observations, interviews, and artifacts to aid in the construction of the narrative. Finally step six involved the interpretation of the data. Reflecting on the analyzed data I was able to answer the original research questions and address the purpose statement. Through the use of triangulation I made every effort to insure that the analysis and findings were reliable and valid. With the aid of NVIVO 9 I was able to visually display findings from my study using a coding tree.

In summary, I began this study with a central research question. I then selected six sub-questions that aided in the research of the central question. Extensive data was gathered including interviews, observations, and a collection of artifacts. To begin the

analysis, each participant's interview was transcribed verbatim. A within-case analysis was conducted using NVIVO 9 were I developed codes and themes for each of the three cases. It was evident that after coding and theming the 17 participant's interviews that saturation had been reached. Once the individual cases were analyzed I cross-analyzed the cases to compare the perspectives of these three cases to examine common threads. The overarching themes between the cases were used to explain the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the school environment.

## Establishing Credibility and Trustworthiness

The credibility of the data is imperative when conducting qualitative research because the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and the data analysis in the study (Bogden & Biklen, 1982; Huberman & Miles, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to establish trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend that researchers ask four questions about their research: (a) Is confidence established in the "truth" of the findings?, (b) Are the findings applicable for other contexts ?, (c) Are the findings consistent and could they be replicated ?, and (d) Are the findings neutral with the least amount of bias? Trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba includes credibility (internal validity), dependability (reliability), transferability (external validity), and confirmability (objectivity).

Credibility does not exist without dependability, so according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), both can be increased when specific techniques are employed. These include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, and audit. Creswell (2008) also discussed credibility when he

explained that triangulation, member checking, or audits can be used to determine accuracy or credibility. Triangulation involves a process of corroborating evidence from multiple individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection into descriptions and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As mentioned earlier, I used triangulation when corroborating the evidence from different individuals and different types of data. Triangulation was conducted with the data that was collected from each of the five groups within the study. Triangulation was also conducted during the with-in case analysis and during cross-case analysis. Member checking, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the most critical technique for establishing credibility. This approach involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to participants and asking them to check the study findings for accuracy and to determine if interpretations are fair and representative. Also mentioned earlier was my use of member checking. Adult participants in my study received summaries of their interviews to determine if I had captured what they had intended to say. No changes were implemented after this member checking. A second member checking was implemented after the data was analyzed. The themes and an interpretation of these themes were given to all of the adult participants for their feedback. The third strategy, audit or audit trail, documents the development of the study. According to Carcary (2009) when developing an audit trail, "a researcher provides an account of all research decisions and activities throughout the study. He/She examines the research process and the product of inquiry to determine the findings trustworthiness" (p. 15). The audit trail is used for clarification of all major decisions made through the research process to aid others in better understanding the

details of the study and for self reflection. The documentation of my audit trail for this research study can be viewed in appendix N.

In qualitative research, transferability is sometimes interchangeable with the term generalizability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) establishing transferability in naturalistic research is different than for quantitative research. Reliability in qualitative research cannot be assessed by usual methods of establishing reliability because naturalistic studies cannot be replicated and no two situations are the same (Guba, 1978). It is still possible to discuss the reliability of naturalistic studies. Within these studies researchers can provide the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transferability is possible. Denzin (1989) describes thick description as something that "presents detail, context, emotion, and the web of social relationships…[and] evokes emotionality and self-feelings…The voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interaction individuals are heard" (p.83). If other researchers, given the same data, would draw similar conclusions then the research may be said to be reliable (Newman, 1999). In my research rich, thick descriptions were given to describe the setting, participants, and participants' responses. Participant quotes were used to support my interpretations and descriptions.

Reflexivity is another strategy that can be used to avoid error or bias and therefore help to establish credibility. Reflexivity is defined by Creswell (2007) as the ability of the writer to be consciously aware of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study. The ability to be reflexive, to monitor one's own influences, and to be aware of one's own emotional responses are what allow qualitative

researchers the ability to get close to the participant's world to understand what is going

on (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the *Role of the Researcher* section I use bracketing to

comment on my past experiences and biases that had the potential to influence my

interpretation of my study. I also engaged in reflexivity through triangulation and

member checking.

Establishing confirmability is another step in the process toward trustworthiness.

This step is completely intertwined with the others and includes the use of the previously

mentioned audit trail, triangulation, or reflexive journal. According to Carcary (2009) an

audit trail is used to establish confirmability because it aids the reader in following each

stage of the research process and helps explain the research logic. This allows other

researchers to determine whether the findings are reliable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state

that the study's trustworthiness can be established by overlapping each of these

processes. Confirmability also insures that the study has sampled to saturation.

Finally, saturation is an important aspect of establishing credibility. According to

Yin (2003) sample size is determined by the number of cases required to reach saturation.

In other words, data is collected until no significant new findings are revealed. Originally

three groups were selected for my study then the two additional groups were added. I felt

that with these five groups redundancy or saturation to the interview questions occurred.

**Ethical Considerations**

To aid researchers in conducting ethical studies, the American Psychological

Association (APA) developed guidelines a researcher can use to ensure that everyone

involved in the study is treated ethically. Johnson and Christensen (2000) give assurance

of ethical acceptability if the following APA steps are taken.

1. You have to get the informed consent of the participant.

2. Any deception must be justified by the study's scientific, educational, or applied

   value.

3. The research participants must know that they are free to withdraw from the

   study at any time without prejudice.

4. The research participants are protected from physical and mental discomfort,

   harm, and danger that may arise from the research procedures.

5. The research participants have a right to remain anonymous, and the

   confidentiality of the participants and the data must be protected (p. 69).

The most important obligation for the researcher is to respect the rights, needs, values,

and desires of the participants (Creswell, 2003). Before proceeding with research I

completed the online Institutional Review Board (IRB) training and complied with all the

IRB requirements necessary to receive IRB approval.

All participants were given a recruitment letter (Appendices A, D, E) that

explained the time frame of the study, what would be expected of them during the study,

details about their confidentiality, participation in the study was voluntary, and their

ability to drop from the study at any time. Participants were also asked to sign a consent

form that clearly stated the purpose of the research, procedures, risks and discomforts,

and benefits (Appendices F, G, and H).

Protecting participants' confidentiality while collecting data, analyzing data, and

disseminating finding is of utmost importance (Patton, 2002). To ensure this

confidentiality, I kept all audiotapes, transcriptions, and other artifacts in a locked file

cabinet in my home and all information was stored on an encrypted computer.

Additionally, when reporting the study's findings each participant was identified by a

pseudonym to ensure his or her anonymity.

## Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was one of a participant-observer (Yin, 2003), as I not

only observed participants but also spent time with the participants building a rapport

with them. This rapport was established through visits to the shelters prior to beginning

research, clearly explaining the purpose of the study to the participants, and exhibiting

the skills that Yin explains are needed for data collection including having good listening

skills and showing lack of bias.

When beginning this study my knowledge about factors contributing to the

development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless was

limited. However, I have spent the past two years working with three specific homeless

groups and as a result have a better view of the world in which they live. One group with

whom I spent time included men who lived in a recovery shelter. Another group included

men, women and children who lived in low-income housing or on the streets. The last

group included mothers and children living in a shelter. In working with each of these

groups I tried to establish an understanding about the experiences of these individuals.

Having these opportunities allowed me to observe the day to day struggles and triumphs

this population faced. During this study I was able to better understand the paths the

children travel that lead them to struggle or thrive in their development of social belonging.

When reporting the findings it was my obligation to acknowledge my biases, values, and interests. As the researcher I have admitted that my background and experiences with the homeless was limited. I am a white female from a middle class background. I have never been homeless or lived in a shelter. Until this study, I had not ever known anyone personally who was homeless. I believe that never having been homeless or lived in a shelter allowed me to view the issues associated with this study from an outsider perspective.

**Summary**

Chapter three discusses the qualitative research approach. This includes discussion about the qualitative inquiry approach, philosophical assumptions, and the research sample. Also included in the chapter was information concerning data collection methods and procedures, data analysis procedures, establishing credibility, ethical considerations, and my role as a researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

**Case Study One: Children**

**Setting**

**Shelters.** The first shelter, Family's Hope, provided for the needs of

approximately 400 women and children. Their goal was to facilitate a life-changing

program for woman and children by providing tools necessary to overcome barriers to

success. This shelter provided medical services, counseling services, addiction counseling

services, life-skills training, and post-secondary education. They also offered state-

certified childcare, a daycare center open to the public and after school care for the

children who reside at the shelter. Other needs met by the shelter included three meals per

day, seven days a week and basic care which included supplying clothing, basic hygiene

products, and transportation.  This transportation was provided 24 hours a day, moving

women and children to and from work, school and medical appointments. The living

arrangements at Family's Hope shelter were set up in a dorm type arrangement with two

bedrooms connected by a bathroom. These rooms did not provide individual facilities for

cooking so residents ate in a common area. Women and their children entered this

program for various reasons; all needed help in their lives. Sixty percent of the residents

came from a Justice System referral program and were on parole, probation, or a re-

entry/transition program. The other forty percent of the women at Family's Hope shelter

were self-admitted. These included women who were homeless, escaping domestic

violence, wanted help with their drug abuse issues, or simply had nowhere else to turn. It was these women and their children who were the focus of this study. It was the hope of the shelter that by introducing women and children to Christ and offering a multitude of needed services, the shelter could help women and children attain a brighter future.

The second shelter, Family's Joy, was at a transitional housing facility that women and children moved into after graduating from Family's Hope shelter. Approximately ten families lived at Family's Joy shelter which was an apartment style facility where women and children had their own rooms and families prepared meals for themselves. The philosophy for Family's Joy shelter was the same as for Family's Hope shelter and the strict rules for both shelters were the same. Husband could rejoin their wives and children at Family's Joy shelter which allowed for the reestablishment of families.

**Schools**. The School of Hope was located in the city limits of an urban city and was open to the public for those living within the school district. The school district was the fourth largest in the state with 30,500 students, although there had been a continuous drop in enrollment for the past three decades. The School of Hope was one of 31 elementary (K-5th grade) schools in the system. The mission of the school system was to guide all students to achieve excellence in a safe, secure and nurturing environment and to meet the needs of a diverse student population who is prepared to succeed in a global society.

The School of Joy was a private Christian school founded in 1988 for children in grades K4 through 12th grade. The student to teacher ratio was 17:1 and there was an

active volunteer program (over 100 volunteers come each week to tutor students). For the

preceding five school years, 2007-2011, all graduates were accepted into college. The

philosophy at the School of Joy is to meet children at the point of their academic need

through a curriculum that emphasizes reading and math so that students can confirm to

themselves that they can achieve. The goal of the school was to meet the academic,

spiritual, and social needs of each student at the school in a Christ-centered environment.

School leaders believed that the school "was called" to a unique educational mission to

meet the needs of a predominantly urban, at-risk student body.

**Participants**

  For the purpose of this study, all participants were assigned pseudonyms to

protect their identities.

- Andrew was a Caucasian male, age five, and a kindergartener in Mrs. Adam's class at School of Hope. He was the son of Cheryl. Andrew was at one time removed from his home by DHR but had been living with his mother at Family's Hope shelter for the past 15 months.

- April was a mixed race female, age seven, and a first grader in Mrs. Bailey's class at School of Hope. She lived at the Family's Hope shelter with her mother Amy and younger brother but had other siblings who were not at the shelter. She moved in and out of the shelter three times in the past three years. By the end of the study she had once again left the shelter with her mother.

- Crystal was a Caucasian female, age seven, and a second grader at School of Hope in Mrs. Hunter's classroom. She lived at the Family's Hope shelter with her grandmother and little sister. Her father was in prison. Her mother and brother lived at the shelter for a short time but moved out leaving her to be raised by her grandmother.

- Austin was a Caucasian male, age five, and a kindergartener at School of Joy in Mrs. Rutherford's classroom. He lived at the Family's Joy shelter with his mother Tammy, half sister, and half brother. He has one additional half sibling who did not live at the shelter. His father was in a drug rehabilitation facility in the city.

- Wyatt was a Caucasian male, age six, and a first grader in Mrs. Kennedy's class at School of Joy. He lived at the Family's Joy shelter with his mother Emma and baby sister after having moved out of the Family's Hope shelter. His father was not involved in his life.

**Themes**

Each child offered his or her perspective regarding the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the classroom. Based on the data gathered from the children, I identified five themes: acceptance, stability, interaction, support, and understanding of social belonging. Additionally, based on the data collected, subthemes were identified (see Table 6).

**Acceptance.** The first and strongest theme identified for children was acceptance. All five children in the study voiced this as a major factor contributing to their development of social belonging in the classroom. Two subthemes were also identified: acceptance by peers and acceptance by teachers and counselors.

*Acceptance by peers.* Through both the interview process and the observations I was able to grasp the importance peer acceptance played in whether children felt as if they belonged socially in the classroom. When I asked the children "what makes you feel like you belong at school?" Crystal, Austin, and Wyatt said it was their friends. Andrew and April specifically named their friend(s) as those who helped them feel like they belonged at school. When it became obvious that peer acceptance (friends) was important to the children, I asked them how they went about making friends. Andrew, April, and Austin all mentioned that friends were nice to each other. For example when I asked April "Why are they your friends?" her reply was, "because some people are nice to you and some of 'em are mean." Interestingly, when I asked Crystal how she made friends at her new school her reply was, "they'd come up to me and ask me, "are you my friend?"" At that point they decided if they were friends. I observed some children say they were friends with someone one day and then claim to not be friends the next.

When I interviewed Andrew about his interactions with friends at School of Hope he told me about his lunchroom experiences. Andrew said, "I tell them to sit by me and they don't listen." "They don't listen" I said. Andrew replied "yeah, they go sit somewhere else." So I asked him what he did then and he replied "just sit by myself."

When I conducted my observation of Andrew in the lunchroom I made sure to watch for this interaction. Obviously it was not a onetime event because I was able to see this interchange among the students on the day of my visit just as Andrew had described it to me in his interview. When Andrew asked other children to sit by him they would just walk by without responding. The child who eventually sat by Andrew was from the same shelter as Andrew. I saw a similar event when I observed Crystal in the lunchroom. She tried to set her tray down several times but was told she would have to move because the seat was saved. This was not the case when I observed April at lunch. She sat down first and waved others to sit with her, which they did. Another interesting thing I observed during my visit to the lunchroom was that the children were not allowed to speak to each other while eating. So although Andrew did not have friends to sit with at lunch, this time together was not a time for social interaction. The fact that Andrew mentioned this interchange between himself and the other children though showed me that even when the he did not get to interact socially at lunch it was still important to sit with his friends. Because they did not want to sit with him he did not feel as accepted by his peers.

I also observed the children in PE. When Andrew entered the PE room the children were expected to follow a video to complete exercises. There was little interaction between students. Andrew was well behaved and followed instruction better than most but did not interact with the other children even when given the opportunity. Unlike Crystal's lunchroom experience, when she attended PE, two children called her over to watch them play. She did not join in their play though and soon decided to sit at a table and color.

I also observed Andrew in the classroom. Students were divided into groups which rotated to stations around the room. On several occasions I observed Andrew being left out of the activity in which his group was participating. At one center he quickly chose the spinner for the game but another boy took it away from him. At the computer center he sat down at a computer that did not have to share with someone else but another boy made him get up and move. During a game of Bingo Andrew won but two other boys in his group said they had won. Andrew stood up to the children some of the time but not always. So although Andrew mentioned that friends made him feel like he belonged at school, he repeatedly encountered negative peer interaction. I did not see any negative peer interaction between Andrew and those he called his friends but that was because I did not see any interaction between these children.

The other four children who also mentioned that friends made them feel like they belonged at school had more positive interactions with their peers. Except for Crystal's incident in the lunchroom, I did not observe any other negative peer interaction. Austin talked and laughed with his classmates during class time, lunch and PE. He also relied on his classmates to help him get the right answers in math. Similar to Austin, Wyatt looked to his classmates to help him get the right answers but his social interaction with his classmates was limited due to his own shyness.

*Accepted by teachers and counselors.* During the interview process the children had little to say about their teachers or counselors. When I asked April what made her feel like she belonged at school she said it was her teacher. Crystal and Austin also mentioned their teacher was nice. But it was more evident during the observations that

acceptance by teachers and counselors was important to the children. April initiated showing her picture to her teacher and was pleased with the affirmation she received back. She also waited in her seat when instructed and followed the directions of the teacher. At one point April approached the teacher and hugged her. Wyatt made sure to raise his hand high and waved it around when he knew the answer to a question. It was important for him to let the teacher know he knew the answer to her question. During my classroom visit with Austin he initiated a conversation with his teacher about something that had happened to him over the weekend. He was eager to share this part of his life with her. Crystal's artifact (Appendix P) was a drawing that included her writing, "I love my teacher and my school." This was an example of her feeling loved by her teacher and sharing that love with her teacher. Even though the children did not verbalize the importance they placed on teacher and counselor acceptance, I believe that these examples made it clear that their teacher's acceptance was something they strove to achieve.

**Stability.** The second strong theme focused on the child's need for stability. After initial analysis it appeared that children identified *mobility* as a subtheme under the theme identified as *stability*. It was later determined that *mobility* was not the issue children discussed during their interview because the actual act of moving was not an issue for the children who were homeless. Instead the children were more concerned about having familiar possessions with them when they moved and then establishing familiar surrounding once they were in a new location. For these reason the subtheme was: familiarity.

*Familiarity.* Due to the situations these children were in, there had been multiple moves for each of the children. Andrew had lived with his mother, then was moved into foster care, and then back in with his mother for the past 15 months. April, age 7, had already moved in and out of the Family's Hope shelter three times when I conducted the study. At the time of the interview with April she had been at the shelter for six weeks but moved out unexpectedly just a few weeks later. During her interview I asked her if it was it hard or easy when she moved and she replied, "It's hard. I'd go to another school, back to another school." She also mentioned that she had more fun when she was able to stay longer in one place. Crystal had lived in several locations before being left at the Family's Hope shelter with her grandmother. When I asked Crystal how she felt about having to move to a new school she said it made her mad. At the time of the interview Crystal had only been at her new school a few days. As residents of the Family's Joy transitional shelter, Austin and Wyatt, had experienced a little less mobility in recent years than the other children but had still moved several times before entering the shelter. Wyatt was the only child in the study who had attended the same school the previous year.

Due to their mobility, the children expressed and displayed their desire to have familiar objects and surroundings. One child spoke about familiarity concerning his possessions. When I asked Austin what belonging meant, he said, "It means to own, like a position that you own. (mother) possession (Austin) yeah possession." Austin went on to talk about things belonging to people so I asked him if people could belong and he responded, "Nope. People can't belong to people. People belong to God." For Austin

belonging meant having something that had moved from place to place with him. Like Austin, Andrew's display of familiarity was through a possession of an object. When Andrew first started school he did not want to leave his backpack in his locker in the hall. This was an item he had brought from "home" and he did not want to let it go in his unfamiliar surroundings.

Although the other children did not express their need for familiarity when I interviewed them, I did see examples during my observations. As mentioned earlier, April was the first in her class to claim her spot at the lunch table. She sat in the same spot everyday and did not want anyone to take her seat. She was happy to invite others to sit with her as long as she had her seat first. I saw Crystal claim her desk space by making sure to have only her supplies on her desk. She arranged her books around her desk in order to keep her space separate. Both girls wanted the stability of claiming something familiar.

One activity that was absent during my observations was the act of sharing. Crystal was the only child I saw share a possession with another child while at school. I did not see any other child share school supplies, PE equipment, or lunches.

**Interaction.** The third theme involved the issue of available opportunities for interaction. This theme explored the opportunities children had to interact with a variety of different classmates and the purposeful actions of providing or sometimes not providing opportunities for interaction. The subthemes were identified as: exposure to different classmates and opportunities to interact.

***Exposure to different classmates.*** When I asked Andrew about his friends at school he went into a lengthy discussion about his class being divided into groups that rotated to different centers. He told me that one of his friends was in his group called the "kittens" but his other friend was in the "bird" group. When I asked him how he became friends with the child in the bird group he told me matter-of-factly that they met at school. From this comment I concluded that they had been given opportunities throughout the day to interact with others besides during center time. I learned though, through my observations, that this was not the case. The friend he referred to was also from the shelter and there was very little exposure or time to interact with others in his class. Different from Andrew, April talked about her friends at school, some of whom were from the shelter and some who were not. When I observed April she did seem to have more interaction with others in her class during lunch and PE. In the classroom though, her desk was separated from the others and she was not exposed to the interactions that took place among the other children. During my observations of Andrew, April, and Crystal in the afterschool program the children were exposed to a variety of different students but they tended to spend the most time with the others from the shelter. My observations of Austin and Wyatt revealed that the children attending School of Joy had more exposure to different classmates than those attending School of Hope. Both Austin and Wyatt spent time in the classroom interacting with different groups of children.

***Opportunities to interact.*** This was an important subtheme because all five of the children mentioned how much they wanted to spend time with their friends. But some of the children mentioned that they did not get to have time with their friends at school. Andrew mentioned that he liked to draw pictures with his friends at school but that they did not go outside to play because his teacher was allergic to grass. Not once during my visits to School of Hope did I see a class outside playing. Crystal told me that she liked the shelter better than school. When I asked her why she said, "It is funner. I get to see a lot of people and play with my friends." I asked her if she got to play with people at school and she said no. Crystal did tell me that she had more fun in the after school program because she was able to spend time with her friends. It was April's artifact (Appendix P) that exemplified her value of playing with friends. When I asked her to draw a picture about something good that happed at school that day, she drew a picture of herself at PE which said, "Today at school I was fun. I like my school. Today at school we plad (played) in PE." This picture showed the importance April placed on interaction with her friends.

When I asked Wyatt why he liked school he said it was because he got to play with his friends. Wyatt's artifact (Appendix P) was also an example of the importance of providing opportunities to interact. I tried multiple times to get Wyatt to draw a picture for me about his day at school but he wanted to have nothing to do with drawing for me. Finally after several days he was willing to draw a picture about his field trip to the science museum. Once Wyatt got started he drew and drew explaining about everything he saw and those with whom he had spent the day. This opportunity outside the

classroom to interact with his classmates had made an impact on him and he was finally willing to share this with me.

When I asked Austin why certain people were his friends at school he told me it was because they got to play together in the classroom and on the playground and they got to eat together. I was able to observe this on my visits to School of Joy as the children at this school were freer to interact with their classmates and were allowed time to play on the playground. It was apparent through my interviews with the children and my observations at the schools that the children placed a high value on their ability to interact with their friends. It was also clear during my observations that children who were not given the opportunities to interact with their friends had a more difficult time feeling a sense of belonging and did not enjoy school as much as those who were given the opportunity to interact with their friends.

**Support.** The fourth theme identified for the children was support and more specifically support from their family. This led to the subtheme entitled: family support.

*Family support.* As will be mentioned in the fifth theme, understanding of social belonging, the children who verbalized what belonging meant to them discussed that it was connected with their family. Andrew expressed that to belong meant he was loved by his mama and daddy. During my interview with Andrew I was able to observe interactions between Andrew and his mother. It was clear to see that their relationship was positive and Andrew felt loved and safe in her presence. Even though Andrew did not get to see his father often, because he was in another shelter, he did talk about his

father in positive terms. April also mentioned family as something that helped her feel like she belonged. She was happy to tell me all about her siblings who did not live at the shelter with her. Crystal mentioned her mother when asked what belonging meant. This was interesting since she was not living with her mother but was living at the shelter with her grandmother. During our interview her mother showed up at the shelter and Crystal was very happy to see her.

Austin did not express in his interview that family was related to his feelings of belonging but I was able to observe interactions between his mother and him during my interview. He was very shy at first and did not want to answer my questions. He crawled up in his mother's lap and at first would only shake his head to answer my questions. It was apparent that he felt very safe in his mother's lap. After a short time Austin began to open up to me but did not leave him mother's lap. Wyatt was the only child who did not mention family in his interview and that I did not get to see any examples of family support between his mother and him. So although the children did not fully verbalize their value of family support it was obvious through their actions that family support was important to them.

**Understanding of social belonging.** The fifth and final theme identified for the children was their understanding of social belonging. Children ages 3 to 5 years are most likely unable to understand that other people have different feelings and experiences from their own. For this reason I was interested to know if the children would understand the concept of social belonging since this involved understanding how other people feel about them. This subtheme was identified as: simplistic understanding

***Simplistic understanding.*** Four of the five children in the study expressed their understanding of belonging in basic terms. Andrew said belonging meant "mamma and daddy", April said "family", Austin said "possessions" and Crystal said belonging meant "mommy" but none of the children could explain belonging any further. Austin and Wyatt mentioned in their interviews that they did not know the meaning of belonging. So I tried asking in different ways "can you tell me what the word belong means to you?", "do you know what belonging means?", and "can you describe what it means to belong?" Austin and Wyatt still answered "I don't know." But when I asked questions such as "what makes you feel like you belong at school" or "does anyone help you feel like you belong at school" the children would answer the question by using terms like friends, family, and playing together. Even though the children used these terms to talk about social belonging they did not connect these words or concepts together. Another example of the simplicity of understanding the concept of belonging was through Austin's artifact (Appendix P) I asked Austin to draw a picture that showed me something good about school that day or to draw anything that happened that made him feel like he belonged. He drew a flower. When I asked him why, he said "just because I wanted to." For Austin there was not a connection between what took place at school and his sense of belonging. I found it interesting that Austin was the only child who said belonging meant "possessions" and when he drew a picture it was of an object that could be possessed by him.

**Table 6**

*Themes and Subthemes of Factors Contributing to the Development of Social Belonging in the Classroom: Children*

| Acceptance | Stability | Interaction | Support | Understanding of Social Belonging |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Accepted By Peers | Familiarity | Exposure To Different Classmates | Family Support | Simplistic Understand |
| Accepted By Teachers and Counselors | | Providing Opportunities To Interact | | |

**Case Study Two: Mothers**

**Setting**

The mothers resided in both Family's Hope and Family's Joy shelters. The descriptions for these shelters can be found in case study one.

**Participants**

For the purpose of this study, all participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities.

- Cheryl was a Caucasian female, age 39 and the mother of Andrew. She had a second son who was three years old. She had been an RN before drugs caused her to lose her job and temporarily lose her children. She and her sons had lived at Family's Hope shelter for 15 months, and even though

she had graduated from the drug rehabilitation program, she planned to continue living at the shelter indefinitely.

- Amy was a Caucasian female, age 27, and the mother of April. She had a second child who was two and a half years old. In 2008 she lived at Family's Hope shelter for eight months then in 2010 moved back for ten months, and in 2011 returned due to lack of housing options. She worked at the shelter in the day care. During the study she unexpectedly left the shelter again without notice.

- Abby was a Caucasian female, age 42, and the grandmother of Crystal. She had a 17 year old daughter and 25 year old son. It was the son's children who lived at Family's Hope shelter with her. She lived at the shelter for six months and planned to continue living there without moving to transitional housing.

- Tammy was a Caucasian female, age 31, and the mother of Austin. She was adopted when she was born. She had her first of four children when she was 14 years old. She at one time lost custody of her children due to domestic violence in the home. She had also had bouts with drug addiction. She had originally lived at the Family's Hope shelter but moved four months prior to the Family's Joy shelter. She worked in the day care at Family's Hope shelter.

- Emma was a Caucasian female, age 20's , and the mother of Wyatt. She was also the mother of a five month old baby. She originally lived at the Family's Hope shelter but had recently moved to the Family's Joy shelter.

**Themes**

Each mom offered her perspective regarding the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the classroom. Based on the data gathered from the mothers, I identified five themes: acceptance, stability, support, deterrents to social belonging, and understanding of social belonging. Additionally, from the data collected, subthemes were identified (see Table 7).

**Acceptance.** The first theme identified by the mothers was acceptance. All five mothers in the study voiced this as a major factor contributing to the development of social belonging in the classroom. Three subthemes were also identified: acceptance by peers, acceptance by teachers and counselors, and avoiding labels.

*Acceptance by peers.* The terms used most often by the mothers to explain being accepted by peers was "fitting in" and "friends". Four out of the five mothers mentioned the importance of their children feeling like they had friends and fitting in with their peers. Amy mentioned that she felt that not having friends and fitting in with peers would be more detrimental to her daughter's development of social belonging than the fact that she was homeless.

Abby mentioned an incident at school in which her granddaughter, Crystal, was made fun of by her classmates because she had a "boys" backpack. Crystal did not really mind the backpack until her classmates made fun of it. Abby said "I guess she wants a different backpack so she will belong, or feel like she belongs." Abby believed that the opinions of the classmates were indicators of whether Crystal was accepted by her peers and that this was very important to her granddaughter.

Tammy expressed her understanding of peer acceptance when she talked about her son's experience at a football game. She said she knew he felt like he belonged at school when he said things like "they are going to beat us" and "we are going to beat them". The fact that he used possessive words let her know that he felt accepted by his peers and felt like he belonged at school.

*Acceptance by teachers and counselors.* Not only did the mothers think it was important for the children to be accepted by their peers but they also believed it was important for the children to feel that same acceptance from their teachers and counselors. Without acceptance being modeled in the classroom, by the teachers and counselors, the mothers did not feel that social belonging could develop. Interestingly the mothers never used the term "acceptance" when talking about teachers and counselors and factors contributing to the development of social belonging in the classroom. But they did talk about the teachers and counselors loving and caring for their children and how important this was for their children. It was as if they really could not express what acceptance was so they explained it the best way they knew how. Tammy talked about how much her son Austin loved his teacher and how his teacher accepted him into the

class. Abby also mentioned that Crystal's teacher spent time with her. To Abby this meant that the teacher accepted Crystal for who she was and it did not matter where she came from. Overall the mothers used terms like care, concern, and love to express their understanding of acceptance. Even though the mothers had a difficult time expressing the meaning of acceptance, they were clear that acceptance by teachers and counselors was a contributing factor to social belonging in the classroom.

*Avoiding labels.* Two mothers in particular, Cheryl and Amy, talked in detail about their children being labeled as "shelter" children and thus being treated differently. Cheryl talked about the fact that her son goes to school in the shelter van. She said "they [other children] know that all these kids are coming from the shelter, and that makes a difference. That puts a label on them". She felt that this made it harder for her son and the other "shelter" children to be accepted because they were stereotyped and labeled. She felt that other people at school expected these children to be dirty and nasty causing others to keep their distance.

Amy did not mention the shelter van but did talk about how other children ask her daughter "Are you one of those shelter kids?". The mothers thought that the responses given by the "shelter" children went a long way in determining whether social belonging in the classroom existed for these children. When I asked Emma what the school did to help children feel like they belonged at school she responded "They treat him just like any other kid". I think she summed it up with this statement because, as the other mothers indicated, when children were labeled as different this caused the children from the shelters to feel they were different and less accepted by others. The mothers felt that the

labels placed on their children meant that others viewed them as below standard and that this view was a factor that impeded the development of social belonging in the classroom.

**Stability.** Mothers identified stability as the second theme. They talked in more positive terms about their child's ability to adapt and about their child's possessive nature. It was initially believed that *mobility* was a subtheme of *stability*. But it was determined after the mothers conducted their member checking of the themes that the mothers really did not consider their constant mobility as a factor in their child's ability to develop belonging in the classroom. For this reason *mobility* was removed as a subtheme. Two subthemes that were identified were: ability to adjust to situations and familiarity.

*Ability to adjust to different situations.* Three of the five mothers mentioned their child's ability to adapt to their constantly changing environment. April's mother, Amy, talked about their multiple moves back and forth to the shelter. She said:

> April was excited when we went back home and she was excited to come back to (the shelter), which I know I can't keep doing her like that. But, as far as her grades slipping or her starting to act out in school, we didn't have any of that. So, she adapted to change pretty well.

Emma, made similar comments when I asked her how she thought Wyatt was able to develop belonging. She said:

> He adjust(ed) well here from where we were. He actually loves this place. He fit right well. He don't know it's a shelter. He doesn't know the meaning of it. He just knows this is our home for the time.

When I asked Abby what she thought helped Crystal fit in at school and develop belonging she said it was the fact that Crystal went to school with other children from the shelter. She believed that having children around her that she knew helped her adjust to her new environment at school.

On the opposite side of this issue, two mothers discussed the difficulty their children faced in adjusting to the different situations. Tammy briefly touched on Austin's struggle to adapt when she mentioned that once her son got to know everybody, "he's done a lot better." Cheryl voiced concern that her son, Andrew, was one of only two Caucasian children in his classroom and that this was a new environment for him. She thought this was a factor that made it difficult for Andrew to develop belonging.

*Familiarity.* Familiarity was not a strong subtheme for the mothers but was mentioned during the interview process. Both Amy and Emma commented that belonging included having something that was "yours". They both focused on ownership of material possessions and the importance this played in their child's sense of belonging. Emma also briefly touched on familiarity and belonging related to a place. She commented that her son, Wyatt, did not feel a familiarity in his living conditions because, "he knew this wasn't his home." These mothers believed that allowing their children to have familiar items with them when they moved helped them feel a connection to those possessions and in turn helped the children feel a belonging with new living situations. When the mothers were asked to define belonging none of them included familiarity as part of their definition they only included it as part of what they thought their children would define as belonging.

**Support.** The third theme identified for the mothers was support and more specifically their own support of their children. This led to the subtheme entitled: family support.

*Family support.* Abby showed her understanding of family support when she said it was important to spend time with her granddaughter and to let her know she was important and wanted. Emma expressed that she believed her son was doing well at the shelter because she was there to support him. Tammy also felt that family support was important but she had a slightly different idea of family. Because she was adopted she stated that family did not have to be blood related. Even though she had contact with her biological parents she said, "My mom and dad are the people that adopted me, that loved me and was there for me and took care of me. I mean, that's my mom and dad." This led me to understand that she believed family support was a big part of belonging. She also talked about her "family" at the shelter and the bond she had with the other women and children with whom she lived. This understanding of family support was observed during my interview with her and her son. He was very shy and relied on his mother to protect him. She provided this support for him in a very loving way.

Tammy was the only mother who specifically talked about family support as it related to the school setting. When I asked her if having an older brother at school made a difference for Austin she said it definitely made it easier for him to feel like he belonged at school. Even though Cheryl did not specifically talk about family support during our

interview, I was able to observe positive support of her son during my interview with him. She was soft spoken and helped him to feel at ease with my presence.

**Deterrents to social belonging.** The fourth theme identified by the mothers was deterrents to social belonging. The lack of social belonging led to repercussions but there were also deterring factors that affected future development of social belonging in the classroom. The mothers had many different ideas concerning the deterrents associated with the lack of social belonging. For this reason the subthemes included: negative feelings, negative behaviors, and withdrawal.

*Negative feelings.* When I asked the mothers what may keep belonging from occurring in the classroom, mothers discussed the internalization of negative feelings. When I asked Cheryl how negative feelings might affect her child's sense of belonging she said, "It would affect his self-confidence. It may not affect his learning capabilities, but it would most definitely affect his self-confidence and how he feels about himself." Throughout the interview Cheryl showed concern about her son, Andrew, not having a sense of belonging at school. Abby answered the same question by saying that Crystal would be miserable if she felt like she did not belong at school and would internalize these feelings. Tammy said her child would feel like an outcast and feel different than other children and this would deter the development of belonging. The mothers did not express that there were negative feelings displayed by their children but if negative feelings did exist in their children, belonging could not develop.

*Negative behaviors.* Slightly different from negative feelings, which were inward reactions, was the deterrent of negative behaviors shown outwardly by the children. When I asked the mothers what may keep belonging from developing in the classroom several mothers responded children 'acting out' in the classroom. Amy elaborated by explaining that if children acted negatively toward both the teachers and toward their peers they would not be accepted by others or develop a sense of belonging. Emma agreed when she said children would "not comply with the teacher" which would cause less acceptance by teachers. Interestingly, none of the mothers indicated that their children exhibited negative behaviors toward their teachers or other children. They only discussed negative behaviors in general terms for children who did not feel a sense of belonging in the classroom.

*Withdrawal.* Amy emphasized that April loved school but that if she did not feel like she belonged at school she could see April completely shut down and not want to interact with others. Amy went on to talk about other children at the shelter. She said, "There are some other children that are completely just- I did not even know they lived here. Because they are so shut off. I don't know if they don't feel like they belong." Tammy told me a story about her son, Austin, when he first arrived at the shelter, "He was shy. He told me, to begin with, he said, "It's so big! There are so many people! And I don't like all the people." I observed this shyness and withdrawal during my observation with his mother and him. Since his first arrival, Austin has found a place at the shelter and is no longer withdrawn and shy around the other children or me.

**Understanding of social belonging.** The fifth theme identified by mothers dealt with their understanding of social belonging. Only one mother, Amy, was able to express what she thought social belonging meant to her child and to her. She relayed to me that social belonging involved fitting into your environment and having friends. The other four mothers found it difficult to express what the concept of social belonging meant to them or their children. This lead to the subtheme entitled: difficult to express.

*Difficult to express.* When I asked the mothers what social belonging meant to them and what they thought their children believed social belonging meant, four of the mothers had a difficult time explaining the concept of social belonging. Cheryl said "that's a really hard question, I mean, it is, but it isn't. I mean, we all want to belong, in one way or another, but that is a hard question." When Abby was asked what social belonging meant to her she replied, "it's- I don't know, it's hard to describe for me." Four times throughout the interview with Abby she reiterated that the concept of social belonging was hard to explain. Cheryl and Abby were never able to put into words their understanding to the concept of social belonging. Tammy and Emma both mentioned that they did not think their children would be able to explain what social belonging meant to them. When I interviewed Emma she said about her son, "I don't think he understands belonging. I don't think he will be able to give you a definition. I don't want him to think that he doesn't belong." So not only did the mothers have a hard time expressing social belonging they also believed that their children would have a hard time expressing their understanding about social belonging. This difficulty in their ability to express the

meaning of social belonging to me helped me understand how it was also difficult for the

mothers to express this concept to their children.

**Table 7**

*Themes and Subthemes of Factors Contributing to the Development of Social Belonging in the Classroom: Mothers*

| Acceptance | Stability | Support | Deterrents to Social Belonging | Understanding of Social Belonging |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Accepted By Peers | Ability To Adjust To Situations | Family Support | Negative Feelings | Difficult to Express |
| Accepted By Teachers and Counselors | Familiarity | | Negative Behavior | |
| Avoiding Labels | | | Withdrawal | |

## Case Study Three: Teachers and Counselors

### Settings

The teachers and counselors were from both School of Hope and School of Joy.

The descriptions for these schools can be found in case study one.

### Participants

For the purpose of this study, all participants were assigned pseudonyms to

protect their identities.

- Mrs. Adams, an African American female, was Andrew's Kindergarten teacher. She had been teaching for five and a half years total with four years at School of Hope. She had little experience with homeless or shelter children before having Andrew in her class. Her class consisted of 18 students. Two of these students were from Family's Hope shelter.

- Mrs. Bailey, an African American female, was April's first grade teacher. She had worked with the city school system for 14 years, first as a secretary and then as a teacher at School of Hope. She had little to no experience with homeless or shelter children before having April in her class. Her class consisted of eight boys and seven girls. All the children in the class were African American.

- Mrs. Hunter, a Caucasian female, was Crystal's second grade teacher at School of Hope. She had taught for 29 years, with 28 of those years in the city school system. She had taught grades kindergarten through third grade. As far as she was aware she had not had much exposure to working with homeless or shelter children.  Her class consisted of eleven boys and four girls. Crystal was the only Caucasian student in the class, the rest were African American.

- Mrs. Rutherford, an African American female, was Austin's kindergarten teacher. She had taught for 30 years with 23 of those years spent at School of Joy. She had much prior experience in with working with children who

were homeless or living in shelters. Her class consisted of eight boys and nine girls.

- Mrs. Kennedy, an African American female, was Wyatt's first grade teacher. She had taught for 38 years with seven of those years at School of Hope. She had taught grades first, fifth, and sixth. She had prior experience with children from shelters both during her teaching in public and private schools. Her class consisted of nine boys and eight girls. Wyatt and two other students were Caucasian. The others were African American.

- Mrs. Johnson was an African American female counselor at School of Hope. The children with whom she interacted included Andrew, April, and Crystal. She was a kindergarten and first grade teacher for 22 years before becoming a counselor. She had been a counselor for 12 years with nine of those years at School of Hope. She had sporadic experience through the years with children who were homeless or in shelters.

- Mrs. Ragland was an African American female and the part-time counselor at School of Joy where Austin and Wyatt attended. She was a family counselor for 15 years. She had extensive experience working with at-risk youth and children who are homeless.

**Themes**

Each teacher and counselor offered her perspective regarding the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the classroom. Based on the data

gathered from the teachers and counselors, I identified six themes: acceptance, stability, interaction, support, deterrents to social belonging, and understanding of social belonging. Additionally, from the data collected, subthemes were identified (see Table 8).

**Acceptance.** The teachers and counselors' first theme was acceptance. All five teachers and both counselors expressed acceptance as a major factor contributing to the development of social belonging in the classroom. Three subthemes emerged during analysis: accepted by peers, accepted by teachers and counselors, and treating all children the same.

*Accepted by peers.* Peer acceptance was a subtheme addressed by all case participants. Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Bailey, Mrs. Hunter, and Mrs. Ragland all used the same specific term "peer acceptance" when discussing social belonging in the classroom. More specifically, Mrs. Kennedy defined social belonging in the classroom as having at least one person in the classroom that you call a friend or buddy, someone you spend time with in PE or at lunch. She went on to tell of one student from a shelter that was never chosen by the other children to be in their group. He looked different and acted different from the other children and they never accepted him into the class environment. Mrs. Rutherford summarized being accepted by peers by saying that real social belonging in the classroom takes place when the children from the shelters don't even know there is any difference from themselves and the other children in the classroom.

***Accepted by teachers and counselors.*** Teachers and counselors agreed that children looked to them for acceptance and that this was a factor that contributed to social belonging in the classroom. When I asked Mrs. Bailey what specific activities she did in her classroom to encourage social belonging she said:

> We sing little songs. And my children, they love to get up and move around, and that lets them feel free. And when they start feeling free and happy, you can see their face just light up when they smile. If you come peep in, you'll see it, they're loving it.

She went on to talk about hugging the children which was something I witnessed in my observation of her classroom. It was clear that the children felt accepted by their teacher. Mrs. Kennedy commented that when children feel accepted they feel safe. An example of this was told by Mrs. Adams who said:

> Sometimes they come and blurt out everything to me. And I listen. I give them a chance to talk about their dog at home or what they did over the weekend with their parents, so they feel like this is their space.

If the children did not feel safe and accepted by Mrs. Adams they would not be willing to share with her.

Both Mrs. Rutherford and Mrs. Ragland expressed the importance of caring and showing love to the children. Mrs. Ragland elaborated on teacher and counselor acceptance by saying many children felt it was important that a teacher liked them because they didn't always know if a teacher liked them. She said that social belonging to the children was feeling like, "My teacher likes me, she accepts me, and she thinks I'm good."

***Treat all children the same.*** The final subtheme pertaining to acceptance was treating all the children the same. Initially this subtheme was entitled *avoiding labels* but after reflection of the themes it was determined that the teachers and counselors actually went beyond just the negative connotation of labeling and addressed more positive aspects associated with treating all children the same. The counselor, Mrs. Johnson, expressed that at her school teachers are expected to do the same things for the children who are homeless and to those in homes. When Mrs. Hunter was asked about treatment she said, "I'd never single them out. Never. You always treat them like they are all the same. So, you're not singling them out, they're always inclusive." Mrs. Rutherford commented that they stress the importance of following what the Bible says, to treat each other with kindness and love. She said that if you looked into any classroom you could not tell who was homeless because they were all treated the same. When I asked Mrs. Adams how the school was handling the influx of children from the shelter she commented, "We've kind of come together and taken them and just treat them like they're the normal kids who come, because they are just normal kids, just with different circumstances."

Another important part of treatment included confidentiality and being sensitive to the special needs of the children who are homeless. Mrs. Adams stressed the importance of protecting the fact that a child is homeless when she said:

> It is not something that we talk about in the open. And, if they do want to talk about it, we talk about it in private, so that they can maintain their level of confidentiality and don't feel singled out because they are homeless.

A final important aspect of treatment included providing the same opportunities to the children who are homeless. Mrs. Adams mentioned the importance of offering opportunities like the gifted program or the band to all students even if the logistics were more difficult.

**Stability.** The second theme identified by teachers and counselors was stability. They voiced their concerns about the consequences that can be present due to the unstable lifestyle to which these children were exposed. Two subthemes emerged: ability to adjust to situations and consistency.

*Ability to adjust to situations.* The "ability to adjust to society, of your group of peers" was the way Mrs. Kennedy defined social belonging. Mrs. Johnson defined social belonging as feeling safe and comfortable in the environment you are in and that this cannot take place without the ability to adjust to new situations. She explained that children from the shelter sometimes had a difficult time adjusting to this new environment. For example she said:

> (School of Hope) is a predominantly a black population, and for some of them, I think they are more accustomed to being in a predominantly white situation, where they are not the minority. So, I think that was an adjustment for them. But, I think they're starting to adapt.

Another example was expressed by Mrs. Adams when she encountered a child from the shelter who did not want to leave her backpack in the locker out in the hall. She said:

> So, we talked, and she still cried, and cried, and cried. So, I said, "I'll tell you what. You stick your backpack in the locker right here and it's not going to move." And she was upset. And I said, "I'll tell you what. On our way to PE, I want you to stop by your locker and peek at it and see if it's still in there." And

she did. And I said, "You know, you can peek again on the way back. And then, when we go to lunch, I want you to look again, just to make sure it's still there and no one has bothered it." And being able to check on it, to make sure it was still there, it calmed her, and I haven't had a problem since.

This example showed how Mrs. Adams was able to help the child adjust to her new environment. She also hoped she was able to help the child feel welcomed so she could develop a sense of belonging in her new environment.

Mrs. Hunter commented that distractions from the children's environment outside of school were of concern and also impeded children from adjusting inside the classroom. All teachers and counselors voiced that social belonging involved fitting in with their peers and that this could not occur unless children adjusted to their new environment.

*Consistency.* Mrs. Ragland commented that the lives these children led included many absent fathers and there was no stability or consistency in the home. Mrs. Hunter agreed when she said:

I see children who come to school dirty, children who don't have the things they need, they're unprepared, they slept at one person's house the night before, they slept at another person's house the next day, and it's just chaotic and it shows up because they usually make poor grades. I mean, without an exception, those children usually make poor grades.

Mobility was another area of consistency teachers and counselors expressed as a negative factor effecting the development of social belonging in the classroom. When I asked Mrs. Bailey what factors might impede the development of social belonging she said:

Having to move a lot. Because I think that, when children have to move a lot, they don't feel like they have had a chance to say goodbye. And sometimes, when they make good friends, they hate to leave 'em. And, they feel like they've lost something.

In my interview with Mrs. Hunter she said:

> It concerns me so much because I've seen a lot more of this than I ever used to, these children moving from one Section 8 housing to another, or one housing project to another, and they might change schools, three schools in one year! I just think that's horrendous! The mamas, they don't even really understand – I don't think they even think about what they're doing to the children. But, to me, that is one of the worst things. That affects them so negatively, especially if they are already strugglers, struggling in school.

When I asked Mrs. Hunter what factors she thought positively contributed to the development of social belonging she said, "It's not really anything specific, but it's mostly just consistency. Like, I just stress it day in and day out, day in and day out, and by the end of the year I can really see some social maturity." She went on to say that school can be the children's constant in their lives. They don't have much consistency at home so when there was a constant structure at school they were able to develop a sense of belonging in the school environment. Mrs. Johnson also commented that children were able to develop social belonging when there was a constant stable environment.

**Interaction.** The next theme identified for teachers and counselors involved the interactions of the students. They discussed the importance of interaction among all the students, purposeful time spent in interaction, and creating a family atmosphere within the classroom.

For this reason the subthemes were identified as: exposure to different classmates, providing opportunities to interact, and building family-like relationships. Initially the last subtheme was identified *building relationships.* After further analysis it was determined that teachers and counselors, more importantly, wanted to *build family-like*

*relationships* with their children. This subtheme better exemplified the ideas expressed by the teachers and counselors.

      ***Exposure to different classmates.*** When asked what was implemented in the school environment to encourage development of social belonging, both teachers from School of Joy commented that they encouraged interaction with multiple classmates. Mrs. Rutherford said she tried to group them and pair them so they had a chance to spend time with all the other children in the class. I observed this practice in her classroom when she played a game that made children move all around the classroom and sit by other children. She also changed their assigned seats during the year to help expose the children to a variety of students. Besides just the classroom time, children at School of Joy were encouraged, during the morning care, to sit with other children not in their class. Mrs. Kennedy said that in her class when she noticed someone always picking his or her friends for an activity she encouraged him or her to pick someone else. She mentioned that examples from the Bible were taught to encourage the importance of being kind and loving to everyone in the class. She felt these lessons were an important part of developing a sense of belonging in the classroom. From School of Hope only the counselor mentioned exposing the children to different classmates. She mentioned several times in the interview that the children from the shelter began the school year just interacting with each other because "they seemed to socially fit with each other" but that she now saw them interacting with other children too. She said:

        I just think they really are becoming more comfortable with the environment and
        more comfortable with their classmates, so that they're branching out a little bit

more.  And that's a good thing, because that's what we want them to do, not just depend on each other and only interact with each other.

None of the teachers at School of Hope mentioned exposure to different classmates as being important to social belonging in the classroom nor did I witness any examples of this practice during my observation. As discussed in the next section very little interaction occurred on any level at School of Hope.

*Providing opportunities to interact.* When I asked Mrs. Ragland, the counselor from School of Joy, how children develop social belonging in the classroom she said:

> They go about it by interaction, interacting with each other.  But, I want to say that (it) is not developed fully, and the reason why I say that is because a lot of them don't know how to interact, and I think interaction starts at home, communicating, feeling a part.  I think the problems with interaction in the classroom starts because of them feeling like they don't belong at home.

She went on to say that it was important to provide opportunities for the children to interact in activities outside the classroom as well such as clubs, sports, or mission trips. She also talked about how she was purposeful in her counseling session to include time to interact. She explained:

> I try, in here, in my counseling group, I get all of them together and I do, like, a social party for Christmas, where we interact and we talk, and I sit everybody down and occasionally I do groups, where we can talk about what's going on, and they can see that they're not alone, that their issues they're dealing with, they're not the only person dealing with them, but that other kids are dealing with the same things.

Mrs. Rutherford, also from School of Joy, indicated the importance of providing opportunities and encouraging interaction with the children. She said she was always encouraging children to participate and to find a friend and she taught the children in her class that if they see someone without a friend to become that person's friend.

Again, Mrs. Johnson was the only person from the School of Hope to bring up the topic of providing time for children to interact. She said in her counseling sessions she tried to provide time for the children to divide into groups so they could interact and talk with each other. But a factor that she felt impeded the children at School of Hope was that there was not an opportunity for interaction in the classroom. She said:

> They get very little time that they actually can interact, just on a relaxed social type basis. Most of what they're doing has to do with class work and not just sitting down, talking, being friends. We have PE but it is structured and we do not have recess. We just don't have a lot of mix and mingle kind of time to become social. There is just not a lot of time for that.

 I found this very evident when I observed at School of Hope in the classrooms, during PE, and in the lunchroom. Everything was very structured and teachers did not allow children to engage in social behavior. This lack of opportunity, according to those from School of Joy, would be a factor that impeded the development of social belonging for the children at School of Hope.

*Building family-like relationships.* The word "family" was used by several of the teachers as they discussed how to encourage social belonging in the classroom. For the teachers and counselors this relationship meant providing an accepting environment where children felt safe and loved. It meant children where comfortable enough to express their feelings and needs. As Mrs. Adams so plainly put it, "they spend eight hours a day with us. We are their second mom." For Mrs. Adams building a strong family-like relationship was crucial in order for the children to develop social belonging in her classroom. She commented that the children come into her kindergarten classroom unsure, nervous and worried. Some have never been to school before. So she felt it was

important to build a relationship with them. "It's a process that I go through, just getting to know them, telling them that we are family in this room and at this school, and that helps them to kind of adjust to coming to school." Mrs. Bailey told all of her children, "When you come in my room, we are a family." I was able to observe this during my visit to Mrs. Bailey's class. The children were freely hugging her and seemed to enjoy their time with her. Mrs. Rutherford also commented on the importance of building a relationship to help the children "feel like they belong to someone." These teachers and counselors believed that when there was a lack of family structure in the shelter it was even more important to build a family-like relationship in the classroom.

**Support.** Support was strongly emphasized by all participants in this study. Both the advantages of having support and the disadvantages of not having support were addressed. The subthemes that emerged included: family support, counseling sessions, teaching about appropriate behaviors, and encouragement.

*Family support.* Mrs. Hunter believed that a child's definition of belonging would include the word "family". Even when children didn't live with either parent she still believed that the children would associate belonging with family or the support that family provided. Mrs. Kennedy also agreed that belonging to a child was associated with a parent's ability to meet physical needs and give support, but that some parents were not always able to accomplish meeting these needs due to their own personal issues.

Mrs. Johnson mentioned that many of the issues she has dealt with in counseling sessions were due to children and parents being separated. Mrs. Kennedy also told about

two different students who were struggling in her class due to being separated from their parents. Mrs. Ragland expressed that absent fathers were a negative factor contributing to a child's social belonging. She also added that other factors contributing to negative family support included anger in the home and alcohol and drug abuse in the family.

Not all teachers expressed the negative effects of family support. Mrs. Bailey stressed that part of April's success in class was due to the support she received at home from her mother. Mrs. Hunter summarized the importance of support when she said:

> The children who do well in school are the ones that usually have more of that home support and they come to school well rested, well fed, they have somebody be sure they did their homework and got ready for school the next day.

*Counseling sessions.* Both counselors stressed the importance of providing counseling opportunities for the children. Mrs. Johnson said that in her counseling sessions she spent time talking to the children about cooperating with each other, working collaboratively, and saying positive things to one another because this encouraged a better atmosphere for social belonging to develop. In Mrs. Ragland's counseling sessions she worked to provide an atmosphere that encouraged interaction among the children. This was accomplished through socials and group counseling sessions. She liked to provide opportunities for children to discuss their daily struggles:

> We talk about what's going on, and they can see that they're not alone, that their issues they're dealing with, they're not the only person dealing with them, but that other kids are dealing with the same things. Other kids have issues with mom, or belonging.

Both counselors believed that counseling sessions were a positive factor in children developing social belonging in the classroom.

***Teaching about appropriate behaviors.*** All participants in the study voiced the importance of teaching children appropriate behaviors needed to be accepted by their peers in order to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. Mrs. Johnson described lessons she taught on diversity. We talk about, "acceptance and accepting each other for who we are, knowing that we are all still special, and that there's something that we all can do to make our day a better day and make our class a better class." Mrs. Adams said she taught her kindergarteners through social skills building activities like the importance of sharing with your classmates, being part of a group, and working as a team in the classroom. Mrs. Bailey also spoke about her lessons to the children about sharing. She stressed to the children that they were to think of the classroom in terms of what is "ours" not what is "mine". Mrs. Hunter said that in her classroom they study the code of conduct which teaches children the importance of respect, responsibility, and resourcefulness. They also study character trait development in order to improve relationships within the classroom.

Both teachers from School of Joy emphasized the importance of teaching biblical principles to the children. Mrs. Rutherford said it was through the bible stories that children learn about how to act around others, how to treat others with kindness, and to love others. Mrs. Kennedy said that it was through the required bible verse memorization that children build on their knowledge on how to treat others.

*Encouragement.* Mrs. Johnson gave one example of encouragement when she said, "we try to make sure everyone has a special part and a special role" because this helps them feel like they belong. During one of Mrs. Johnson's counseling activities children were asked to say something positive to another student. The purpose was to help the children feel like they enhanced the classroom and made it a better place. Mrs. Adams also commented that the way to build a sense of belonging in children was to help them feel like "they are a part of this, like they have a place, in my classroom, like they have their specific job. It means something for them to be here." Mrs. Hunter said she stressed the importance of teaching about responsibility. She encouraged her children but also felt that children who were held responsible for their work and their actions took more pride in their work and in themselves and that this encouragement led to a sense of belonging.

**Deterrents to social belonging.** The fifth theme identified by teachers and counselors included deterrents that may cause belonging to not exist in the classroom. The subthemes included: negative feelings, negative behaviors, and withdrawal.

*Negative feelings.* When I asked teachers and counselors what might hinder children from developing a sense of belonging in the classroom, Mrs. Adams put it simply when she said children who make it plain they don't like coming to school create an atmosphere that does not encourage belonging. Other terms teachers and counselors used to describe deterrents were: show signs of anger and depression (Mrs. Kennedy),

and come to school sad and broken (Mrs. Rutherford). Mrs. Johnson expressed it this way, "Sometimes they don't feel good about themselves. It's hard to come and do your best when you don't feel your best; whether it's physically you're not feeling well or mentally and emotionally not feeling well." These negative feelings about oneself made it hard for belonging to develop.

*Negative behaviors.* Five of the seven participants mentioned that children who exhibit behavior problems had difficulty developing belonging. Mrs. Bailey, Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Hunter, and Mrs. Kennedy all agreed that acting out in class, poor conduct, and showing an attitude were all deterrents for the development of belonging. Mrs. Hunter also commented that another negative behavior she noticed was children who did not get along with their peers, both in their actions and verbal exchanges. I did not see these specific behaviors with the children I was observing but these behaviors were evident in the classroom.

*Withdrawal.* Another deterrent that was addressed by five of the participants was children withdrawing from participating in the classroom. Mrs. Kennedy described a situation in her class where a student did not feel like he fit in so he had withdrawn from his group of peers, isolated himself from everyone, and ostracized himself. She then told a story about another child who was ashamed of his background so he had "set up defenses so he wouldn't feel, so no one would hurt him." Mrs. Ragland said she had dealt with children with social phobias who felt as if they did not belong so they frequently withdrew from other children. The teachers and counselors commented that

these withdrawn children who did not participate in class activities were not accepted by their peers.

Another term that surfaced during discussions with the teachers and counselors was "loner". Mrs. Rutherford described this action "They become sheltered, a loner." No matter what the term; withdrawn, isolated, ostracized, or loner they all described deterrents that hindered the development of belonging.

**Understanding of social belonging.** The final theme identified by teachers and counselors dealt with their understanding of social belonging and their ability to express this understanding. This led to the subtheme of: able to express.

*Able to express.* This subtheme pointed to the fact that all the teachers and counselors were able to define and verbalize what they thought social belonging meant. The overall consensus included terms like "part of" and "fitting in". Mrs. Hunter also mentioned "feeling comfortable with your peers" was a way to express belonging. Mrs. Kennedy commented that it is not only fitting in but to "not feel ostracized" and having the ability to adjust to society and peers.  Mrs. Rutherford added that children who were viewed by others as not having a sense of social belonging were considered "loners". All participants in this case had a clear understanding of social belonging and were able to verbalize this understanding.

Even though the teachers and counselors were able to express their understanding of belonging, they believed the children may not have had much experience with actual belonging. Therefore it might be a confusing concept for them. In my interview with Mrs.

Hunter she commented "it's like, if you ask them if they belonged, they would tell you, without a doubt, yes, they have a strong sense of belonging" but she went on to say that the children's concept of belonging is different from the norm. They don't even understand what it means to belong because they have not had the opportunity to experience belonging. When I asked Mrs. Kennedy how she thought children living in shelters would define social belonging she responded with a laugh before trying to answer the question. When I asked Mrs. Johnson the same question, her response was "Oh! That might be a little more difficult!" She went on to explain that because they tend to experience new environments more often than housed children, the concept of belonging can be more confusing for them.

**Table 8**

*Themes and Subthemes of Factors Contributing to the Development of Social Belonging
in the Classroom: Teachers and Counselors*

| Acceptance | Stability | Interaction | Support | Deterrents to Social Belonging | Understanding of Social Belonging |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Accepted By Peers | Ability To Adjust To Situations | Exposure To Different Classmates | Family Support | Negative Feelings | Able to Express |
| Accepted By Teachers and Counselors | Consistency | Providing Opportunities To Interact | Counseling Sessions | Negative Behavior | |
| Treating All Children The Same | | Building Family-Like Relationships | Teaching About Appropriate Behavior | Withdrawal | |
| | | | Encouragement | | |

**Cross Case Analysis:**

**Children, Mothers, and Teachers and Counselors**

**Themes**

A comparison of themes across the three cases revealed the emergence of six total themes: acceptance, stability, interaction, support, deterrents to social belonging, and understanding of social belonging. Some themes were shared by all three cases while other themes were mentioned by only one or two cases (Table 9).

**Acceptance.** Acceptance emerged as a common theme across all three cases and was the strongest of all the themes when considering the agreement between the cases. Every participant in the study discussed acceptance as a factor that contributed to the development of social belonging in the classroom. Some of the participants talked about acceptance in positive terms, for example how being accepted had led to a sense of belonging. Others talked about acceptance in more negatives terms explaining how the lack of acceptance led to an absence of the sense of belonging. Subthemes for all three cases included *acceptance by peers* and *acceptance by teachers and counselors.* Mother also included the subtheme, *avoiding labels* and teachers included *treating all children the same.*

*Accepted by peers.* The subtheme, accepted by peers, was the strongest subtheme being addressed by all participants except one mother. When describing belonging, the children most often used the term "friend", mothers used the terms "friend" and "fitting in", and the teachers and counselors used the term "accepted". All of the responding

participants referred to peer acceptance throughout the interview process as the most important factor for the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless. The children were especially verbal about the importance of being accepted by their peers. They discussed how friends made them feel loved and gave them the sense of belonging. I was able to see examples of peer acceptance and peer rejection during my observations. Even when peer rejection was apparent, it did not stop the rejected child from trying again to be accepted. The mothers and teachers and counselors echoed the sentiments of the children. These two cases talked about the importance of feeling comfortable with peers and feeling a sense of acceptance in the classroom. It was clear from the interviews and observations that peer acceptance played a major role in the developing of social belong for the children who are homeless.

*Accepted by teachers and counselors.* This was another subtheme addressed by all three cases. When the children talked about their teachers they all referred to how nice their teacher was. Through their teacher's expression of being nice the children felt accepted. Children who felt accepted by their teachers and counselors were willing to show affection to them and to share stories about their life with them. The other two cases used similar but stronger terms, like cared for and loved, when talking about the connection between the child and feeling accepted by the teachers and counselors. Even though the terms were slightly different the ideas were the same. In order for children to develop a sense of belonging in the classroom, children had to feel loved and accepted by their teachers and counselors.

The case that indicated this subtheme as the most important was that of the teachers and counselors, with only one teacher not commenting on the importance of the need for acceptance by teachers and counselors. Through my observations I was able to see the effort teachers and counselors put forth to help children feel accepted within the classroom. Teachers and counselors listened, gave hugs, and encouraged the children. All three cases believed these actions by teachers and counselors were important for children to feel accepted and that this acceptance was a factor that led to the development of social belonging in the classroom for the children who are homeless.

*Avoiding labels.* Only the mothers addressed the avoidance of labels as an important factor associated with social belonging in the classroom. This was not a strong subtheme with only two mothers addressing this issue but these two mothers were very adamant and vocal about this topic. They both discussed how being labeled "shelter children" was a hindrance to their children developing social belonging in the classroom. Interestingly, the children did not in any way mention labeling as an issue for them. I was able to witness discussions between children from the shelter and other children at school concerning their housing situation. Children from the shelter were truthful about their living conditions and did not seem bothered that others knew where they lived. They did not seem to be concerned about being labeled and did not bring up the topic during our interviews. I also did not observe a teacher or a counselor use any type of label during her time with the children or with me during the interview processes. All of the teachers and counselors appeared to understand the sensitivity of the situation and handled themselves professionally.

*Treating all children the same.* The teachers and counselors had a similar subtheme to "avoiding labels" but I felt it was different enough from what the mothers had expressed that I named it "treating all children the same". Of course avoiding labeling was one way teachers expressed they treated everyone the same, but teachers and counselors also discussed the importance of offering all children the same opportunities. These opportunities might include things like tutoring, which cost extra money, or afterschool activities, which include additional transportation. Teachers and counselors believed without these opportunities children were not given the full advantage to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. Neither mothers nor children expressed the same concerns as the teachers and counselors. The mothers never mentioned that the absence of opportunities for their children affected their child's belonging in the classroom. The children never mentioned nor demonstrated that they felt left out or in any way disadvantaged due to their living situation. Through my observations I never saw a teacher or counselor treat any children differently due to their living situation. Because teachers and counselors did such a good job of treating everyone the same could be the reason it was not an issue brought to attention by mothers or children.

**Stability.** Stability emerged as a common theme across all three cases. Even though stability was addressed by all participants, there was not a subtheme that bridged all three cases. Discussions about stability ranged from the need for adjustability by children to the need and advantages of consistency and familiarity. All cases agreed that stability in the life of children was needed for the development of social belonging both

inside and outside the classroom setting. The cases had differing opinions though, about what stability meant to children who are homeless and how stability could be achieved by children who are homeless. The mothers and the teachers and counselors addressed the subtheme *ability to adjust to situations*. The children and mothers addressed the subtheme *familiarity*. Teachers and counselors were the only case to address *consistency* as a subtheme.

   ***Ability to adjust.*** Mothers along with teachers and counselors discussed the importance for children to have the ability to adjust to new situations. It was apparent that mothers were aware of their unstable living situations but they only spoke in positive terms about how well their children could adapt to changing surroundings and circumstance. The mothers did not consider their child's ever changing environment an issue because they believed their children were able to adequately adjust to whatever new situation was presented.

   The teachers and counselors also mentioned the ability of children to adjust but they also mentioned that adjustment did not always occur and how important this ability was to the development of social belonging in the classroom. They gave examples of children who were able to come into the classroom and fit in right away. These children were accepted by their peers and appeared to adjust to their new environment without hesitating. But they also told about children who were withdrawn or rejected by their peers. These children put up walls and were not able to fit in or adjust to their new situation. In both cases it was agreed that children's ability to adjust to new situations was a positive attribute for children who were homeless, but teachers and counselors

understood how the ability to adjust to new situations played a role in children developing social belonging in the classroom. Children did not mention anything about their ability to adjust to new situations. When children were asked about how they felt about moving, their responses were negative. They remarked about how difficult it was to go back and forth between schools and that it made them mad when they had to move. This did not indicate that the children could not adjust just that they did not like having to adjust.

   *Familiarity.* This subtheme was mentioned by both children and mothers. In the mother's case they mentioned familiarity was not how they would define belonging but believed it was how their children would define belonging. These mothers were correct about their assumptions. The children did discuss how important it was to be able to claim something as "mine" whether it was an object or a personal space. The mothers did understand the importance of familiarity for their children but were not always able to provide this for their children. With the inability of children to claim much personal space at the shelter, I observed children claiming their personal space at school.

   The teachers and counselors did not identify familiarity as a subtheme as related to stability. Most of the teachers and counselors had had little experience with children who were homeless and were not aware of this need that children expressed. Only Mrs. Adams mentioned in her interview about two incidents involving children needing to keep hold on to their backpacks because it was a "safety net" or familiar.

*Consistency.* Teachers and counselors were the only ones to mention the importance of consistency. They had a much clearer picture of the implications of mobility for children who were homeless than the children and the mothers. They discussed how mobility impeded children academically, emotionally, and socially. Teachers and counselors were able to give several examples of how children struggled when they were constantly or unexpectedly moved from their home and their school. Teachers and counselors commented that is was their responsibility to provide as much consistency in the classroom as possible because this was an important factor for the development of social belonging for the children who are homeless. Only one mother even alluded to her child's mobility when she told me she knew she needed to stop moving her daughter around. None of the other mothers or children mentioned consistency as having an effect on the sense of belonging in the classroom.

**Interaction.** The third theme to be identified was interaction.  Only children and the teachers and counselors commented on the need for interactions to be present in order for social belonging to occur in the classroom. During the analysis of the mother's case it was first believed that *interaction* was a theme but after further analysis it was determined that very little was said by mothers on this topic. The interaction discussed by children and the teachers and counselors included the importance of providing opportunities to interact, the need for building relationships between children who are homeless and other children in the class, and building family-like relationships with teachers and counselors. All children and all teachers and counselors addressed the issue

of interaction. *Exposure to different classmates* and *providing opportunities to interact* were subthemes that emerged for the children and the teachers and counselors. *Building family-like relationships* was only addressed by the teachers and counselors.

*Providing opportunities to interact.* This subtheme was especially important and mentioned most often by children. During the interview process the children spoke about how much they enjoyed when they were able to spend time with their friends. These activities included center time, PE, and lunch. It was during my observations that I was able to see how important these interactions were for children and how little opportunity they had to interact. The teachers and counselors also agreed with the importance of allowing children to play together but confirmed that children did not get many opportunities to build a sense of belong in the classroom through interacting with their peers. In fact, the lack of opportunity to interact emerged as a factor that impeded the development of social belonging in the classroom.

Since mothers were not as aware of the interactions that took place in the classroom as the other two cases, they did not mention the importance of providing opportunities to interact for the development of belonging in the classroom. Of the mothers interviewed, only Tammy and Emma briefly mentioned a lack of social opportunities at the shelter. Through my visits to the shelter I was able to witness some of the limitations placed on the mothers who wanted interaction opportunities for their children. Unlike housed children it was more difficult to invite their housed friends over to play. To go play in the "backyard" meant that children went to play in an area where the mothers went outside to smoke or they had to play in a vacant parking deck.

*Exposure to different classmates.* The next strongest subtheme, mentioned by the children's case study and the teachers and counselor's case study, was exposure to different classmates. Teachers and counselors expressed the importance of children from the shelter to be exposed to all the children in the classroom and not just allow them to spend time with the other children from the shelter. They believed that social belonging in the classroom would not develop if children were allowed to segregate themselves and limit their interactions to just the other children from the shelter. By exposing them to everyone in the classroom children from the shelter had more opportunities to interact, be accepted, and develop relationships with their peers.

When I interviewed children I asked them if they were friends with anyone else at school beside children from the shelter. Several answered that they were friends with non-shelter children. Because there was very little interaction that took place during my observations I was not able to witness children from the shelter interacting with their non-shelter friends. But through my experience with the children from the shelter, I never saw a non-shelter friend visit children at the shelter.

Due to their living situation, children from the shelter spent much time together. They traveled to and from school each day, eat breakfast and dinner together, did homework together, and then spent all weekend together. This is not typical for their non-shelter peers. For this reason the teachers and counselors placed an emphasis on the importance of exposing the children who are homeless to different classmates. They agreed that it was too easy to stay with the familiar, other children from the shelter, than to reach out to others. Without the exposure to all classmates, teachers and counselors did

not believe social belonging could develop in the classroom for the children who are homeless.

   *Building family-like relationships.* Teachers and counselors were the only case to mention the importance of building family-type relationships in the classroom. Several times throughout the interview process teachers and counselors talked about how important it was to develop a classroom atmosphere where students felt safe and accepted, like in a family. Because teachers and counselors were not always sure what type of family situation children were experiencing, they wanted to make sure that at least in the classroom they felt like a family. Teachers and counselors believed that a family atmosphere was conducive and necessary for the development of social belonging in their classrooms.

   The children did not mention their need or desire for a family-type relationship with their teachers or counselors, but through my observations of the children interacting within this type of environment it was clear that they enjoyed this relationship. Again mothers were not aware of the relationships that existed within the classroom so they did not mention the importance of their children building a family-like relationship with teachers and counselors. The only comments mothers made about relationships in the classroom were, for example, Tammy who talked about how much happier her son became after he got to know everyone in his class. Amy also talked about how nice April's teacher was to her, and Abby who talked about how much time Crystal's teacher spent with her. These mothers were aware of the positive effects of the family-type

relationships within the classroom but they did not know or understand that it derived from the family-type atmosphere the teachers and counselors had created.

**Support.** The fourth theme to emerge for all three cases was support. According to participants this support was provided to children through the family, counseling, teaching, and encouraging. During the interview process, support was discussed by most participants. Although the issue of support was not mentioned during the interview process by Austin and Wyatt, I was able to observe the support given to Austin during the interview process. Support was also not mentioned by two mothers, Cheryl and Amy, but again I was able to see loving support given by Cheryl to Andrew during the interview process. The issue of support was strongest among teachers and counselors. Each participant addressed the importance of support and teachers and counselors provided more subthemes related to support. The subtheme *family support* was addressed by all three cases. Teachers and counselors also addressed *counseling sessions, teaching about appropriate behaviors, and encouragement.*

*Family support*. Family support was the only subtheme addressed by all three cases. Three of the children; Andrew, April, and Crystal, mentioned family members as examples of people who supported them. According to these children a sense of belonging was defined by the term "family". As previously mentioned family support was not only discussed but also observed during the interview process. Three of the mothers were present during their children's interview with me. Both Andrew and Austin sat in their mother's lap during our interview in order to feel comforted. These mothers

were not only supportive in their actions but also in the way they spoke to their children.

They were positive and encouraged their children during my time with them. Two

mothers; Tammy and Emma, both mentioned how much better their sons coped because

they were able to feel their mother's love and support.

Teachers and counselors also mentioned support but focused more on the

consequences when there was a lack of support from family. Only Mrs. Bailey

specifically mentioned that she believed April received support from her mother at home.

The rest of the teachers and counselors discussed how the lack of support by family

impeded the development of social belonging in the classroom. They discussed issues

such as absent fathers, lack of meeting basic physical needs, and lack of meeting

emotional needs. Teachers and counselors believed that both positive and negative family

supports were contributing factors to the development of social belonging in the

classroom.

*Counseling sessions.* The second subtheme under support was counseling

sessions. Not surprisingly, counselors were the most vocal about the importance of

counseling for the development of social belonging in the classroom. They discussed the

importance of building a children's self-esteem and making them feel important. During

counseling sessions children were encouraged to interact and were allowed to be more

social than when they were in the classroom setting. Counselors believed that

encouraging this type of social interaction outside the classroom would help children feel

more comfortable with their peers inside the classroom leading to better peer acceptance

thus more feelings of belonging. Mrs. Kennedy also mentioned the importance of

counseling sessions because she believed it allowed for more one-on-one time with the children, something that was not always possible for the classroom teacher. At the time of the interviews and observations none of the mothers had interacted with their children's teacher or counselor. I was not surprised that mothers or their children did not mention this subtheme. Through the interview process it was clear that mothers were not aware of what took place during their children's time with the counselors.

*Teaching about appropriate behaviors.* Again, only teachers and counselors mentioned this as an important factor contributing to the development of social belonging in the classroom, but all seven participants from this case strongly agreed to its importance. For teachers and counselors, the behavior topics discussed included acceptance, sharing, following rules, respect, responsibility, and at School of Joy-Biblical principles. These behaviors were taught to children through social skills building activities both in the classroom and during counseling sessions. Surprisingly, children did not mention this subtheme during their interviews. I was also surprised that not even one mother mentioned the importance of appropriate behaviors as a factor contributing to the development of social belonging in the classroom. Through my interactions with the mothers and children it was apparent that not all mothers teach appropriate behavior skills to their children. According to teachers and counselors appropriate behavior skills were an important factor that led to the success of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless.

*Encouragement.* A final subtheme mentioned only by teachers and counselors was the need for encouragement. Teachers and counselors believed it was important for children to feel important within the classroom. Time was spent in both the classroom and in counseling sessions working to improve the children's belief in their self-worth. Through encouragement teachers and counselors hoped also to build children's self-esteem. They believed that children with higher self-esteem were then more likely to develop a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Not surprisingly, children did not verbalize the need or desire for encouragement. This concept was not fully understood by children in this study. I did observe though, children expressing their desire for encouragement. During observations of several children, I saw them raise their hands excitedly so they would be called on by the teacher. They were happy when teachers gave them encouraging words after giving a correct answer. I also observed April show her teacher a picture she had drawn in hopes of getting affirming words of encouragement.

In the shelter environment encouraging words were not always abundant between adults and children. This may be why mothers did not mention the importance of encouragement.

**Deterrents to social belonging.** The fifth theme to emerge was deterrents. Initially this theme was identified for children but was removed because children did not associate deterrents to social belonging with a lack of belonging in the classroom. Through the interview and observation process it was evident that the mothers and the teachers and counselors were aware that children's actions and behaviors exhibited in the

classroom could interfere with developing belonging. Teachers and counselors, having the most direct experience with the issue, had the most insight about deterrents to social belonging. The mothers and the teachers and counselors agreed that three subthemes emerged including *negative behaviors, negative feelings,* and *withdrawal.*

*Negative feelings.* The first subtheme to emerge was negative feelings. This deterrent was defined by the mothers and the teachers and counselors as an inward expression. Participants were in agreement that children who dealt with self-esteem and self-confidence issues found it harder to develop belonging. The mothers believed none of their children allowed these deterrents to affect their children's sense of belonging. Teachers and counselors did not indicate that any children in this study were experiencing the effects of a deterrent. They did confirm they had taught children in the past who struggled with this issue.

*Negative behaviors.* The second subtheme identified by the mothers and the teachers and counselors was negative behaviors. Through both the interview and observation process I was able to view children's negative behaviors. Even though I was able to observe some of these negative behaviors in the classroom, children did not associate their negative behaviors with a lack of belonging.

Out of all the children Andrew appeared to be the most shunned by his peers. There were multiple incidences throughout my observation that indicated that some of the children did not accept Andrew. I did not observe Andrew being blatantly disobedient during my visits to his school but Andrew's artifact (Appendix P) portrayed him getting

in trouble due to his misbehavior. When I asked Andrew to draw a picture for me that would show me something that happened at school that day, he drew two pictures of himself getting in trouble. The first was when he did not draw the correct things on his paper in class and the second was when he got in trouble for running in the lunchroom during after school care. In both instances these negative behaviors could deter others from developing an accepting peer relationship with Andrew. Austin talked in his interview about getting a paddling because he was bad. I did not witness Austin misbehaving in the classroom or any obvious signs of a lack of belonging felt by Austin, so I can only comment on what he conveyed to me in the interview. During my observations with Crystal, I witnessed her being shunned by her peers at lunch and later that same day her misbehavior in the classroom led to her being removed from her peers. Crystal's artifact (Appendix P) told of another incident at school where she got in trouble. I was able to witness this event at school when I went to observe Crystal in PE. When I arrived Crystal was not in PE because she had displayed negative behavior in the classroom. This behavior separated her from her classmates and did not allow for her to interact with them during her PE time.

Mothers had a better understanding than the children that negative behaviors hindered belonging in the classroom. They commented, hypothetically, that children who acted out toward their peers and did not comply with their teachers would have difficulty being accepted by others which in turn would hinder the development of belonging. None of the mothers referred to their own children as engaging in this type of behavior.

Teachers and counselors had the clearest understanding about negative behaviors being a deterrent to belonging in the classroom. They provided several examples of

children who struggled to feel accepted by their peers. This lack of acceptance was due to children expressing themselves negatively through both physical and verbal actions. The teachers and counselors agreed that these negative behaviors increased peer rejection which led to less likelihood of a child developing a sense of belonging in the classroom.

*Withdrawal.* Another subtheme to emerge was withdrawal. Teachers and counselors agreed that this deterrent was often times associated with negative feelings. Children who did not feel good about themselves were less likely to try to develop a sense of belonging with their peers. They expressed that children without a sense of belonging were many times labeled as "loners". Mothers were able to relate to withdrawal more than the previous two subthemes. They gave examples of how their children experienced withdrawal while at the shelter. They did not discuss any episodes of withdrawal at school.

**Understanding of social belonging.** In order for other researchers and me to understand this study, it was important to identify the participants' concepts of belonging. The discovery of the concepts they grasped about belonging helped to lay the foundation for this study. Subthemes for each case were different and included *simplistic understanding* for children, *difficult to express* for mothers, and *able to express* for teachers and counselors.

*Simplistic understanding.* It was a concern whether the children ages 5 to 7 would be able to understand the concept of belonging. Furthermore, I wondered if

children who are homeless have even more difficulty understanding the meaning of belonging. Through this study I learned that the children were able to understand belonging in the simplest of terms. Except for Austin, all of the children associated belonging with people. The children mentioned their mothers, fathers, and friends. They associated "being nice" to others as a way to make friends, which, from their perspectives, was how "belonging" developed.

*Difficult to express.* The mothers seemed to have a better understanding of belonging and how it could develop for their children, but they had difficulty putting a definition of belonging into words. Many times throughout the interview process mothers said "you know what I mean-belonging". They used the word belonging to try to describe belonging.

*Able to express.* The teachers and counselors had no trouble expressing their understanding of belonging. They were able to give examples of children who exhibited signs of belonging in the classroom and express what happened when belonging did not exist. They also expressed that they believed the concept of belonging would be difficult for children to express. Teachers and counselors expressed that children who are homeless may be confused about what belonging was because they did not have opportunities to experience belonging at home.

**Table 9**

*Themes and Subthemes of Factors Contributing to the Development of Social Belonging in the Classroom: Across Three Cases*

| Acceptance | Stability | Interaction | Support | Deterrents to Social Belonging | Understanding of Social Belonging |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Accepted By Peers | Ability To Adjust To Situations (M,T) | Exposure To Different Classmates (C,T) | Family Support | Negative Behavior (M,T) | Simplistic Understanding (C) |
| Accepted By Teachers and Counselors | Familiarity (C,M) | Providing Opportunities To Interact (C,T) | Counseling Sessions (T) | Negative Feelings (M,T) | Difficult to Express (M) |
| Avoiding Labels (M) | Consistency (T) | Building Family-Like Relationships (T) | Teaching About Appropriate Behavior (T) | Withdrawal (M,T) | Able to Express (T) |
| Treating All Children The Same (T) | | | Encouragement (T) | | |

Note of cases: C=children; M=mothers; T=teachers and counselors. *Subthemes that emerged for only one or two cases are noted in parentheses by the case's letter.

**Research Questions Answered**

This study was guided by the following research question: What factors may

contribute to the development of social belonging in the school environment for

elementary children, ages 5 to 7, who are homeless? This question was answered through

the identification of themes and discussed in detail throughout the paper:

- Acceptance: This acceptance needed to be provided by peers, teachers and

counselors. Children needed to feel that they had friends and 'fit in' with others.

- Stability: Familiarity of surroundings and ability to claim familiar space were identified as ways for children to feel a sense of belonging. Also consistency and routine aided in a feeling of stability.

- Interaction: Children needed to build relationships with their peers, teachers and counselors. Children desired to spend time with their friends in social activities.

- Support: This support included encouragement from the teachers and counselors that aided in the development of self-esteem for the children. It also included support from mothers.

- Address deterrents to social belonging: Negative behaviors and negative feelings were identified as deterring factors for the development of belonging. These behaviors and feelings had to be addressed for belonging to develop.

- Understanding of social belonging: According to Selman, children have a rudimentary understanding of belonging due to their inability to take the perspectives of others.

The central research question was further supported by the following sub-questions. The answers to these sub-questions were also informed by the thematic analysis:

1. How do the children, parents, teachers, and counselors, in general, define social belonging?
   - Children- defined belonging simplistically as: family, friends, possessions of familiar items, and inclusion into specific groups.

- Parents- had a difficult time expressing their definition of belonging but expressed that it included: having friends and fitting in

- Teachers and counselors- were easily able to express how they defined belonging and included: fitting in, being a part of something, and feeling comfortable with your peers

No prior literature identified how parents or children defined belonging. Prior research on teacher's and counselor's definitions included positive peer relationships (Casillas, 2010). Goodenow and Grady (1993) defined belonging as feeling accepted, respected, included and supported.


2. What do the parents, teachers, and counselors think social belonging in the school environment means to children?

- While parents indicated that their awareness of the school environment was limited, teachers and counselors identified a range of meaning including:

- Having friends

- Fitting in

- Being accepted by peers

- Being accepted by teachers and counselors

- Familiarity to their surrounding

My research pertaining to belonging in the classroom identified similar results to previous studies including having the experience of fitting in (Hagerty et al.,

1996). Also Casillas (2010) identified the need for supporting and accepting peers, close teacher-child relationships, and positive interpersonal relationships (friends). Eispar (2010) also identified the need for a connection between children and teachers.

3. What strategies do parents, teachers, and counselors engage in to encourage the development of social belonging in the school environment?

- Parents did not provide any information about strategies for in the school environment because they did not have interaction with the school- they spoke in general terms about support for their children

- Teachers and counselors identified a number of strategies including:

  - Exposing children to different classmates to build relationships

  - Providing opportunities to interact in a social setting

  - Building family-like relationships

  - Providing counseling sessions

  - Teaching appropriate behavior

My research findings related to strategies for the classroom were in line with research by Lewis, Schaps, and Watson (1995) who found that providing opportunities to interact helped children develop a sense of shared purpose and aided in the development of belonging. Daniels (1992) discussed the importance of counseling sessions for children who are homeless. It was during the

counseling sessions that she engaged in teaching children appropriate social skills

needed in maintaining friendships. Dathatri (2007) also discussed the need for

teaching appropriate behaviors. Divoll (2010) identified the importance of

creating classroom relationships that allowed students to feel known. These

results were similar to my results relating to building a family-like relationship.

4. What factors impede the development of social belonging in the school

   environment?

   - During the interview process parents, teachers, and counselors

     identified the following deterrents (See appendices I, K, and L for

     interview question).

     - Peer rejection

     - Labeling children as homeless

     - Teachers and counselors treating children who are homeless

       differently

     - Lack of consistency

     - Lack of opportunities to interact

     - Lack of relationship building

     - Lack of family support

Anooshian (2003) also found peer rejection to be a deterrent to social

belonging. Powers-Costello and Swick (2008) identified negative teacher's

perceptions of children who are homeless as a deterring factor to belonging.

Family support was identified by Howard and Johnson (2000) as a factor that made a difference in the development of belonging. They found that without family support the sense of belonging was impeded.

5.  What repercussions are evident for children who are homeless when there is a lack of development of social belonging in the school environment?

- During the interview process parents, teachers, and counselors identified the following deterrents (See appendices I, K, and L for interview question).

    - Negative behaviors including antisocial behavior and disobedience

    - Negative feelings including low self-esteem and low self-confidence

    - Withdrawal  from interacting with peers, teachers, and counselors

Numerous studies identify the repercussions as behavior problems, depression, and anxiety when social belonging did not develop (Bassuk & Rosenburg (1990); Bassuk & Rubin (1987); Graham-Bermann et al. (1996); Rescoria et al. (1991); Walsh (1992); Yu et al. (2008); and Zima et al. (1994). But only one study, Bassuk and Gallagher (1990) specifically address aggression, shyness, and withdrawal as repercussions for children ages three to five years old.

6.  What specific activities do children engage in during the school day that encourages the development of social belonging?

- During the interview process children, teachers and counselors identified specific activities (See appendices J, K, and L for interview questions. Due to the abstract nature of belonging, the children's questions were modified to better fit their understanding of belonging).
  - Children mentioned center time, lunch, PE, and afterschool program activities
  - Teachers and counselors mentioned playing games to improve social skills

No prior research identified children's responses similar to those found in this study. Similar teacher and counselor responses could be found in Divoll's (2010) study and by Daniels (1992). No prior research identified specific activities for children similar in age to those in my study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

**Overview**

The seriousness of the increasing numbers of children who are homeless is well documented with an estimated 1.35 million to 1.5 million children experiencing homelessness and another 3.8 million living with family or friends (Bassuk, 2010; The Institute for Children and Poverty, 2009; HUD, 2009). The National Center of Family Homelessness (2011) also reports that 42% of the homeless population is less than 6 years of age. Limited research is available that explores the implications for this young population.

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the classroom for five to seven year old children who are homeless. Three cases (children, mothers, and the teachers and counselors) were included in the study in order to explore the different perspectives of this issue. The qualitative data was collected through interviews, observations, and a collection of artifacts. Analysis of the data was performed at two levels: within each case and across the cases. Credibility of the findings was assessed through member checking, audit trail, reflexivity, and triangulation of data.

## Findings

To answer this study's central question and sub-questions, this qualitative multiple case study yielded six total themes and various subthemes between the three cases. These themes are acceptance, stability, interaction, support, deterrents of social belonging, and understanding of social belonging. While numerous variations in the subthemes evolved for each case, overall the six themes represented the factors participants expressed contributed to the development of social belonging in the classroom for five, six, and seven year old children who are homeless.

### Acceptance

The first factor that contributed to the development of social belonging was acceptance. "To be included in the class is more than just having a desk" (Romano, 2000, p.105). Participants from all three cases expressed a similar sentiment indicating that acceptance was the most important factor contributing to social belonging in the classroom. It was conveyed during the interview process by many of the participants that children could develop a sense of belonging when they felt accepted and were able to establish relationships with other children, teachers, and counselors. This finding is in agreement with a dissertation by Morgan (2003) who also found a statistically significant association between acceptance and school belonging for second and fifth graders.

From the perspective of all five children, acceptance meant they had friends. For children who are homeless, however, friendships are often the first casualty of their situation (Walsh, 1992). Waxman and Reyes (1987) reported that children who are

homeless were the silent victims of homelessness. They had more difficulty making friends because they were always the 'stranger' in the class. Eddowes (1992) reported that the establishment of friends was the foundation for social competence which led to social belonging. Failure to develop social competence led to peer rejection. I was able to observe an instance where peer acceptance had not taken place and the child who was homeless was shunned or ignored. This lack of acceptance is a concern according to Maslow (1970) who believed that the absence of friends could lead to social anxiety, loneliness and depression. Crick and Ladd's (1993) study of third and fifth graders found Maslow's concerns valid and reported in their study results, "rejected children exhibited relatively higher levels of social distress (i.e., they reported significantly higher levels of loneliness than all other groups and had the largest percentage of members who could be classified as experiencing multiple forms of distress)" (p.251).

While one particular child in the study appeared to be challenged by establishing friendships, the other four child participants were accepted by their peers and I was able to see positive interactions within the school environment with their friends. Some of their friendships were with other children who were homeless but in others instances friendships included children they met at school. According to Maslow's hierarchy, friends are a requirement for the development of love and belonging.

Labeling children as homeless, according to Medcalf (2008), Nunez (2010), and Whitman et al. (1990), is a common practice among peers and teachers and was a concern for the mothers in this study. Several mothers indicated that being labeled "homeless" was a factor that contributed to their child not being accepted by their peers and thus led to a diminished sense of belonging. This belief by the mothers is

substantiated by Gibel's (1996) study of students in 6th through 12th grade that indicated

housed students had significantly more negative attitudes toward their homeless peers

than toward their non poor housed peers or poor housed peers. Even though this study

was conducted with older children than those five to seven years old, in this study, at the

very least, it confirms the potential for future difficulties for the children who are

homeless. Rafferty and Rollins (1989) quoted a participant in their study who said, "The

other kids don't treat the children from the shelter nicely, they pick on them and call them

'the shelter kids' or 'the homeless kids'" (p.88). Rosenman and Stein (1990) also

reported that children, who were labeled "shelter kids" by their peers, often lacked a

sense of belonging and failed to develop long term relationships.

Even though the mothers addressed labeling as a concern, the children did not

address this issue. Walsh (1992) and Tower (1992) both found that children often tried to

hide the fact that they were homeless to avoid the embarrassment of being labeled "a

shelter kid". I did not find this to be true in this study. The children I observed were open

about where they lived and did not avoid questions from other children about their living

situation. During one of my observations with April and Crystal they were specifically

asked if they were from Family's Hope and both, without hesitation, answered "yes". I

did not observe any of the five participants try to hide the fact that they lived at Family's

Hope shelter. Because this study is focused on younger children, age very possibly plays

a part in whether children are affected by labels.

Other studies (Gibel, 1996; Menke, 2000) indicated that lack of appropriate or

stylish clothing led to less peer acceptance. I did not find this to be an issue for the

children in this study because all children wore uniforms provided by the shelter. This

allowed the children who were homeless to 'fit in' better with their peers which increased the opportunity to be accepted.  A similar finding about 'fitting in' and clothing was found in Einspar's (2010) study who explained, "By providing a sweatshirt for a student who felt embarrassed to come to school, the principal enabled this student to feel more a part of the school" (p.89).

Gibel (1996) reported that teacher attitude and acceptance had a significant effect on how children were treated at school. This came to light in this study as well and was addressed by all three cases. From my observations it was the teachers and counselors who had the most impact on children's feelings of acceptance. The teachers and counselors were responsible for not only monitoring the acceptance levels of the children in the classroom but also expressing their own acceptance of the children who are homeless. My findings were also consistent with Anglin (1998) who reported that teachers were responsible for helping children who are homeless to assimilate into the classroom and socialize positively with their peers.

Teachers and counselors from this study also believed that they positively impacted acceptance in the classroom by treating all children the same. This was substantiated by Barton (1998) who stated that treating all children the same was a major challenge for those in her study. But it was believed that a teacher's attitude about children in the classroom who are homeless played a part in the student's success or failure both academically and socially. Ramsey (1991) also agreed by saying that teachers must scrutinize their own assumptions about children in the classroom in order to provide acceptance for everyone. In Swick's (2000) opinion the single most powerful

barrier to acceptance in the classroom for children who are homeless was having a teacher who held negative attitudes about homelessness.

The children and mothers agreed that when teachers and counselors showed kindness the children felt accepted. The teachers and counselors expressed that they showed acceptance to children by listening, giving affection, and encouraging the children. In my pilot study (Ott, 2011) 'expressions of love' was a theme that emerged as a factor contributing to social belonging in the classroom. The importance of affection was mentioned by both the children and the teachers and counselors in this study as well. Teachers and counselors stated that often children did not receive positive touches at home so hugs were very important for children to feel that they belonged in the classroom. Daniels (1992) said this about Maslow's hierarchy, "Acceptance, attention, and affection are key components in feeling that one "belongs" to a group and is loved by others (p.104)

Eddowes and Hranitz (1989) reported that children who are homeless were more concerned with meeting Maslow's lower hierarchal needs of food, clothing, shelter, and safety so that the higher level of social needs which includes peer acceptance was not of concern for them. The children in this study, were able to have these basic needs met at the shelter and had moved to the third level of Maslow's hierarchy, love and belonging, where peer acceptance and belonging were very important to them.

**Stability**

As with acceptance, stability was identified by all three cases as a factor contributing to the development of belonging in the classroom for children who are

homeless. In this study stability referred to the desire to experience a sense of familiarity and ownership. This finding was in agreement with Einspar's (2010) study that found one way to create a sense of belonging in the classroom was to provide as much stability as possible in school and at home.

Stability to children and mothers was associated with familiarity of their surroundings. 'Stability and consistency of environment' was also a theme that emerged during my pilot study (Ott, 2011). Anglin's (1998) study revealed that when children must leave behind their possessions when they move, they become less connected to their past and they lose their sense of belonging. Rivlin (1990) reported that claiming of space was not uncommon for children who are homeless and she called it territoriality. She stated that children established proprietary interests over places as a means to obtain security. The development of personal space provided the children tangible signs that they were special. According to Maslow's (1970) hierarchy, since children in this study had had their physiological needs met at the shelter, they next desired to gratify their safety needs which included safety of their property.

Mothers were aware that stable living situations were not always available. Due to this instability, the mothers emphasized the importance of their children having the ability to adjust to new situations and that this factor played a role in their children's ability to develop a sense of belonging in the classroom. This idea was similar to a conclusion drawn from Dathatri's (2008) study that indicated children must learn to adjust to the classroom culture and learn to engage with others in order to develop a sense of belonging.

Teachers and counselors, in this study, also were aware of the importance consistency played in the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1994) first propositions in order for social development to occur, "interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time" (p. 1644). Teachers and counselors understood that when children did not experience consistency in one microsystem, home, it became even more important to provide consistency in another of the children's microsystems, school. Through observations and interviews for this study, it was apparent that schools could be a constant in the children's lives if they were fortunate enough to attend for an extended period of time. Fortunately, four of the five children, in this study, had been in their school for at least six months when this study ended.

**Interaction**

The children, teachers and counselors all expressed that interaction was a third factor that contributed to the development of belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless. It was obvious through my observations that children, in this study, desired to spend time with their friends but were not given many opportunities. The children wanted to engage in shared experiences to help build better relationships. In Romano's (2000) opinion, interaction within a trusted classroom community that included shared experiences was how a sense of belonging was developed. A similar finding emerged in my pilot study (Ott, 2011) when it was determined that shared experiences led to children having a common bond which in turn enhanced the ability to develop a sense of belonging within the children. Studies that involved children who were not given

opportunities to interact indicated that children who are homeless became socially isolated (Anooshian, 2003; Tower, 1992; Walsh, 1992).

Besides providing opportunities for interaction, teachers and counselors stressed the importance of exposing children who are homeless to multiple situations and other children. Lewis, Schaps, and Watson (1995) said that a sense of belonging was best developed when children were given "many opportunities to get to know one another as people and work with a shared sense of purpose" (p.551). Anooshian (2000) emphasized the importance of providing "classroom activities with a variety of social interactions, including small groups (and) partners" (p.89) in order to promote positive social environments. This was further confirmed through a statement by Ramsey (1991), "By placing children in a number of different groups, teachers can keep changing the mix of children to prevent segregation (and) 'bring out' more isolated children" (pp.121-122). Ramsey's statement is consistent with what I observed in several of the classrooms. Teachers were purposeful in their actions when they selected children to participate in different groups throughout the day.

The teachers and counselors, in this study, indicated through their interviews that they worked hard at developing a family-like relationship with their students because they believed it was a factor needed in the development of a sense of belonging in the classroom. The results from Quinn-Schuldt's (2010) study also indicated the importance of teacher's willingness to develop relationships with children who are homeless in the classroom. Einspar (2010) reported that a positive school climate that encouraged one-on-one connections between children and teachers was a way to develop a sense of belonging within the classroom. Jackolski's (2009) dissertation suggested that educators

must focus not only on instruction within the classroom but must also provide a human environment where relationships are built between teachers and children. She emphasized that small groups (families) are important in the development of belonging within the classroom. Goodenow and Grady (1993) also mentioned that smaller teams (families) within a school helped to create a sense of community belonging. Even though Jackolski's research and Goodenow and Grady's study were conducted with older children, I also found that placing children in smaller family-like groups was beneficial for the young children.  In Tatta's (1997) study elementary school teachers were even willing to take on the family responsibilities of bathing children and washing their clothes in order to promote a sense of belonging.

**Support**

Participants from all three cases indicated that some type of support was another factor necessary for belonging to develop in the classroom for children who are homeless. "For children whose lives have been disrupted by events leading up to the change in housing, support from significant others appeared to be an essential contributor to their well-being" (Graham-Bermann et al., 1996, p.258).

All three cases indicated the importance of family support. Studies by Howard and Johnson (2000); Swick and Williams (2006); and Tatta (1997) all found similar results pertaining to the importance of family support for children who are homeless. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy was an important point of reference when discussing family support. Families were the ones who were responsible for supporting their children's physiological and safety needs. In this study those needs were met by the mothers. The

next level of support needed according to Maslow was the need for love and belonging. Eddowes and Hranitz (1989), and Kozol (2006) reported that often the stress parents who are homeless endured made it difficult to consistently demonstrate support and guidance for their children. For the most part the mothers, in this study, were able to provide this level of need for their children. But the results of this study would also indicate that parental stresses made this type of support difficult for the mothers. Bronfenbrenner (1979) was also a point of reference when exploring the need for family support because he believed children were continuously affected by changes that occurred in their environments. Thus support from the family along with school and community were needed to establish trusting relationships.

Teachers and counselors also saw the importance of counseling sessions and teaching appropriate behaviors. In this study, teachers and counselors believed they provided support by helping children to develop prosocial skills. Within Venhorst's (1995) study, he defined social skills "as the ability to act in ways that are rewarded and not behave so that one is punished or avoided" (p.18). Teachers and counselors spent time in class and during counseling sessions engaged in sensitivity training and developing social skills to help children regulate their emotions, behaviors, and interactions. The goal was to help children interact appropriately with their peers and to feel good about themselves while doing it. Erikson (1980) believed elementary aged children were capable of engaging in such training. Baggerly and Borkowski (2004) and Howard and Johnson (2000) also focused, in their studies, on social skills training and helping children who are homeless feel comfortable and secure within their school because they believed it was important for the development of belonging.

Teachers and counselors, in this study, also believed it was important to support children who are homeless through words of encouragement in hopes of building the children's self-esteem. Edwards and Mills (2001) found that encouraging children to connect with others, highlighting student's strengths, and helping children feel as though they contribute to the class were all ways children's self-esteems was increased and a sense of belonging was developed. I observed some of Edwards and Mills ideas implemented in the classrooms during my observations. Several teachers indicated that they tried to provide a classroom environment where children had responsibilities which allowed them to take ownership of their accomplishments. Divoll's (2010) study found that feeling "known" helped offset disconnects between teachers and children. I also observed teachers and counselors implement this strategy through their emphasis on family-like relationships.

**Deterrents to Social Belonging**

Besides the positive factors that contribute to the development of belonging, deterrents to social belonging were also identified. Deterrents to social belonging were identified as feelings or actions by children that impeded development of social belonging in the classroom. As previously mentioned, studies exist that explored the repercussions of a lack of belonging but few examined what improved or deterred belonging.

The mothers and the teachers and counselors indicated that both low self-esteem and low self-confidence were deterrents to developing belonging. Multiple studies (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; Tower, 1992; Waxman & Reyes, 1987) also indicated that

children who are homeless demonstrated significantly lowered self-esteem. Yet, results from Ma's (2003) study found that self-esteem was the single most important predictor for children's development of a sense of belonging. As mentioned above, teachers and counselors understood the implications and importance of self-esteem and spent time trying to help children improve their feelings about themselves.

Negative behaviors were another deterrent of social belonging identified by the mothers and the teachers and counselors. According to Yu et al. (2007), "Behavior disorders were four times more prevalent in the homeless children than in the housed children" (p.7). During this study, I observed children removed from peer interaction due to negative behaviors. This exemplified negative behavior as a deterrent to social belonging. In order to continue interacting, children had to learn to resolve conflict and manage aggression. I not only witnessed negative behaviors by the children in the study but also toward the children in the study. It was unknown which of these behaviors was exhibited first. It was also unclear through previous research whether negative behaviors deterred the development of belonging or the lack of belonging created negative behaviors. What was clear in this study were steps taken by teachers and counselors to help children learn appropriate behaviors in order to develop a sense of belonging. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed school was a place where children acted out due to negative experiences in other microsystems.

Another behavior identified as a deterrent to social belonging was withdrawal. Previous studies also indicated that one of the most frequent behaviors exhibited by children who are homeless was withdrawal (Buckner et al., 1999; Rosenman & Stein, 1990; Williams-Jacobs, 2008). Teachers and counselors commented that it was often hard

to separate withdrawal from children's negative feelings. One reason children withdrew was due to their lack of self-esteem. Tower (1992) and Walsh (1992) commented that children kept their distance so others didn't learn about their housing situation. I did not observe but teachers and counselors spoke about former students who became loners and socially isolated due to their withdrawal from their peers. This behavior inhibited the development of acceptance, interaction, and ultimately a sense of belonging.

**Understanding of Social Belonging**

Understanding of social belonging was the final factor identified in this study. The concept of social belonging can be difficult for all children to understand but may be much more for children who are homeless. Children in this study had experienced multiple moves, multiple schools, and even foster care. The other factors identified in this study (acceptance, stability, interaction, and support) were not always available for these children. But despite these facts the children in this study demonstrated a simplistic understanding of social belonging.

The age of the children also played a role in their ability to understand how to develop belonging. According to Ramsey (1991), in early childhood children gain social knowledge and learn how to relate effectively with others. Cognitively they are becoming aware of others' perspective, emotionally they are becoming aware of their own and others' feelings, and behaviorally they are learning specific skills to relate to others.  In order for children to interact with others they must be able to coordinate their own perspective with those of other children. Selman (1980), an expert in understanding children's perspective taking abilities, explained levels of children's abilities. Level 0

included children ages three to seven years. Children were capable of recognizing their own and others thoughts and feelings but could not distinguish their own feelings from those of others. Level 1 included children ages four to nine. These children could differentiate perspectives. Level 2 included children ages six to twelve. Children at this level were able to self-reflect and exhibit reciprocal perspectives. The ages of the children, in this study, meant they fell in any of these three levels but developmentally I believe they were all at level 0. During my observations and interviews with the children they were able to tell me how they felt about their friends, their school, and living at the shelter but I did not get the impression that they understood that their feelings were different from anyone else's in their class. Since perspective taking is not a skill with which children are born, their understanding of belonging is not yet complete. As the children in this study get older their perspectives of others will change. It is not known whether different factors contributing to the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless would emerge for older children. For this reason the level at which children understood belonging and their age were factors contributing to the development of belonging for the children in the classroom who were homeless.

The understanding of social belonging by mothers and teachers and counselors also played a role in the development of belonging in the classroom. Mothers in the study had a better understand of belonging and were at a higher level on Selman's scale but had difficulty expressing what belonging meant to them. This might be due to lack of education or a lack of belonging experiences. This inability to express their understanding of belonging may be a reason the children in this study had only a

simplistic understanding of belonging. Teachers and counselors had no difficulty understanding or expressing belonging. They were able to explain what it meant to them and what they thought it meant to the children in the classroom setting. This was a contributing factor because it meant teachers and counselors could better assist children in their classrooms to develop social belonging.

## Conclusions

The majority of literature concerning homeless education focused on the barriers to education and the repercussion of homelessness to children's education. Additional literature was available to discuss the repercussion when children who are homeless experience a lack of belonging in the classroom. However, few studies focused on what influenced or impeded the development of belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless.

Belonging is an essential need for all human beings but it is not always within reach for children who are homeless. The ability to develop a sense of belonging in the classroom relies not only on the children who are homeless but on those around them. Without really understanding why, the children knew they wanted stability and consistency in their lives. They adjusted and coped the best way they knew how.

Through interactions children, teachers, and counselors felt they could relate better with each other. Children were able to feel more secure in their environment which led to the development of feelings of worth and belonging.

Family support was an integral part of children's physiological and safety needs being met. Family support was sometimes apparent in children's belonging and self-

esteem needs being met. In other instances teachers and counselors were the support system children counted on for help to reach these levels of needs. Teachers and counselors used skills building and encouragement as ways to help children build their self-esteem and develop a sense of belonging.

Children were not able to understand the relationship between their own negative feelings and behaviors and responses of acceptance or rejection they received from others. Mothers better understand the relationship but were certain their children did not exhibit any of the deterrents to social belonging. Teachers and counselors knew firsthand how the deterrents to social belonging interfered with the development of social belonging. They helped children through social skills building exercises and through encouragement so belonging could develop.

The understanding of belonging was in the emergent stages for the children. The adults in the study had a better understanding of the concept but did not believe the children understood what belonging meant. The level of understanding was a factor in the development of belonging for the children in the classroom.

## Implications

### Implications for Practitioners

The findings from this research have practical implications for all schools wanting to improve the ability of children who are homeless to developing a sense of belonging in the classroom. In order for children to experience a sense of belonging in the classroom, this study strongly indicates that it is crucial to introduce into a child's microsystem acceptance, stability, interaction, support, and understanding of belonging while avoiding

deterrents to social belonging. Without these factors the lack of a sense of belonging creates repercussions that compound the inability to develop belonging.

Peer and teacher acceptance was determined to be an integral factor to the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless. When friendships with peers where not developed children were shunned and ignored. When friendships were apparent there existed a camaraderie that led to children feeling a sense of belonging. Teachers and counselors who desire all students in the classroom to develop a sense of belonging should provide a loving and accepting environment where children feel safe and loved. This environment can be established when teachers and counselors treat all children the same and do not single out or label the children who are homeless.

Children desire to live in a predictable constant world. When this does not happen they cling to whatever they can find that is familiar to them. Children, in this study, who felt stability within their situation and surroundings, were better able to develop a sense of belonging in the classroom. They felt safe and secure within these familiar surroundings and were better able to adapt and 'fit in' with their peers. Teachers and counselors who can provide children who are homeless with a stable and consistent classroom environment will aid them in developing social belonging. Children in my study also wanted to be able to claim a place in the school environment that was theirs. Teachers and counselors can provide children with their own desks or cubbies to help the children feel that something belongs to them. When a predictable world does not exist for the children they have to learn to be adaptive within each new environment. Dathatri's (2008) study also indicated that children must learn to adjust to the classroom. This

ability to adapt may suggest that a school-based intervention, such as counseling, could

be beneficial for children to help them develop a sense of belonging.

The time spent in interaction increased the probability that children would

develop a sense of belonging in the classroom. Teachers and counselors have many

opportunities throughout the day to engage children in interactions with their peers.

Unfortunately, results from my study indicated that children were not provided adequate

opportunities for interaction within the school environment. This, according to

participants, hindered the development of social belonging in the classroom for children

who are homeless. Quinn-Schuldt's (2010) study also pointed to the fact that teacher and

counselors must be willing to move beyond providing only academic instruction and

focused also on building relationships with the children who are homeless.

When support was given by teachers and counselors, school provided an escape

or safe haven for children. This support was provided through words of encouragement

and social skills training. My findings were supported by Howard and Johnson (2000)

who also found the importance for children who are homeless to engage in social skills

training. Teachers and counselors can use 'teachable moments' throughout the day to

encourage the children and help improve children's social skill. Edwards and Mills

(2001) found that this type of encouragement increased children's self-esteem which then

increased their sense of belonging. Schools that provided a climate where children felt

safe promoted an environment conducive to belonging.

The more children showed negative behaviors toward their peers the more

rejected and shunned they became. Children who had not developed a healthy self-esteem

withdrew from peers causing social isolation. Children who were no longer socially

involved with their peers could not develop a sense of belonging within the classroom.

For teachers and counselors this means they must manage the classroom in such a way

that social isolation does not occur. It is important to encourage inclusion of all children

in all activities to avoid withdrawal of children from the social setting.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) the stronger and richer the links between

microsystems the better the situation for children at the center of the system. However,

communication between teachers and mothers did not occur within my study. An

implication for teachers and counselors is to place importance on parent communication

and involvement. School may need to provide multiple ways of communication due to

the lack of telephones and internet services for the homeless. Teachers and counselors

may also need to spend time in the shelter environment in order to increase parent

involvement.

The final implication for teachers and counselors is to consider curriculum that is

beneficial for children who are homeless or at high risk for homelessness. In order to

investigate if curriculum existed specifically for children who are homeless, I visited the

website for the National Center for Homeless Education and National Association for the

Education of Homeless Children and Youth. They identified several successful programs.

Three curriculum models were specifically recommended for developing social skills.

The first was Heartwood Character Curriculum. This curriculum believes that a student's

attitude, perseverance, self-esteem, and social skills play a part in school success. The

program is used to foster fundamental emotional and social understanding in children.

Another curriculum recommended was Life Skills 4 Kids. Their learning objectives

include self-awareness, interpersonal skills, decision making, drug awareness, and earth

skills. This curriculum focuses on increasing self-esteem and self-responsibility, inspiring children to stay in school and develop a lifetime enthusiasm for learning, developing positive social skills, developing critical thinking and decision making skills, and training children to protect themselves from drugs, violence and other harmful influences. The final social skills curriculum was Kids' Connection, Too. It is designed specifically for developing social skills for children who are homeless. The objectives of the curriculum include learning how to listen and communicate effectively, manage emotions-especially anger, practice self-control, be part of a team, deal more effectively with change, choose friends wisely, make healthy choices and decisions, and refuse negative peer pressure. Two additional classroom curriculums suggested for children who are homeless was Success For All and Creative Curriculum. Success For All curriculum provides literature-based lessons that introduce strategies and skills for critical thinking, problem solving, and working cooperatively in teams. Creative Curriculum includes a social component to help children feel comfortable in school, trust their new environment, make friends, and feel they are a part of a group. An emotional component includes helping children experience pride and self-confidence, develop independence and self-control, and have a positive attitude toward life. Creative Curriculum's emphasis is in language which is often shown to be developmentally delayed for children who are homeless. Teachers of Creative Curriculum are encouraged to support development of the value of self and others. All of these areas make Creative Curriculum beneficial for children who are homeless.

**Implications for Research**

The findings from this research also have implications for other researchers who are concerned about children who are homeless developing a sense of belonging in the classroom.

1. Morgan's (2003) study implies that a statistically significant association exists between acceptance and school belonging for second and fifth graders. What is not known is the association between acceptance and school belonging for children of other ages. My study indicates that age plays a role in understanding belonging and acceptance but it does not explore if contributing factors are different for older children. Research is needed to explore at what age children fully understand belonging and the association between acceptance and school belonging for children who are homeless.

2. My study is in agreement with Maslow's (1999) ideas indicating that affection is a key component in feeling that one "belongs" to a group and is loved by others. What was not explored was whether age changes the influence affection has on feelings of belonging. Previous studies (Anooshian, 2003; Ramsey, 1991) indicate that providing older children with small group (family type) settings helped them with their sense of belonging but they do not discuss what influence affection or lack of affection plays in developing their sense of belonging. Additional research in this area would be beneficial for understanding if age plays a role in positive effect of affection on belonging.

3. Bronfenbrenner (1986) indicates the importance of the mesosystem which connects children's school and home environment. My study revealed that

mothers did not have a connection with the school and most communication between the school and mother was administered through the shelter liaison. This had implications for my study because mothers were not able to answer some questions regarding their child's school experience. No prior research was found to address the issue of mothers lacking communication with the school. Further research is needed to explore if the lack of communication between mothers and the school affect their child's sense of belonging in the classroom.

4. Further research could also include shelters that have more transient residents. This study included shelters where mothers had the opportunity to reside for extended periods of time. Research with children who experience more mobility and less stability is needed.

5. Another direction for further study may involve exploring factors that contribute to the sense of belonging within the shelter environment. The day-to-day experiences and interactions between the children in a shelter are different than those in the classroom. Knowledge gained from this research could help shelter directors and mothers better understand the social dynamics within the shelter.

6. Expand the study to include older children. Empirical research shows that as homeless children get older they can become more aggressive, depressed, or withdrawn. Further research is needed to explore how belonging is affected for older children who have experienced homelessness for a more extended period.

7. This study identified six factors that contributed to the development of social belonging. A deeper study of any one of these factors that included a wider age range of children may bring to light how age affects a particular factor.

8. Another study could be conducted to explore factors contributing to the development of social belonging taking into account the age at which a child becomes homeless. Conducting a cross-sectional study of children when they first enter the homeless environment could also add to the knowledge base.

9. A final direction for further research may involve examination of factors contributing to the development of social belonging for mothers. Exploring what factors affect their sense of belonging may help to explain the factors identified for children.

**Overall Significance of the Study**

This qualitative multiple case study provided insight into the factors that contribute to the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless ages five to seven years. Previous empirical research has shown the importance of children who are homeless developing belonging in the classroom (Capp, 2003; Tatta, 1997; Vanhorst, 1995) and other research has shown the negative effects when belonging does not develop (Anooshian, 2003; Bassuk & Rosenburg, 1990; Graham-Bermann et al., 1996; Medcalf, 2008; Rescoria et al., 1991; Wood et al., 1993; Yu et al., 2008). However, little research has focused on what contributes or impedes children's ability to develop belonging in the classroom while they are homeless. My study filled a gap in the literature by identifying these contributing factors.  Only one previous study (Einspar, 2010) was found that identified similar findings to my study. Einspar reported that the way to create a sense of belonging in the school environment was to provide a positive climate, stable environment, opportunities for interaction, sensitivity training, and

material resources such as school supplies and clothing. Einspar's study differed from my study though, because it included information for grades K-12 and included perspectives from school personnel only. My study was significant because it included not only the opinions of the teachers and counselors but also mothers and children. No other research was found that took into account these perspectives. Mothers and children were found to contribute immeasurably to my study. A final significance to my study was the age of the children. An ample number of studies (Attles, 1997; Barton, 1998; Graham-Bermann et al., 1996; Menke, 2000; Obradovic et al., 2009; Wood et al., 1993) have focused on older children who are homeless but very few studies (Bassuk & Gallaghar, 1990; Bassuk & Rubin, 1990) have been conducted with specifically younger children who are homeless. By exploring contributing factors of social belonging for younger children a gap in the literature was filled that can help springboard further research in this area.

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# APPENDIX A

## PARENT RECUITMENT LETTER

Dear participant,

I am writing this letter to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation at UAB. The purpose of this study will be to explore factors that contribute to the social belonging in the school environment of children, ages 5 to 7, who are residing in shelters. I have purposefully selected you and your child to be the focus of one of my interviews because I feel you and your child will provide useful and firsthand information needed for my study.

Your involvement is important to me. If you choose to participate, you, your child, your child's teacher, and counselor will be asked a set of simple questions to help the researcher understand the factors that contribute to social belonging for your child. The parent portion of the study will consist of an initial audio-taped interview on the shelter premises that will be 30-60 minutes. One to two additional interviews may be needed to clarify any information you provided during the initial interview. Follow-up interviews will be at your convenience and may be in person, on the phone, or through e-mail. Children will be involved in one to three audio-taped interviews on the shelter premises that last 10-15 minutes each. Parent and child interviews will be conducted separately. Children will also be observed one to three times in their school setting. In order to give you time to think about responses interview questions are attached.

I would greatly appreciate your help in my study. I hope to use this information to better serve your child in the educational setting. I understand the importance of privacy and confidentiality so only false names will be used in reporting this study. You will have the option to withdraw from the study at any time should you choose to do so. Please understand that your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate please review the attached consent form. Included in the consent form is permission to also speak with your child's teacher and counselor. Selected participants will be the first four who contact me regarding participation. Your child will be asked at the initial interview if he or she is willing to talk with the investigator. If your child does not want to participate, the researcher will discontinue the session immediately. We will go over the consent form together at our scheduled interview.

Feel free to contact me at the e-mail address or call the phone number below if you would like to participate or have additional questions.

Sincerely,

Corilyn Ott

APPENDIX B

PRINCIPAL CONSENT LETTER

Dear principal,

I am writing this letter to request permission to conduct a research study in your school for my doctoral dissertation at UAB. The purpose of this study will be to explore factors that contribute to the social belonging in the school environment of children, ages 5 to 7, who are residing in shelters. I am requesting this permission because a child in your school is involved in this study. The parent has given me permission to also speak with their child's teacher and counselor concerning this study. I feel your school will provide useful and firsthand information needed for my research.

Your school's involvement is important to me. This study will involve interviewing a counselor and teacher who is associated with the child already in this study, also included will be up to three observations of this child in their school environment. At no time will the child be identified to others or be removed from the classroom for this study.

I would greatly appreciate your help in my study. I hope to use this information to better serve children in the educational setting. I understand the importance of privacy and confidentiality so only false names will be used in reporting this study. You will have the option end the study at any time should you choose to do so. Please understand that your participation is completely voluntary. If you consent permission for me to conduct this study, please sign the attached form.

Feel free to contact me at the e-mail address or call the phone number below if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,


Corilyn Ott

APPENDIX C

GATEKEEPER CONSENT FORM

August 1, 2011

As the Principal of _____school, I,

_____, give my permission to allow Mrs. Ott to conduct research at

this school including observations of teachers and children and interviews with teachers

and counselors.

APPENDIX D

TEACHER RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear participant,

I am writing this letter to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation at UAB. The purpose of this study will be to explore factors that contribute to the social belonging in the school environment of children, ages 5 to 7, who are residing in shelters. I have purposefully selected you to be the focus of one of my interviews because a child in your classroom is also involved in this study. The parent has given me permission to also speak with you concerning this study. I feel you will provide useful and firsthand information needed for my study.

Your involvement is important to me. If you choose to participate you will be asked a set of simple questions to help the researcher understand the factors that contribute to social belonging for children who are homeless and living in shelters. The teacher portion of the study will consist of an initial audio-taped interview on the school premises that will be 30-60 minutes. In order to give you time to think about responses, the interview questions are attached. One to two additional interviews may be needed to clarify any information you provided during the initial interview. Follow-up interviews will be at your convenience and may be in person, on the phone, or through e-mail. The principal has given permission for the children to be observed up to three times in their school setting. This will involve observational visits to your classroom and other areas in the school that social activities occur like the gymnasium and the cafeteria.

I would greatly appreciate your help in my study. I hope to use this information to better serve children in the educational setting. I understand the importance of privacy and confidentiality so only false names will be used in reporting this study. You will have the option to withdraw from the study at any time should you choose to do so. Please understand that your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate please review the attached consent form, and you and I will go over it at our scheduled interview.

Feel free to contact me at the e-mail address or call the phone number below if you would like to participate or have additional questions.

Sincerely,


Corilyn Ott

APPENDIX E

COUNSELOR RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear participant,

I am writing this letter to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation at UAB. The purpose of this study will be to explore factors that contribute to the social belonging in the school environment of children, ages 5 to 7, who are residing in shelters. I have purposefully selected you to be the focus of one of my interviews because a child in your school is also involved in this study. The parent has given me permission to also speak with you concerning this study. I feel you will provide useful and firsthand information needed for my study.

Your involvement is important to me. If you choose to participate you will be asked a set of simple questions to help the researcher understand the factors that contribute to social belonging for children who are homeless and living in shelters. The counselor portion of the study will consist of an initial audio-taped interview on the school premises that will be 30-60 minutes. In order to give you time to think about responses, the interview questions are attached. One to two additional interviews may be needed to clarify any information you provided during the initial interview. Follow-up interviews will be at your convenience and may be in person, on the phone, or through e-mail.

I would greatly appreciate your help in my study. I hope to use this information to better serve children in the educational setting. I understand the importance of privacy and confidentiality so only false names will be used in reporting this study. You will have the option to withdraw from the study at any time should you choose to do so. Please understand that your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate please review the attached consent form, and you and I will go over it at our scheduled interview.

Feel free to contact me at the e-mail address or call the phone number below if you would like to participate or have additional questions.

Sincerely,


Corilyn Ott

APPENDIX F

## Informed Consent Document for Parent

**UAB**

**TITLE OF RESEARCH:** Do I belong?: Factors Contributing to Social Belonging of Children Who Are Homeless in Southeastern United States Shelters. A Multi-Case Study.

**UAB IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER:  X110721001**

**INVESTIGATOR:** Mrs. Corilyn Ott

**SPONSOR:** University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education

For Children/Minors (persons under 19 years of age) participating in this study, the term *You* addresses both the participant ("you") and the parent or legally authorized representative ("your child").

## Explanation of Procedures

I am asking you to take part in a research study.  The purpose of the study is to explore factors that contribute to social belonging in the school environment. I have asked you to participate because you have a child that qualifies for this study.

If you participate in this study, you and your child will be interviewed separately by the investigator. You will be asked a series of questions that will help to identify factors that contribute to social belonging in the school environment for children who are homeless. You will be asked to participate in an interview that will last 30-60 minutes. This interview will take

place at the shelter. One to two more interviews may be needed to clarify any information you provided during the initial interview. Follow-up interviews will be at your convenience and may be in person, on the phone, or through e-mail. Your child will be asked to participate in one to three interviews that will last 10-15 minutes each and take place at the shelter. Your child will also be involved in one to three observations that will take place at your child's school. These observations will take place in your child's school environment where children engage in social interaction (i.e. the classroom, lunch room, PE, playground). At no time will your child be asked to miss class time to be interviewed or observed. Your child will not be singled out or identified at any time during observations. The investigator will also be interviewing your child's teacher and counselor. All interviews will be audio-taped for the purpose of clarity of responses. The audio tapes will be stored in a secure place accessible only to the investigators and will be heard only by the investigator and her committee. None of the participants will be identified by name in the written report.

A total of four mother/child pairs will be randomly selected for this study. Also included in the study will be four teachers and two counselors. If you are selected for this research your child will be asked at the initial interview if he or she is willing to talk with the investigator. If your child does not want to participate, the researcher will discontinue the session immediately.

## Risks and Discomforts

The risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

## Benefits

This study will help investigators understand the factors that contribute to the social belonging in the school environment of children who are homeless. This information can then be shared with children, parents, teachers, and counselors to enable them to better serve their students in the school. You will not directly benefit from this study.

## Alternatives

The alternative is not to participate in this study.

## Confidentiality

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law.  However, research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including people on behalf of The University of Alabama at Birmingham; and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).The results of this study may be published for scientific purposes, but no identities will be revealed. Audio-tapes will be erased after the required three years.

## Refusal or Withdrawal without Penalty

Whether or not you take part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this institution. Your child's participation or performance in this study will not affect his or her class standing.  If your child does not want to participate, the researcher will discontinue the session immediately.

## Cost of Participation

There are no costs to you for your participation in this research.

## Payment for Participation in Research

There are no payments to the participant.

## Questions

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact Corilyn Ott at 205-980-9119. She will be glad to answer any of your questions.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll -free number, press the option for "all other calls" or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the Office of the IRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

## Legal Rights

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent document. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study.  You will receive a copy of this signed document.

_____                _____

Signature of Participant                                Date


_____                _____

Signature of Principal Investigator                        Date


Your signature below indicates that you give permission for the investigator to interview your child's teacher and counselor.

_____                _____

Signature of Participant                                Date


_____                _____

Signature of Principal Investigator                        Date

## Signature Page for Research Involving Children

You are making a decision whether or not you and your child will participate in this study and if your child's teacher can be contacted to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read (or been read) the information provided above and decided to participate.

| | |
|---|---|
| Signature of Parent | Date |

| | |
|---|---|
| Signature of Principal Investigator | Date |

## Waiver of Assent

*The assent of* _____ *(name of your child) was waived because of age.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Signature of Parent | Date |

APPENDIX G

**UAB**  Informed Consent Document for Teacher

**TITLE OF RESEARCH:**  Do I Belong?: Factors Contributing to Social Belonging of Children Who Are Homeless in Southeastern United States Shelters. A Multi-Case Study.

**UAB IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER:  X110721001**

**INVESTIGATOR:**  Mrs. Corilyn Ott

**SPONSOR:**  University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education

## Explanation of Procedures

I am asking you to take part in a research study.  The purpose of the study is to explore factors that contribute to social belonging in the school environment for children who are homeless. You have been asked to participate in this study because you have a student in your classroom who is also participating in this study. The investigator has been given permission by the parent to speak with you. This study will include four parents, four children, four teachers, and two counselors.

If you participate in this study, you will be interviewed and observed by the investigator. You will be asked a series of questions that will help to identify factors that contribute to social belonging for children who are homeless. You will be asked to participate in an interview that will last 30-60 minutes. Additional interviews may be needed to clarify any information you provided during your initial interview. Follow-up interviews will be at your convenience and may be in person, on the phone, or through e-mail. You will also be involved in 1 to 3 observations that will take place during school time. These observations will take place in the child's school environment where children engage in social interaction (i.e. the classroom, lunch room, PE, playground). At no time

will a child be asked to miss class time to be interviewed or observed. All interviews will be audio-taped for the purpose of clarity of responses. The audio tapes will be stored in a secure place accessible only to the investigators and will be heard only by the investigator and her committee. None of the participants will be identified by name in the written report.

## Risks and Discomforts

The risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

## Benefits

This study will help investigators understand the factors that contribute to the social belonging in the school environment of children who are homeless.  This information can then be shared with children, parents, teachers, and counselors to enable them to better serve their students in the school environment. You will not directly benefit from this study.

## Alternatives

The alternative is not to participate in this study.

## Confidentiality

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law.  However, research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including people on behalf of The University of Alabama at Birmingham; and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).The results of this study may be published for scientific purposes, but no identities will be revealed. Audio-tapes will be erased after the required three years.

## Refusal or Withdrawal without Penalty

Whether or not you take part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at

any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this institution.

## Cost of Participation

There are no costs to you for your participation in this research.

## Payment for Participation in Research

You will not be paid for participating in this research.

## Questions

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact Corilyn Ott at 205-980-9119. She will be glad to answer any of your questions.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll -free number, press the option for "all other calls" or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the Office of the IRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

## Legal Rights

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent document. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

 Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study.  You will receive a copy of this signed document.

_____         _____

Signature of Participant                            Date


_____         _____

Signature of Principal Investigator              Date

APPENDIX H

**UAB**          Informed Consent Document for Counselor

**TITLE OF RESEARCH:**      Do I Belong?: Factors Contributing to Social Belonging of
Children Who Are Homeless in Southeastern United States Shelters. A Multi-Case Study.

**UAB IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER: X110721001**

**INVESTIGATOR:**          Mrs. Corilyn Ott

**SPONSOR:**              University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education

## Explanation of Procedures

I am asking you to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to explore factors
that contribute to social belonging in the school environment for children who are homeless.
You have been asked to participate in this study because you have a student in your school who is
also participating in this study. The investigator has been given permission by the parent to speak
with you. This study will include four parents, four children, four teachers, and two counselors.

If you participate in this study, you will be interviewed by the investigator. You will be asked a
series of questions that will help to identify factors that contribute to social belonging for children
who are homeless. You will be asked to participate in an interview that will last 30-60 minutes.
Additional interviews may be needed to clarify any information you provided during your initial
interview. These interviews will take place at school during times convenient for you. All
interviews will be audio-taped for the purpose of clarity of responses. The audio tapes will be
stored in a secure place accessible only to the investigators and will be heard only by the
investigator and her committee. None of the participants will be identified by name in the written
report.

## Risks and Discomforts

The risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

## Benefits

This study will help investigators understand the factors that contribute to the social belonging in the school environment of children who are homeless.  This information can then be shared with children, parents, teachers, and counselors to enable them to better serve their students in the school. You will not directly benefit from this study.

## Alternatives

The alternative is not to participate in this study.

## Confidentiality

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law.  However, research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including people on behalf of The University of Alabama at Birmingham; and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).The results of this study may be published for scientific purposes, but no identities will be revealed. Audio-tapes will be erased after the required three years.

## Refusal or Withdrawal without Penalty

Whether or not you take part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this institution.

## Cost of Participation

There are no costs to you for your participation in this research.

## Payment for Participation in Research

You will not be paid for participating in this research.

## Questions

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact Corilyn Ott at 205-980-9119. She will be glad to answer any of your questions.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll -free number, press the option for "all other calls" or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the Office of the IRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

## Legal Rights

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent document. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study.  You will receive a copy of this signed document.

_____          _____

Signature of Participant                              Date


_____          _____

Signature of Principal Investigator                Date

APPENDIX I

PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCAL

| Factors Contributing to Social Belonging<br>Multi- Case Study Parent Interview Protocol | |
|---|---|
| Name_____          Date_____ | |
| Organization_____<br>Location_____ | |
| Introduction:<br>I want to thank you for taking time to talk with me today. With your permission, I will be tape recording this conversation. In this study I am interested in exploring factors that may contribute to social belonging in the school environment of children who are homeless. You have had a chance to review the questions that I will be asking today. It is important that I know your perspective of social belonging of children who are homeless, so please feel free to discuss your views openly. For clarity, I may ask you additional questions that you have not had a chance to review.  Are you ready to begin? | |
| 1.  Please tell me about yourself. How many children do you have? How long have you been living at the shelter? | |

| | |
|---|---|
| 2. What do you think of when you hear the word belonging? | |
| 3. What does it mean to your child to belong when they are at school? | |
| 4. How do you think children who are living in shelters develop belonging in school?<br><br>What obstacles make your child's belonging difficult?<br><br>What do you think helps your child feel like they belong? | |

| | |
|---|---|
| 5. How might lack of belonging in school affect your child? | |
| 6. What is done in your child's school to help your child feel like that he/she belongs in school?<br><br>What do you think should be done? | |
| 7. Is there anything I have not asked that you think would help me understand belonging concerning your child? | |

APPENDIX J

CHILD INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

| Factors Contributing to Social Belonging<br>Multi-Case Study Child Interview Protocol |
| --- |
| Name_____          Date_____ |
| Organization_____<br>Location_____ |
| Introduction:<br>I want to thank you for talking with me today. With your permission, I will be tape recording our talk. Are you ready to begin? |

| | |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Please tell me about yourself. Tell me about your family How long have you been at this shelter? | |
| 2. What does it mean to you to belong?<br><br>How long have you been going to your new school?<br>How comfortable are you in your new school?<br>Do you feel like you belong in your school? | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | |
| 3. What does it mean to you to belong when you are at school? | |
| 4. How do you make friends at school?<br><br>Tell me about your friends.<br><br>What makes it hard to make new friends at school? | |

| | |
|---|---|
| 5. How do you feel when you have to move to a new school?<br><br>How do you start to make friends in the new school?<br><br>What makes you feel comfortable at school? | |
| 6. When you move to a new school who helps you feel like you belong? | |
| 7. What do you do at school that helps you feel you belong at school?<br><br>On the playground, in the cafeteria, during free time. | |
| 8. Is there anything else you want to tell me about belonging that I have not asked you about? | |

Thank you again for talking with me today.

| | |
|---|---|
| Factors Contributing to Social Belonging<br>Multi-Case Study Child Interview Protocol 2<br><br>Name_____             Date_____ | |
| Organization_____<br>Location_____ | |
| Introduction:<br>I want to thank you for talking with me today. With your permission, I will be tape recording our talk. Are you ready to begin? | |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Please tell me about your day at school. | |
| 2. Would you draw a picture for me about something that happened today at school? | |
| 3. How did this activity/event make you feel about your day? | |

Thank you again for talking with me today.

APPENDIX K

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

| Factors Contributing to Social Belonging |
| Multi-Case Study Teacher Interview Protocol |

Name_____          Date_____

Organization_____
Location_____

Introduction:
I want to thank you for taking time to talk with me today. With your permission, I will be tape recording this conversation and later transcribing what we say. It is important that my writing reflect what you mean to say; therefore, I will want you to review our conversation to make sure I correctly represent your views.
In this study I am interested in exploring factors that may contribute to social belonging in the school environment of children who are homeless. You have had a chance to review the questions that I will be asking today. It is important that I know your perspective of social belonging of children who are homeless, so please feel free to discuss your views openly. For clarity, I may ask you additional questions that you have not had a chance to review.  Are you ready to begin?

| 1. Please tell me about yourself. How did you decide upon your career? How long have you been teaching?<br><br>What experiences do you have with working/teaching with homeless children? | |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| 2. What do you think of when you hear the term social belonging?<br><br>How do you apply this term to the context of the school environment? | |
| 3. What do you think social belonging is to a child how is homeless?<br><br>How would you describe social belonging of a child who is homeless in your classroom? | |
| 4. From your perspective how do children who are homeless develop social belonging in school?<br><br>What factors specifically do you think contribute to the development of social belonging for a child who is homeless?<br><br>What factors do you think impede the development of social belonging for the children who are homeless? | |

| 5. What repercussions, if any, are evident for children who are homeless when there is a lack of social belonging in the school environment? examples | |
|---|---|
| 6. What is done in your school environment to encourage the development of social belonging toward the children who are homeless?<br><br>Are there any specific activities you do that help the children who are homeless to develop social belonging in your classroom or school environment? | |
| 7. How would you evaluate the school's effort to create social belonging for the children who are homeless?<br><br>What do you think should be done? | |
| 8. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to tell me about your experiences with children who are homeless? | |

Thank you again for your time today. May I contact you if I have any follow-up questions? If you have any additional thoughts please feel free to contact me.

APPENDIX L

COUNSELOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

| Factors Contributing to Social Belonging<br>Multi-Case Study Counselor Interview Protocol |
|---|
| Name_____     Date_____ |
| Organization_____<br>Location_____ |
| Introduction:<br>I want to thank you for taking time to talk with me today. With your permission, I will be tape recording this conversation and later transcribing what we say. It is important that my writing reflect what you mean to say; therefore, I will want you to review our conversation to make sure I correctly represent your views.<br>In this study I am interested in exploring factors that may contribute to social belonging in the school environment of children who are homeless. You have had a chance to review the questions that I will be asking today. It is important that I know your perspective of social belonging of children who are homeless, so please feel free to discuss your views openly. For clarity, I may ask you additional questions that you have not had a chance to review.  Are you ready to begin? |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Please tell me about yourself. How did you decide upon your career? How long have you been a counselor?<br><br>What experiences do you have with working with homeless children? | |

| 2. What do you think of when you hear the term social belonging?<br><br>How do you apply this term to the context of the school environment? | |
|---|---|
| 3. What do you think social belonging is to a child how is homeless?<br><br>How would you describe social belonging in the school of a child who is homeless? | |
| 4. From your perspective how do children who are homeless develop social belonging in school?<br><br>What factors specifically do you think contribute to the development of social belonging for a child who is homeless?<br><br>What factors do you think impede the development of social belonging for the children who are homeless? | |

| | |
|---|---|
| 5. What repercussions, if any, are evident for children who are homeless when there is a lack of social belonging in the school environment? examples | |
| 6. What is done in your school environment to encourage the development of social belonging toward the children who are homeless?<br><br>Are there any specific activities you do that help the children who are homeless to develop social belonging in their classroom or school environment? | |
| 7. How would you evaluate the school's effort to create social belonging for the children who are homeless?<br><br>What do you think should be done? | |
| 8. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to tell me about your experiences with children who are homeless? | |

Thank you again for your time today. May I contact you if I have any follow-up questions? If you have any additional thoughts please feel free to contact me.

APPENDIX M

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL


Setting: _____

Observer: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Length of observation: _____


| Descriptive Notes | | Reflective Notes |
|---|---|---|
| | Setting-<br><br>physical environment | |

| Descriptive Notes | | Reflective Notes |
|---|---|---|
| | Activities-<br><br>Did participant initiate | |

| Descriptive Notes | | Reflective Notes |
|---|---|---|
| | Social environment-interaction between student and teacher | |

| Descriptive Notes | | Reflective Notes |
|---|---|---|
| | Non-verbal Communication of participant | |
| Descriptive Notes | | Reflective Notes |
| | Non-occurrences – what is not happening with participant | |

APPENDIX N

AUDIT TRAIL

An audit trail, according to Lincoln and Guba (1995), is one of the principle techniques in qualitative findings for establishing confirmability. This audit trail will document the development of this study from the initial pilot project to the completed analysis.

- **Identify the research problem**: During the process of completing my pilot study, I identified the need for more research pertaining to the factors contributing to the development of social belonging in the classroom for children who are homeless ages five to seven years old.

- **The research proposal:** a proposal was developed and submitted to both my dissertation committee and then to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This proposal included the purpose of the study, procedures for data collection, and research questions. Approval was received in summer of 2011.

- **Reviewing the literature:** An in-depth review of literature relating to social belonging, children who are homeless, and educational and social issues of children who are homeless was then conducted.

- **Participant selection requirements:** One metropolitan shelter was selected to recruit participants. Qualifications for selection included mothers who were not court ordered residents of the shelter with children ages five to seven years.

Teachers and counselors were then selected that were associated with the child participants.

- **Participant recruitment:** Recruitment letters were given to three mothers living in Family's Hope shelter. All three mothers agreed to participate and gave me permission to interview and observe their children. Next the principal from School of Hope was contacted and she granted permission for interviews and observations of the teachers and counselor associated with the children who were homeless. These teachers and counselor were then contacted through a phone call to participate in the study. All three teachers and the counselor agreed to participate in the study.

- **Interview process:** The interview process began with the mothers and then the children. Only after these interviews were completed did I begin interviews with the teachers and counselor. In total, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted with groups of participants.

- **Observation process:** The observation process began after each of the participants was interviewed. In total, 14 observations were conducted.

- **Data analysis:** Analysis was continually conducted throughout the data collection process. NVivo software was utilized to manage the body of evidence. It was determined at this time that more participants were needed to reach saturation.

- **Second participant selection and recruitment:** A second shelter was then included in the study. The same requirements were utilized for selection. The same recruitment procedures were implemented. Two mothers from Family's Joy

were invited and agreed to participate. Two teachers and the school's counselor
also agreed to participate.

- **Second interview process:** The same procedures were utilized for this interview
  process. In total, eight additional interviews were conducted.

- **Second observation process:** In total, six observations were conducted with the
  children at School of Joy.

- **Member checking:** After each interview with the adult participants, a summary
  of the interview was given to them for their clarification and feedback. No
  additions or changes were made to the data after this process.

- **Data collection complete:** After the analysis of all data collected it appeared
  saturation had occurred due to the repetition of answers received from
  participants.

- **Reflection of analyzed data:** After first analyzing the data it appeared that all
  three cases (mother's case, children's case, and teachers and counselor's case) all
  had the same themes with some variation of subthemes. But after reflection of
  data I concluded that some themes were not fully supported by their case.

- **New themes and subthemes:** After each case was reanalyzed new themes and
  subthemes emerged that better expressed the participant's responses. Participant's
  statements were used in narrative form to substantiate the development of the
  themes and subthemes.

- **Cross case analysis:** Next a cross case analysis was conducted to explore the
  differences between the cases.

- **Second member checking:** Each adult participant was given the summary of the themes and subthemes and asked for their feedback. No additional information or changes were made to the themes from this member checking process.
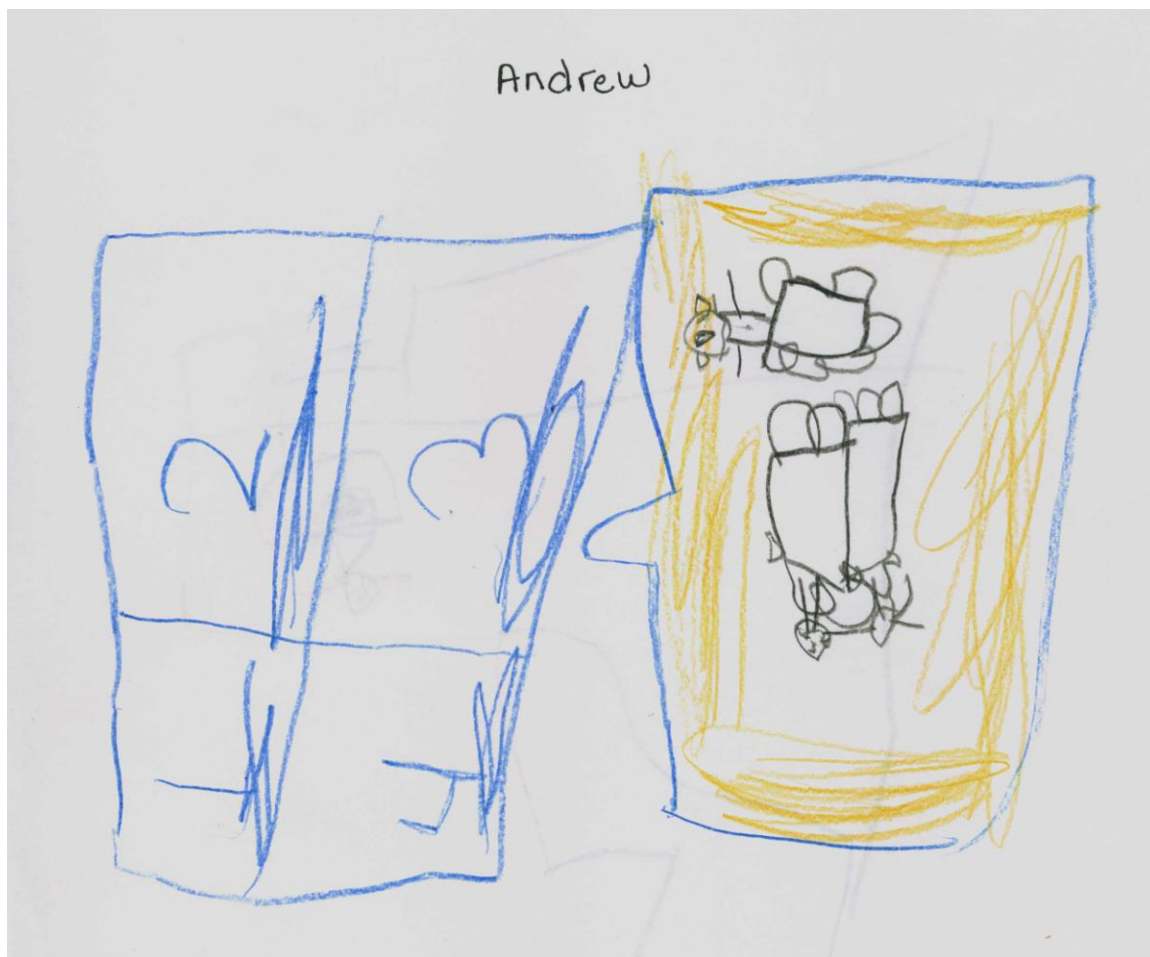
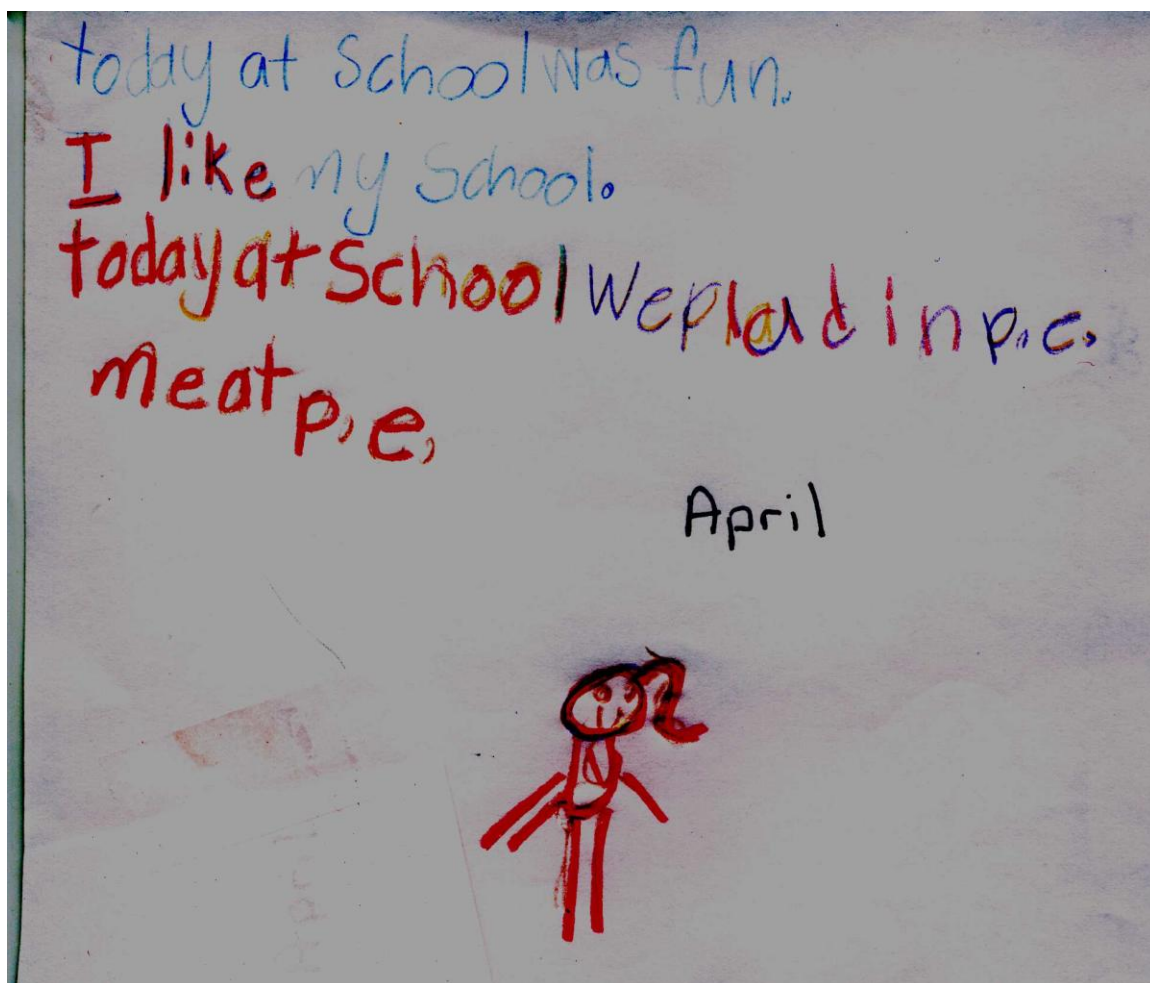APPENDIX O

PILOT STUDY QUESTIONS

The central research question: What factors may contribute to the development of social belonging for elementary aged children who are homeless?
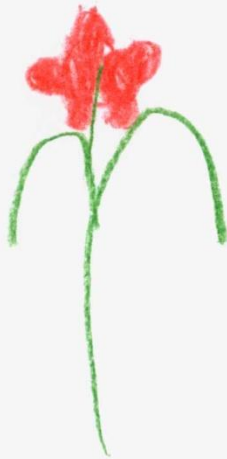
Sub-questions included:

- How do the directors of a shelter's after school program and the school liaisons define social belonging?

- How do the directors of a shelter's after school program and the school liaisons believe the children define social belonging?

- What factors impede the development of social belonging?

- What do directors of a shelter's after school program and the school liaisons do to encourage social belonging in the school and shelter environment?

- What repercussions are evident for children who are homeless when there is a lack of social belonging in the school and shelter environment?
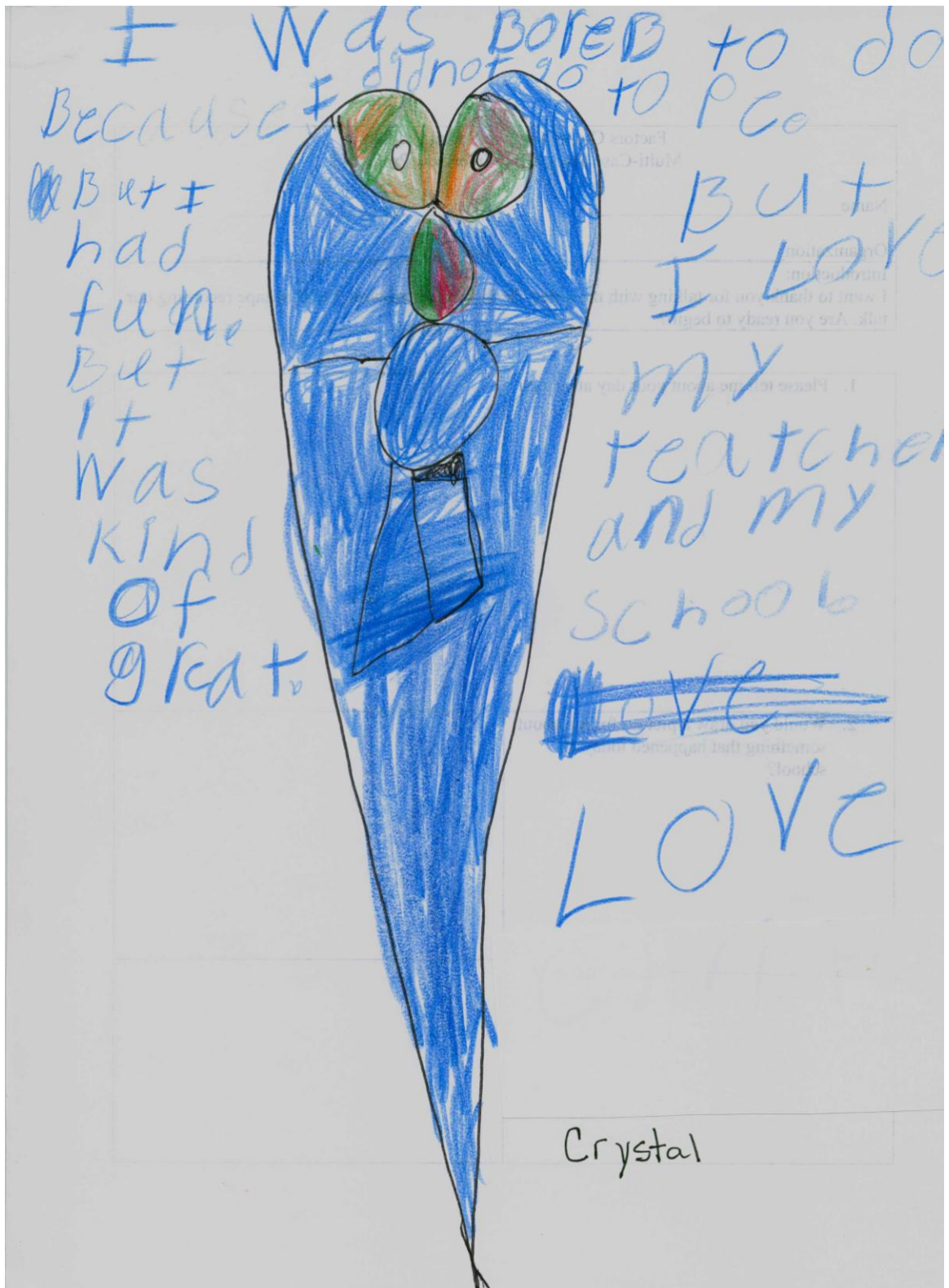
APPENDIX P

CHILD PARTICIPANT DRAWINGS

today at school was fun.
I like my school.
today at school we plad in p.c.
meat p.e.

April

Austin

I was bored to do
Because I did not go to Pce
But I
had
fun.
But
It
was
kind
of
great.

But
I love
my
teatcher
and my
schoob
~~Love~~
LOVE

Crystal

Wyatt

APPENDIX Q

IRB APPROVAL FORM

**UAB** THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

*Institutional Review Board for Human Use*

Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is FWA00005960 and it expires on September 29, 2013. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56.

Principal Investigator: OTT, CORILYN MAE

Co-Investigator(s):

Protocol Number: **X110721001**

Protocol Title: *Do I Belong?: Factors Contributing to the Development of Social Belonging of Children who are Homeless in Southeastern United States Shelters: A Multi-Case Study*

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on _8-16-11_. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.

IRB Approval Date: _8-16-11_

Date IRB Approval Issued: _8-16-11_

_Marilyn Das_
Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review
Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.

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