

No Place to Call Home – Educating Homeless Students

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November 15, 2008

An Action Research Project submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of Education of
Medaille College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Education

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Abstract

Homelessness is not a new phenomenon. It is not confined to the world's poorest countries and can be found in every country, every city and in every town. Homelessness does not discriminate based on gender or culture. It is a scary, turbulent and devastating experience that affects all it has touched. This project aim is to educate teachers on issues dealing with homelessness such as prevalence of homelessness, causes and effects of homelessness on education and tools and strategies that can be implemented within a classroom environment to support homeless children in achieving optimal academic success. How can educators expect children who are homeless to achieve a high level of curriculum standard that the government has set forth when their housing is not secure? How can teachers be expected to teach children experiencing homelessness with full confidence when they are not taught the skills to meet the distinct needs of homeless children? A workshop will be introduced to present material to teachers in order to better meet the educational needs of students experiencing homelessness.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research to my Grade 1/2 class at Saint Anne's Catholic Elementary School in Kitchener, Ontario, my very first class of students along with their wonderful teacher Ms. Altomare, who has taught me flexibility, patience and compassion for all students.

To my parents, who have taught me that the educational journey can be long and tedious, but always worth it. Thank you for your understanding and acceptance in everything that I have chosen to do with my life and for making me feel valued and loved.

In memory of my sister, Lisa Burke, who taught me the necessity of concern for other human beings, the imperfect nature of the society in which we live and the desire for justice for all especially, those who struggle with homelessness and mental health.

To my daughter, who always makes me question how I am treating those around me and also pushes me to strive to be the best possible me that I can be. She has helped me learn to listen to children and tell them what I really want and need.

Lastly and most importantly, I would like to dedicate this research to my husband, Jason. Without you this journey would not be possible. Thank you for your support, love and compassion through this project and the never-ending selflessness over this last year of change. You are a true star.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Norma Friedman for the care in which she reviewed my capstone, chapter by chapter. I appreciated the many conversations and emails we have had that helped clarify my thinking. Your professional collaboration meant a great deal to me. Thank you.

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Chapter One: The Overview

Introduction

Ten years ago, I met my first homeless family. But of all that I have learned during that time, what remains most shocking to me, and most overlooked by others, is the fact that so many of the homeless in Canada and America are children. Although you don't often see homeless families on streets, because they live in emergency shelters or are doubled and tripled up with other families, they are there. They are the hidden homeless and most are young children.

One of the most tragic parts of homeless children's lives is their loss of education. Many repeat grades in school, some never learn to read, and others drop out altogether. All this because they had no quiet place to study, no stable place to stay, and no place to call home. Today, homelessness is no longer simply about housing. Today, it is about education, about families, and more than ever, about children.

Education continues to be viewed as a vital element in breaking the cycle of poverty. Schools can provide a safe haven of consistency and caring for children whose lives are marked by instability and uncertainty (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Relying on current research, this paper will endeavor to explore the prevalence of homelessness, the strategies that teachers can use to support students experiencing homelessness and how the struggle of homelessness does have a detrimental effect on school success. The target audience for this paper includes teachers, teacher education students, administrators, counselors, school officials and anyone involved with homeless children in the education system.

Family homelessness is a relatively recent phenomenon. Many still picture homelessness as a problem for single adult men suffering from an addiction or mental health issue, sleeping on a park bench in an urban center. This stereotypical picture of a homeless person is changing. Children now make up a majority of the homeless population. When we think of this population, we most often envision children

living in shelters in large cities; but even if you teach in a suburban or rural community, you may have children who are experiencing homelessness in your school. (Driver & Spadey, 2004).

Feeling welcomed and valued in school is very important. (Gilligan, Halpenny & Keogh, 2006). When families become homeless, many aspects of the child's routine and structure will be disrupted also. This includes their education. There are many struggles involved with maintaining a consistent schooling schedule for children when they are part of a homeless family. Despite these difficulties, school may represent the only stability for a child in an otherwise insecure and changing routine (Gilligan, Halpenny & Keogh, 2006). It is imperative that we treat children from homeless families with exceptional care and compassion and take the time to understand and identify their specific needs. The topic of homelessness is very important to the field of education. It is important for teachers and educators to identify early who in their individual classes might be homeless and adjust instruction to accommodate the special needs of the student. If teachers and the school community at large can develop programs to integrate transferring students in an appropriate, supportive manner, the potential for negative impacts can be greatly reduced (Hartman, 2007).

There is a large amount of literature on the education of homeless students in America. In America, Congress established the McKinney Act's Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program in 1987 in response to reports that only 57% of homeless children were enrolled in school. The EHCY Program provides formula grants to state educational agencies to ensure that all homeless children and youth have equal access to the same free, appropriate education, including preschool education, provided to other children and youth (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). In Canada, no such Act exists. In fact, there is no mention of any provisions given to homeless students in Canadian schools under the Education Act. In Canada, education is constitutionally reserved to the provincial level of government. This is not the case in the US. Given the federal-provincial division of powers under the Canadian Constitution, comparable federal legislation is not very feasible in Canada

(Decter, 2007). The only stride in the direction of providing special services in support of educating homeless children was the effort to pass a private member's bill in Ontario on October 12, 2006. An Act to amend the Education Act to provide stability for students in transition housing passed at second reading in the Ontario Legislature, but was not passed into law before the provincial election as called in September 2007, and later died in committee (Decter, 2007). This private member's bill could have been the first step in the right direction in providing homeless children the opportunity of enhanced school stability.

From my past experience in working with homeless families, I have witnessed the struggles and hurdles that a homeless child faces in dealing with the education system. There is not one solution to the problem of homelessness. The causes are complex and schools need to do what they can in order to ensure that all children, regardless of their housing situation, will receive an appropriate education. Although teachers and administrators cannot solve all of the problems associated with homelessness and homeless children in particular, they can address their own classrooms and school to remove as many stressors as possible. These stressors have an impact on the learning experiences for students who are homeless and any effort made to remove them is an effort in ensuring the ability for a homeless student to receive optimal education.

It is the responsibility of administrators to bring awareness and sensitivity to teachers about issues such as homelessness. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the teacher to bring the lessons of compassion and empathy to students and discuss issues such as homelessness to foster a community of learners that are sensitive to each other. I will be using an action research approach to develop a three day workshop for elementary school teachers to provide an opportunity to discuss the barriers related to homelessness and hopeful intentions for the future. This workshop will include discussion on educating homeless children, practical strategies that can be implemented in the classroom and next steps to involve others outside of the classroom in support of the education of homeless children. Educational policy and

teacher training need to highlight the special needs of children living in emergency accommodation and to emphasize the important role schools can play in supporting the educational and social development and progress of these children Gilligan, Halpenny & Keogh, 2006).

Project Thematic Concern & Sub Concerns

Project Thematic Concern

Before any discussion on educational reforms for homeless children can be discussed, the current context of homelessness needs to be framed. For the purposes of this paper the definition of homeless will be “anyone who, due to a lack of housing lives: in an emergency or transitional shelter; in motels, hotels, trailer parks, campgrounds, abandoned in hospitals, awaiting foster care placement; in cars, parks, public places, bus or train stations, abandoned buildings; or doubled up with relatives or friends” (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Being fully educated on the subject of homelessness and in particular homeless children should be afforded by all administrators, teachers and students.

The major thematic concern for this paper is to raise awareness and promote sensitivity about homelessness within the school system whereby teachers will have increased confidence and productivity in supporting a student experiencing homelessness so that students experiencing homelessness will receive the supports needed to achieve optimal school success. This is exceedingly important in the field of education because homelessness has escalated over the last 20 years and mothers with children have become the fastest growing homeless population (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006). Many homeless children have a disadvantage in terms of realizing their full potential because of instability with their housing situation. It is important to educate teachers and the larger school community about the causes and struggles of people experiencing homelessness in order to create awareness and sensitivity.

Education is a vital element in breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness. School can provide a safe haven of consistency and caring for children whose lives are marked by instability and uncertainty. Educators can open up doors to possibilities and futures. They can open up doors to

accomplishments for children whose lives have been restricted and confined (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Schools can provide safe places for children and feeling safe and secure is essential in fostering a sense of hope in children.

Homeless students are more likely to experience low achievement test scores, poor grades, educational disability, school behavior problems, grade retention, truancy, and school dropout (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). Homelessness also severely affects the health and well-being of children. Children without a home experience a greater incidence of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and withdrawal. They are twice as likely to experience hunger, have learning disabilities and have delayed development. These are issues which clearly impacts children's ability to attend school and achieve optimal learning success. In addition to this, homeless students also face numerous barriers to school enrollment and attendance, delays in transfers between schools, lack of school supplies, and lack of transportation (Duffield, 2003). This is reason enough to educate teachers and those working with children experiencing homelessness to provide an opportunity to foster the full potential of each and every child. Teachers must look at each individual child and accommodate based on their specific needs to provide an optimal learning environment. This would include accommodating the needs of homeless children in the classroom and the larger school community. The questions outlined below will guide my work and offer ideas on how to recognize and support those children who do not have a place to call home.

Sub Concerns

How prevalent is homelessness?

It is very difficult to obtain an accurate number of homeless families in any city. In most cases, homelessness is a temporary circumstance and not a permanent condition. Researchers use different methods to measure homelessness. One method attempts to count all the people who are literally homeless on a given day or during a given week (point-in-time counts). A second method of counting

homeless people examines the number of people who are homeless over a given period of time (period prevalence counts) (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2008). It is very difficult to obtain accurate results when the homeless population is counted in many ways. It is also very difficult to capture an accurate snapshot of the number of homeless families as being homeless comes with much stigmatization and embarrassment for some. Many families are not using the emergency shelter system but rather staying with other family members or friends. These families would not be counted in the larger numbers but still represent a large portion of the homeless population.

How do teachers know who is homeless?

In order for teachers to make positive changes within their classroom to support students experiencing homelessness they must be well aware of the risk factors of homelessness and identification techniques that can be used to determine if a child in your class might be experiencing homeless. Teachers need training and knowledge on the signs of homelessness and the prevalence of homelessness in their own communities. By gaining knowledge about homelessness teachers can be better suited to effectively implement strategies to support those in need. By educating teachers on issues such as homelessness, we are creating an awareness and sensitivity to children in need. It is not until we can identify the homeless population can we make change and overcome the many barriers of a child experiencing homelessness.

What strategies do experienced and newly qualified teachers need to support a student experiencing homelessness?

Supporting students who are experiencing homelessness is everyone's job. Administrators need to ensure that policy and procedures are set in place to support rather than penalize a student who enters the system with a distinct disadvantage. School personnel and teachers must work together to ensure the best education for all students within the school walls. This includes students who are displaced and have no place to call home. In addition, secretarial staff, custodial staff, librarians and other personnel dealing with students must be informed and better prepared to support students with varied needs.

Teachers need practical training and knowledge of the issues that pertain to homelessness in order to offer the opportunity to all students to succeed, including children who are homeless. Teachers of the homeless must have the ability to put strategies learned into use and modify classrooms and assessments to provide an optimal learning environment. Teachers must realize that every child has the ability to learn and that all children come with varied circumstances that must be taken into consideration when planning lessons and arranging classrooms. Strategies such as providing cooperative learning activities, ensuring transition between school is smooth, accessing present academic levels quickly, contacting the school previously attended to help with placement decisions, providing school supplies if necessary, working with parents as a partner in education, reinforcing positive behavior and providing quiet spaces to study before and after school are just a few examples of strategies that can be implemented to support a student experiencing homelessness. Flexibility is an important attribute for a teacher to have in order to best meet the needs of the individual students in her class.

How can teachers involve administration, parents, peers, students and the community at large in promoting sensitivity about homelessness in our schools?

It is extremely important for all individuals involved with homeless students to work together to ensure the best possible care for our homeless children. When one element is not connected, the larger system fails. When the larger systems do not support the individual teacher's efforts, then the support continuum will fail. Everyone must work together to ensure optimal success. Homeless students have educational rights and they must be upheld consistently. By creating awareness of the issue we can start to understand the importance of supporting this disadvantaged population. Homeless children and youth are frequently invisible and parents and children hide their condition for many reasons. It is important to start talking about the subject of homelessness so we can create an environment in which families experiencing homelessness can ask for help and identify that help is needed. This will allow us to respond as a community and offer an integrated approach in supporting some of the most vulnerable children.

Definitions

The definitions of this project will consist of operational definitions. These words are important to understand the topic of homelessness in greater detail.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this paper, the following apply:

Action Research (AR) – “...action research implies an orientation to research, a form of professional practice, a research process, and for teachers, a reflective way of teaching,” (Holly, Arthur & Kasten, 2004 p.14).

Homelessness – “...anyone who, due to a lack of housing lives: in an emergency or transitional shelter; in motels, hotels, trailer parks, campgrounds, abandoned in hospitals, awaiting foster care placement; in cars, parks, public places, bus or train stations, abandoned buildings; or doubled up with relatives or friends” (Driver & Spadey, 2004 p.4).

Conclusion

The condition of homelessness has severe effects on children’s development and academic progress. As the number of homeless families increase, the need for schools to become actively involved in assisting homeless children becomes increasingly urgent. Everyone involved in the education of a child must work together to remove the barriers impeding a child’s development in a school setting. If teachers do not take a supportive role in working with children experiencing homelessness the effects of being displaced can have serious enduring implications. This paper will endeavor to explore the face of a homeless child and how teachers can play an integral role in supporting a child experiencing homelessness to reach their full academic potential. A focus on teacher strategies to use within classroom settings will also be explored. In addition, this discussion will explore how teachers, administrators and everyone involved in student life can become proactive and intimately involved in achieving an

environment that fosters academic success for all students, including those children without a home. This paper will include a proposal for a three day workshop designed to provide teachers with the knowledge and practical skills that they can implement within classrooms to enhance student learning. The causes of homelessness are complex and there is no easy answer or solution to the problem. Homeless students come to school with a myriad of issues as a result of their homelessness. There is no universal profile that fits every child who is homeless; therefore each student's needs must be addressed on an individual basis (Higgins, Strawser & Yamaguchi, 1997). Teachers have a great opportunity to be agents of change and champion the efforts to educate children experiencing homelessness.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Introduction

It is Friday morning in an Oklahoma sixth-grade classroom, and the class has completed a math lesson just minutes before lunchtime. The principal walks in with a student who has just been enrolled. He is one of the thousands of students displaced by Hurricane Katrina. The boy and the father recently relocated to the area, and since Katrina, neither of the two knows the whereabouts of the boy's mother. She is feared dead. The boy's father is unemployed, and both are temporarily residing at the local homeless shelter. Clearly, this student has no school records or stable home environment, and school is the least of his concerns at this time. Imagine the feelings and questions that this young boy may have. Imagine the feelings and questions that you would have if you were his teacher (Hall, 2007).

Teachers are faced with many challenges in today's classrooms. They must keep up with the changing curriculum in midst of the increasing individual needs of students. Teachers are often stretched in many different directions, trying to support students, parents, principals and the community at large. The field of education provides teachers with a diverse makeup of students within a classroom. This includes students of various backgrounds, experiences and abilities. Teachers are faced with the challenge of meeting the multiple needs within a classroom and providing an optimal learning environment for students so they may achieve success. Providing service to a student experiencing homelessness is a unique challenge amongst teachers today. They not only need to prepare their classrooms to accommodate the needs of homeless children but also need to prepare all students within the classroom to support each other and to truly make a classroom inclusive. Teachers are expected to meet the needs of students within their own classrooms and this would include supporting those children experiencing homelessness.

The average age of a child who is homeless is 6 years of age (Bassuk & Gallagher, 1990). Much of this homelessness takes place in a child's formative years and teachers should pay close attention to the

effects of homelessness on a child's development in order to meet the needs of a child who might be experiencing homelessness in their own classroom. Teachers and everyone involved in homelessness should be concerned how being homeless may affect a child's health and nutrition, developmental, psychological and social growth issues and academic achievement (Bassuk, Rubin & Lauriat, 1986).

Children who are homeless are at risk for health problems because they seldom receive routine health care. Common cold symptoms occur at a rate of 50% higher in homeless children than housed children and diarrhea more than 500% higher than the general child population (Yamaguchi & Strawser, 1997). In addition to health issues, homeless students also suffer from hunger due to financial limitations. Many students come to school hungry and often have to turn to emergency services for supplemental food each month. Relying on an external source can make it very difficult for food stability thus affecting a student's ability within the classroom.

Academic achievement in students is hindered because of homelessness. Elementary school-aged children who are homeless are confronted with a variety of challenges. Many studies show that students experiencing homelessness perform significantly more poorly on academic tests than children who were not homeless. A lifetime history of homelessness only increases the likelihood that a child's academic success will suffer as measured by grade point average (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004). Children who are homeless tend to experience more depression and anxiety than children who are housed. Approximately 47% of children who were homeless were found to have clinically significant internalizing problems, such as depression and anxiety, compared to only 21% of children who were housed (Buckner, 1999). Children who are homeless are also more likely to experience higher rates of grade retention than their housed peers. Children who are homeless also score lower on vocabulary and reading tests than the norm for scale (Rafferty, 2004). Short attention span, separation anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, sleep disorders, poor social interaction and delays in gross motor, speech and language development are all effects of

homelessness on students. These are the common developmental, behavioral and psychological problems associated with children who are homeless and all have an effect on school performance and behavior.

Another lasting effect of homelessness on students is the secondary effect of poor parenting on children (Grant, 1990). Parents who are dealing with the plight of homelessness often face extremely stressful conditions which do not put a parent in an ideal parenting environment. Children are often the benefactors of the poor parenting behavior and the effects are not conducive to healthy child development. Children who are homeless often take on a parenting role themselves and are faced with challenges of finding something to eat on their own, completing homework and arranging transportation to and from places. Barriers such as transportation, health issues, addictions, privacy, hunger, behavioral problems and financial stress all play a part in a student being unsuccessful in school. Teachers have a unique role supporting children in our schools, especially the ones suffering from events that are out of their control. Creating a safe, stable, and nonthreatening classroom is essential for children who are homeless. Teachers and all those involved with homeless children should foster an environment in which the children feel accepted for who they are and not for what they are not (Yamaguchi, & Strawser, & Higgins, 1997). Teachers cannot and should not look away when faced with the obstacle of supporting a child experiencing homelessness. In the next section, four important questions will be explored to further support all involved in supporting a child experiencing homelessness.

Research Questions

How prevalent is homelessness?

People who find themselves without a home tend to be reluctant in discussing their plight with others. They often go to great lengths to hide their life circumstances from others. This makes it very difficult in obtaining an accurate count of the homeless populations. In addition to this, homelessness can be experienced for short periods of time or much longer periods of time. It can be difficult to track the number of people experiencing homelessness as the population is quite transient. Many families who

experience homelessness often end up staying in accommodation that is not suitable. They end up in crowded situations with two or more families living under one roof. Many families choose living with other family members or friends to escape the stigma and embarrassment of living in a shelter.

Despite the fact that obtaining solid data on the number of homeless is a challenge, substantial evidence supports the theory that the number of homeless children in the United States has dramatically increased in recent years. By some accounts, the number has more than doubled in recent decades (Hall, 2007). Families are the largest and fastest growing segment of the homeless population in the United States and the numbers are growing at an alarming rate. It is estimated that approximately 1.35 million children are homeless in the United States and of these over half are under the age of six. The majority of homeless families are headed by single mothers (Horizons for Homeless Children, 2005). In Toronto, Ontario it is estimated that 4,000 children lived in emergency shelters in 2006 (Decter, 2007). This number does not include the many children doubled up on friend's couches, staying with grandparents, or living in cars, trailers or tents.

Older children suffer homelessness in great numbers as well. One recent estimate indicated that more than 900,000 children and youths experiences homelessness in a given year (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Although boys were more likely to experience homelessness than girls, there were no other differences in the prevalence of youth homelessness based on race, poverty, status, family structure, or region of the country (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). Homeless youth could be undercounted as some shelters do not meet the specific needs of youth and youth are often turned away. Along with shelters being inaccessible to them, some youth do not like to go to shelters in order to avoid the stigma that is associated with such. Some youth are intrigued by the life on the street and often become associated with the street culture that surrounds them.

Poverty and homelessness are inextricably linked. For thousands of families, income is stretched and housing precarious. More and more families are living in poverty while rental housing prices and

electricity and heating costs increase. Many families are spending more than 50% of their income in rent each and every month. Poverty can be a hard cycle to break free from. Many families must choose between paying the rent and putting food on the table. In addition to poverty, many women are fleeing domestic violence and are forced into the emergency shelter system to secure safety for themselves and their children. Many homeless children have also suffered violence first hand by either witnessing it or experiencing it themselves (Decter, 2007). There is not enough violence against women shelters to house all of the families fleeing violence so families are housed in homeless shelters.

People become homeless for many reasons. Many factors contribute to the increase in family homelessness such as low wages, lack of affordable housing, changes in public assistance, natural disasters, domestic violence, health issues and substance abuse. Homelessness does exist in every corner of the world and teachers and administrators must be willing to accommodate the specific needs of a homeless student. It does not matter if you live in a rural or urban setting, homelessness does exist and measures need to be put in place to support children experiencing homelessness. Homeless children, like all children have a right to education and deserved to be welcomed into our classrooms. They deserve to be challenged with high expectations, and should be recognized for the valuable background experiences they bring into the classroom. There are signs that teachers can look for in identifying a child who might be experiencing homelessness.

How do teachers know who is homeless?

Some children experiencing homelessness go to great lengths to hide their life circumstance. Homelessness does not discriminate. Homelessness may last a few days or a lifetime. Some children are born into a life of homelessness while others experience it for the first time during their school years. Homelessness affects all socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, cultures and races but is most clearly linked to poverty (Noll & Watkins, 2004). The characteristics of homeless students vary. It can be challenging to identify if someone is homeless in your class, unless otherwise identified prior to enrolling in the

school. There are however, simple signs to look for in a child if identification has not already taken place. Teachers should make efforts to look at the child's history in order to gather information that may be helpful in determining a child's accommodations needed if necessary.

One of the possible signs of homelessness is a history of attending many schools and erratic attendance and tardiness (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Children who are homeless are unstable and may not wake up in the same place every morning. They sometimes are living in crowded situations in which they stay up late due to noise or can't fall asleep as their stomachs are rumbling due to lack of food. This makes it difficult for some to get up on time and be ready for school bright and early. Becoming homeless is an extremely stressful event. Parents are often overwhelmed with the situation of their lives to fully engage in efforts to support themselves. Homeless mothers must typically attend with daily feelings of frustration, sadness, depression and fatigue (Decter, 2007). These feelings can make it hard for a mother to focus on efforts to ensure that her children are ready and prepared for school in the morning. This too can account for increased absences and tardiness.

Another sign of homelessness is that children who are experiencing homelessness often come to class unprepared (Driver & Spadey, 2004). They simply do not have the tools needed for a classroom environment. Homeless children who do have the school supplies needed for class also struggle with ensuring that they are brought to class daily. There is a consistent lack of preparation for class and this is a strong indicator of homelessness. Simply put, homeless children have far more pressing issues on their minds than ensuring they have their pencils and papers ready for class every day. This can be a constant burden on a teacher who must provide the child with the appropriate materials to continue where they left off. By implementing simple measures in your classrooms, you will be able to better meet this need for all students who are not prepared for school. Implementations such as a materials cupboard or special cases with school supplies labeled with student's names are very successful to students who may be experiencing homelessness.

Sleeping in class and poor hygiene and grooming are also possible signs of homelessness (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Children living in emergency shelters are forced to sleep and bathe in common areas. They do not have the luxury of bathing and sleeping in private quarters. This makes it very difficult for children who are already experiencing turmoil in their lives. Sleeping can be very difficult when sharing a room with many other families. Bathing can be embarrassing when having to undress in front of others and be timed while bathing. It can also be embarrassing to share a tub with many and some children will simply refuse to bathe. Some homeless families may not have access to laundry facilities and are forced to wear clothes for days on end without a proper cleaning. All too often, when homeless children are enrolled into the school system their appearance may be the focus for condemnation by peers. They may be taunted and ostracized for not looking like the others do. They fall asleep during classes, because they don't feel safe wherever they are staying at night. The constant moving from place to place breaks the important cycle of continuing education that enables them to rise through the grade levels. They become academically challenged because of the daily struggle to survive (Gibbs, 2004).

Homeless children have very little in terms of possessions. Another sign of homelessness is that a homeless child could resist strongly to parting with personal possessions (e.g., not wanting to leave a favorite toy unattended or put a coat in a locker) (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Some children experiencing homelessness might have had to leave their past housing very quickly and could not take much, if anything, with them. Some items carry more than just practical value. These items can carry memories of a time that was better and stable. Asking a child to part with items that they hold dear to them could trigger the feeling of having nothing. Homeless children may cling to what they have and might be aggressive in trying to claim something for themselves. In a homeless child's mind, his or her possessions become "home" to them. Trying to take them away could make a homeless child feel as if they have been violated. These simple possessions could mean so much more to a child who does not have many possessions than to other children in the classroom.

Another sign of homelessness is that homeless children tend to have issues with hoarding food and hunger (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Children experiencing homelessness are often hungry in class. They may come to class without a lunch or very little food to sustain them throughout the day. Homeless children could also be involved in hoarding food. Some homeless children hoard food as they do not know when they may eat again. Emergency shelters have regular lunch and dinner times and if you are late you may miss out on getting something to eat for the night. Oftentimes the food that is served in a shelter is donated from the food bank. There is a lack of fresh food including produce and breads and children could be left with a lunch that is not as appealing as their peers. Homeless children could also be embarrassed by their lunches and refuse to eat in front of others. The major cause of hunger among children who are homeless is lack of financial assistance and difficulties in obtaining food (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991). Many homeless families turn to emergency food services to get their basic nutrition needs met, but some are still turned away as sufficient quantities are not available.

Lastly, a homeless child lacks the space needed to complete certain school tasks. Another sign of homelessness in children is homework not getting done, not participating in group homework, and notes not signed by parents (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Homeless children do not have adequate space in a shelter environment to complete their homework in a quiet setting. They do not have the means to invite others over to complete group assignments that may require meeting after school. Children could be embarrassed by their situation and not want to invite others over to their “house” to complete assignments. Shelters are often noisy and crowded not making it an ideal place to complete homework tasks. Students who are homeless might present that they want to stay at school after the school day ends. They may want to access the library and other quiet places to complete their studies. Parents of younger students may not have the time or focus to support their child in completing homework or completing paperwork required for school. Parent’s minds could be filled with frustration in looking for a place to

live, or filled with anxiety over the trauma they may be suffering. When parents do not pay attention to school expectations, their children might not as well.

The characteristics of homeless students that impact the quality of their educational experiences are many. The average homeless school-aged child experiences a number of emotional challenges. Irrational fears and phobias, such as a fear of the dark or a fear of strangers, are all typical for this population (Hall, 2007). Socially, this group tends to exhibit immature interaction with peers, inappropriate social interaction with adults, and withdrawal and isolation. In a classroom setting, frequent disruptive tendencies are also common. Other behaviors that are typical of homeless children are difficulty concentrating, psychological and cognitive problems and learning disabilities (Halloway, 2003). It is extremely important to understand the homeless population before we are able to focus on strategies to support them in their quest for equality.

What strategies do experienced and newly qualified teachers need to support a student experiencing homelessness?

Before strategies can be implemented into classrooms to support students experiencing homelessness, teachers must first look at their own understanding and beliefs about homelessness. Our understandings of homelessness are strongly influenced by preconceptions and attitudes, which may be the result of negative media attention reports and limited contact with homeless individuals (Noll & Watkins, 2004). It could be difficult to put yourself in the shoes of another who is homeless if you have never experienced it or had contact with other individuals who are experiencing homelessness. It is easy to stigmatize the homeless, viewing the homeless as flawed and lazy. It is easy to associate homelessness as a result of character flaws or unwise choices. We must look at larger systemic issues that force people into a world of homelessness including such things as high rental costs, affordable housing options, living wages and addictions or mental health issues. Becoming more informed about homelessness is a first step in understanding homeless student's lives and supporting their educational needs (Noll & Watkins, 2004).

There are many simple steps that teachers and administrators can implement in their own school communities that can have a significant impact on the well-being of a homeless child and their family. There are other areas that need to be challenged in order to combat the larger systemic issues that homeless families face daily.

The impact of homelessness on a child's education is very real. Many homeless children have a distinct disadvantage in terms of realizing their full potential because of their instability and the constant moving around. In order to succeed in the classroom, children must have the components needed. Belief in themselves, resiliency and self-esteem are all very important to any child, but most important for a homeless child in order to succeed in the classroom. Oftentimes, parents of homeless children are not in the position to show and teach children how to be resilient and to believe in themselves, when they are struggling with their own personal plight. When families are homeless, some children take on the parental role quite naturally. They say "My mom forgot to check it" or "I couldn't come to school yesterday because my mom woke up late." The distinction between parent and child becomes unclear (Decter, 2007). Teachers can play a significant part in a child's life in fostering the potential of a homeless child and provide a safe and secure classroom that is an optimal learning environment for all.

Transience is a major issue in the education of homeless children (Decter, 2007). Some children are forced to repeat the same material when changing schools, while others miss out on certain parts of the curriculum altogether. Schooling becomes fragmented and children may feel so detached from school that they do not bother putting in the effort to succeed. Some homeless students question why they should put in the effort if they are just going to move again. This shows that many children experiencing homelessness are too transient to lay down solid roots within a school (Decter, 2007). Attachment is so important for a young child and this poses a huge barrier in homeless children succeeding within the school environment. One area that teachers can focus on quickly to alleviate some of the frustration with students who are transient is to ensure that students experiencing homelessness get tested and assessed

very quickly upon their arrival at the school. This ensures that teachers will be able to guide instruction to that individual student to meet them where they are at in the curriculum. It is also important for all schools to indicate on a child's school record whether or not previous testing has been completed (Decter, 2007). This would allow a teacher to have a starting point when working with children who are homeless. If a child's record indicates that no assessment has taken place, then the individual teacher can advocate strongly that assessment happens quickly. Administering a brief educational assessment in reading, math and obtaining a writing sample will avoid teaching above or below a student's ability while certain school records are obtained (Opening Doors project, 2008). Performing an oral interview with the student so they may have the opportunity to share their past school history will also help in providing an initial assessment of the child. All information should be shared with all staff working with the child to ensure a consistent approach in instruction. In addition to assessment, teachers should be planning for the next transition once a student enters their classroom (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Teachers could create a parent folder that would hold all of the important assessments, samples of student work, and copies of educational records to share with the new school once the transition occurs. This folder could stay at the school if a parent requests and be transferred to another school once the family moves again.

Another important strategy for a teacher to implement within their classrooms is to ensure that teachers are being sensitive to the feelings of homeless children by creating a class climate of acceptance and understanding (Knowlton, 2006). Homeless students already feel out of place and not like everyone else. By treating them as different we are only compounding the problem. Homeless students need to feel a sense of belonging (Knowlton, 2006). There are many ways that teachers can achieve this. They can have a demeanor that emphasizes friendliness and a welcoming spirit. They can also set up a classroom that welcomes not only homeless children but all children regardless of differences. Providing cooperative learning experiences is a way that teachers can foster a sense of belonging in children experiencing homelessness. Validating all experiences through cooperative play could enable a child to recognize that

his experiences are worthy and that they have something to contribute to the classroom at large. Giving them an outlet to share within a cooperative learning environment could allow children to support and recognize each other's strengths. Providing classroom activities that promote acceptance of diversity can help create a classroom of welcoming (Driver & Spadey, 2004).

Many children living in a shelter or other precarious living arrangements are often struggling with depression, anxiety and low self-esteem due to the stress of homelessness (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Teachers can help to address these needs and related behavioral considerations by reinforcing positive behaviors and teaching and modeling skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and cooperative learning (Driver & Spadey, 2004). It can be very difficult to meet the needs of everyone in the classroom, while respecting the privacy of everyone involved, but it is imperative. Letting a homeless student know that you are glad that he or she is in your school and that you are excited to have them in your class will allow you to develop a relationship with the student that can possibly lead to a trusting relationship between student and teacher. Also imperative is that teachers start collecting work samples and identify work that students can place in their own portfolio to take with them when they might have to leave the school again (Driver & Spadey, 2004). This practice is also very important as it showcases student's strengths and individual accomplishments. Assembling a portfolio can be a very rewarding activity that could boost the self-esteem of a homeless child. A child that is homeless might not feel as if they can accomplish much but having a portfolio with student work will allow them to feel a sense of achievement and worth.

Another way to welcome students into a classroom could be to assign a welcome buddy to the new student (Noll & Watkins, 2004). This buddy would be responsible for showing the new child around the school and orienting him to the different aspects of school life including library, gym and lunch facilities. Other welcoming activities could include having lunch with different staff members and the student's buddy during the first week of school and to play cooperative games or have the new student fill out an

“All about Me” questionnaire. By completing these activities with all new students you are creating a school environment where everyone feels involved and included (Driver & Spadey, 2004).

A homeless student might experience feelings of shame and embarrassment by their situation, and teachers can simply support them through this by listening to their feelings. (Noll & Watkins, 2004). When students are not comfortable sharing their experiences, offer other means for them to do so. Offer journals, art activities, music lessons and physical education time for them to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences. These concrete activities can help a homeless child work through difficult situations and any anger that they might be experiencing. Teachers also can discuss with the student whether or not a journal would be read by anyone. It would be up to the student to share if they feel necessary.

Some homeless students might not be willing to risk forming deep relationships and friendships with other students as they know that they will need to leave at anytime. A teacher could give the homeless student self-addressed postcards with stamps on them so that the child may correspond with classmates that they might have formed friendships with. Teachers could also make certain that the child has the time needed to clean out their personal space and say goodbye to everyone. Often children experiencing homelessness must leave their previous accommodation very quickly and do not have a chance to say goodbye to neighbors or friends. Allowing them to say goodbye to classmates might alleviate some of the difficulty with the transition of leaving school.

Providing a structured, predictable routine to the school day is important to all children, especially children experiencing homelessness. Homeless students lack structure in their lives (Knowlton, 2006). Every day could bring new fears of what could happen and homeless students need to feel the security of an organized, predictable classroom and school day. Having a visible schedule written on the blackboard would be helpful so that each child knows how the day will progress. This alleviates any anxiety about the uncertainty of a disheveled day.

During the course of the day, teachers may find that children may be restless and leave projects half finished. Teachers can separate tasks into meaningful parts that can be completed in a short time. They can contract with students to finish projects, ensuring that all basic needs are met to complete the project assigned (Opening Doors Project, 2008). It is also vitally important to provide as many opportunities for physical education as possible. Some children living in shelters would not get the required space and time to run and play. The shelter might not contain a green space for children to explore. By limiting or withholding gym or recess as a punishment tool, teachers might be taking away the only time a child might have to play throughout that particular day (Opening Doors Project, 2008).

Another classroom strategy to use is to assign a personal space to any student experiencing homelessness within their classroom. This personal space can be the child's desk or a special spot in the classroom library. Homeless children may not have any apparent sense of roots, personal space, or possessions. Children should be responsible for this personal space and care for it accordingly. By having a "safe place" for student belongings, homeless children feel secure in knowing that their possessions are safe and will not be taken away (Driver & Spadey, 2004). In addition to a personal space, a homeless child could also benefit from being given something that only belongs to him or her (Opening Doors Project, 2008). Examples of this could be a set of school supplies or a pencil case to store items. Teachers should not take away any possessions as a disciplinary measure of a child experiencing homelessness as many homeless children do not have many possessions. Homeless students may cling to what they have and might be aggressive in trying to claim something for themselves. Teachers should also not withdraw privileges if a child doesn't return school materials when due (Opening Doors Project, 2008). The nature of a shelter environment or a precarious living environment is uncertain and returning items borrowed from school could be difficult.

Teachers should also refrain from frequently rearranging the classroom furniture in an effort to provide a sense of stability for a homeless student. Creating a classroom environment that resembles a

home-like setting is also beneficial. A classroom that has plants, photographs of the students, a class pet, and even a sofa or other appropriate domestic furniture provides the homeless student with a sense of stability that they are most likely not getting anywhere else (Hall, 2007)

Homeless children who live in shelters and homes that house more than one family are often noisy. Providing a quiet time to study during the school day can greatly support a child in achieving academic success. Allowing the child to do his or her homework in school would also benefit greatly (Driver & Spadey, 2004). If this cannot be managed within the school, teachers can support the child in their own living environment by offering them their school supplies in a hard container so they can keep track of supplies and use the container as a portable desk if needed. Teachers can also give homeless children a clipboard to complete assignments at home as well. This too can be used as a portable desk. Another strategy to support homeless children living in a shelter environment is to ensure that the shelter has a set of texts on hand in the office so that the student does not have to worry about textbooks being lost in a crowded room situation. If this was available to students they could sign out the texts and use them on-site within the shelter thus supporting the homeless child with their homework completion.

Teachers can also plan assignments in class so that children can keep up without having to take too much homework home (Opening Doors Project, 2008). Teachers must remember to be flexible when developing student's assignments. Certain kinds of assignments might be difficult or near impossible for a homeless students to complete (Noll & Watkins, 2004). A homework project that requires materials such as poster board or computer access might be difficult for a homeless student to attain or afford. Assignments to write about a summer vacation or to conduct a backyard science project might put homeless students in an awkward position. Teachers can still assign projects like those mentioned but should also offer lots of alternatives so children may pick what assignment to complete.

To support literacy efforts, teachers should also incorporate lots of rich literature in classroom libraries that explore broader concepts of shelter and community. Including children's books about

homelessness in your classroom library can support the “housed” students in the classroom to understand what it means to be homeless (Noll & Watkins, 2004). With a little planning by the teacher a classroom environment can be one of welcoming and belonging.

Another concrete strategy that can be implemented in the classroom is the provision of providing the basic needs to all students, including those experiencing homelessness. Children may be reluctant to go to school due to lack of clothing, food for lunch or school supplies. Children who are homeless might lack proper hygiene and be ostracized by their peers for their appearance (Opening Doors Project, 2008). Children who are homeless may suffer from frequent illness or stomach cramping due to lack of food or inappropriate diet. Homeless children may also be absent from school on special occasion days, embarrassed by lack of birthday treats, valentines or a Halloween costume (Opening Doors Project, 2008).

Teachers can support children experiencing homelessness by acquiring resources in the community to meet the specific needs of students. Teachers can keep a small cupboard with extra school supplies, clothing, food and other items as needed. This cupboard can be accessed privately and made available to a homeless student without judgment. In addition to ensuring that some basic needs are available on site within the school, teachers can also gather information about community resources that can support homeless families. They can gather information on food supports, clothing donation agencies, and breakfast and lunch programs and provide appropriate referrals as needed. Being knowledgeable of community resources and having the information on hand can help a homeless family access their basic needs. Teachers must be cautious when offering any support to parents and ensure that parents are respected and supported by the teacher and the school community.

Parents may be embarrassed about their homelessness and teachers and administrators should make parents feel valued as partners in their child’s education (Driver & Spadey, 2004). Providing parents with assessment results, related goals and plans for the next school move will help a parent to

understand that teachers are trying to partner with them to achieve the optimal educational success for their children. Helping parents become familiar with the supports that are offered to families experiencing homelessness, including outside agency support, enables a homeless family to take action in attaining resources if needed. In addition, recognizing that parents who are living in shelters and are not financially able to pay for extra school items such as field trips, school supplies and special treats and offering accommodations to meet those needs will support both the parent and the child in feeling supported.

Teachers can provide parents with an informal support system in which they may feel safe in discussing parenting issues or concerns with teachers. They can partner with the parent to come up with quick mini-goals to support their child. Teachers can also provide hope to parents who might not feel as if they are able to accomplish much. The teacher can work with parents to ensure that the homeless student gets as good an education as possible in the length of time he or she is at school. Have high expectations for yourself as a teacher and growing expectations for your homeless students. Homeless students may struggle academically, emotionally, and socially, but just like their housed peers they need clear, achievable expectations (Noll & Watkins, 2004). Teachers should not make excuses for homeless children out of pity but rather set clear guidelines and expectations and work at removing barriers in order for them to achieve academic success. Through careful observation, teachers can learn to recognize the skills and knowledge they possess and build upon their strengths.

Teachers must recognize that families come in many shapes and sizes. Families with children are no longer defined by the standards set in previous centuries. A two-parent household is an increasing rarity in today's society. It is important to teach students not only the core curriculum, but also life skills that are so important to learning and succeeding in today's society. Educating students in diversity, and other social issues, not only enhance their curriculum learning but also their social, emotional and spiritual everyday lives. All children should be given the same advantages in schools, as all children need quality education in order to be successful in their future lives. Homeless students, like all students, learn

best when their background knowledge and strengths are recognized, valued, and used as building blocks for further learning (Noll & Watkins, 2004). It can be disheartening to identify home with a shelter but this is the reality that kids face every day. Without an adequate education, children will continue to live in poverty and will fail to acquire skills to allow them to become productive members in our society. It is imperative that we work together with all invested parties to incorporate policy and procedure and to implement strategies within our classrooms to support the homeless child and the family as a whole. Teachers must remember that they cannot possibly meet all the needs of a homeless child. However, if they can remove just one frustration, it can make a tremendous difference for that child.

How can teachers involve administration, parents, peers, students and the community at large in promoting sensitivity about homelessness in our schools?

By offering information to the public at large about homelessness we can provide opportunity for all to identify with the struggle of homelessness. It is a difficult task to teach social consciousness but by providing some basic information about the topic and practical strategies to use within the classroom, a larger community discussion between all involved can take place. Teaching safe, secure and comfortable educators, students and shelter workers about homelessness gives them the opportunity to participate and make a difference in other people's lives. When people develop their sense of compassion and caring, society benefits from this. When levels of compassion are developed, individuals could potentially have the opportunity to increase their own sense of happiness and self-satisfaction. People feel better about themselves when they help others or create an atmosphere of a helping environment.

There is little argument that every child deserves the best education our country offers. Ensuring that homeless children receive adequate and high-quality education that it deserves and has every right to receive requires effort on the part of everyone involved. This would include administrators, policy makers, teachers, school counselors and other school personnel. Teachers must advocate for students experiencing homelessness in their individual classes. They must take their concerns to their

administrators so action can happen. Teachers should work hand in hand with administrators and the school community to provide a coordinated approach to help children in need.

To develop relevant programming for homeless children, administrators must implement and monitor efforts to support homeless children within their school walls. Administrators must become advocates for homeless children and ensure that the law is being upheld. The recognition of homeless children and their right to the same education as those children in a traditional family setting was the impetus of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Gibbs, 2004). This legislation has brought awareness to a sometimes invisible population and has highlighted that there are children in our country that are at risk.

In response to this Act, there are now school liaisons positioned to school districts nationwide to assist with the homeless (Gibbs, 2004). In Canada, no such law exists and no support is in place specifically to support homeless children in a school setting. Administrators have a responsibility to ensure that the McKinney-Vento Act is being upheld and that students experiencing homelessness are receiving the supports they are entitled to under the Act. Administrators can work with the school liaisons that represent the homeless population and work with them to link individuals to the services provided.

Administrators can also play a distinct role in ensuring that assessments and linkages are taking place in a timely manner. They must make sure that children who are homeless are being placed in an appropriate classrooms setting and offered any other services that they may need. Administrators can support teachers by ensuring that all nutritional needs are met including offering breakfast programs or linkages to community breakfast programs. They can take a step further and implement a school food cupboard offering breakfast and lunch foods to students who did not eat breakfast or who do not have a lunch. In addition to this they can also supply basic needs such as toiletry items, clothing and school supplies. Teachers can do this in their individual classrooms, but schools can take a proactive role and

offer this school wide. Administrators can also involve parents, community groups and churches in the local community to help support this mission.

Administrators and shelters can work closely together to offer combined support to students in need. School newsletters and brochures can be left at shelters along with grade specific textbooks for shelter families to access. Posting a school event schedule within a shelter setting might also benefit homeless families and staff can work together with the school to keep children involved in school events. Administrators and principals can visit local shelters frequently to foster the relationship between the two services. They can offer assistance in enrollment procedures and set up a protocol for referral between shelter and school. Being present at the shelter can support homeless families who might be embarrassed about their current living situation and might not want to leave the shelter walls in which they find comfort. By offering in-service programs and initiating contact, families can see that the school and the people within the school are here to help support struggling families.

In addition, administrators can also offer relaxed policies for enrollment into schools. Accepting motel receipts and shelter letters as proof of residency and allowing a grace period to obtain school records or verbal confirmation of the students past record is a great benefit to these students (Hall, 2007). Other practical strategies that principals can do specifically is to offer space before and after school for homework completion, group project work and allowing students to use materials such as art supplies within the school setting is of great benefit. Also offering laundry facilities, showers and a place for students to go between the time that the school closes and the shelters open is beneficial to homeless children (Hall, 2007).

Another area of needs that can be met by administration is to train teachers and support personnel on how to help the homeless (Knowlton, 2006). Staff development should be used to increase the sensitivity of teachers towards homeless students and to provide practical strategies that teachers can use within their own classrooms. The action research piece of this capstone project will emphasize the

specific strategies that teachers can implement within the classroom settings that were previously discussed. This is a very important component of supporting homeless families as to offer information about homelessness and how it affects children in particular we are planting seeds of awareness in our communities. We are fostering a community of compassionate teachers who will respond when confronted with a homeless child in their classrooms. By giving each individual teacher the gift of knowledge we can look at breaking the cycle of homelessness for children who might never have a chance otherwise.

Another area of need is for staff to develop a working relationship with churches and civic organizations to help the homeless (Hall, 2007). Administrators should have the resources on hand for parents to access. More importantly, they should also make themselves known to the agencies and support a creation of a referral process that is sometimes needed when accessing support. By setting up referral processes we can then ensure that families are getting their needs met. Administrators can hold community agencies accountable for supporting families who are struggling with homelessness and this process would alleviate the homeless family of having to deal with accessing resources on their own. Collaborating with community organizations can provide much needed help with regards to food, clothing, jobs, health services, transportation and counseling support (Hall, 2007).

Lastly, administrators can try to make sure that parents feel comfortable and are welcomed into the school. Parents can be so occupied with solving their crisis, and often don't become involved with the school community (Decter, 2007). Parents should be invited to sit down and discuss their current situation if they feel comfortable and identify any needs that they may have that the school might be able to help with. A parent questionnaire could be administered to gather important information about their children including likes, dislikes, past school experiences and issues that may be present. Efforts should be made to offer families a tour of the school upon arrival, outlining all of the activities and school clubs that their son or daughter could be involved with. The offering of community resources that focus on food,

transportation and other needs should be available during that first meeting. Parents should be shown that extraordinary efforts will be made to ensure that schools will develop a sense of ownership of their students and that these students feel a sense of membership in the school community (Ziesemer & Marcoux, 1992). Parents must feel that the school is working with them, collaboratively in efforts to ensure that their child receives the best education possible.

By educating teachers about homelessness we can hope that teachers will educate children about homelessness. Teachers can teach children about homelessness so children can be more aware of their own judgments and misconceptions about others. By educating administrators about homelessness, we can visualize school environments that support a non-judgmental and non-biased setting.

Direct services alone to support homeless children are not going to meet the diverse needs of this population. There is so much more that needs to be done to prevent homelessness including increasing the availability of affordable housing and creating policies and procedures that support a living wage. We also need to remember that homeless families not only suffer with the struggle of homelessness but this struggle could also be in conjunction with other struggles, such as mental health issues, addictions and other pertinent health issues. Reports that look only at homelessness effects must look at other circumstances in the specific family environment to account for real results. In doing this, it will help educators and people working with homeless families and children to understand the issues that the homeless family faces every day. Gibbs (2004) wrote that “a homeless student does not wear a sign that says “I’m homeless,” or “I’m lost,” or “I need help,” or talk about where they slept the night before, or share the details of the family environment they must return to at the end of the day. School is often there safe haven. In the same way that a student comes to learn, the teachers, counselors and administrators can try to learn about their students. Whenever possible a teacher should take the time to really see their students.” Everyone involved in supporting a homeless child should really take the time to understand

that the child did not ask for this life, nor did they choose not to have a home. They simply are in a circumstance beyond their control. They deserve every right to an education and future as anyone else.

Conclusion

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, shelter, security, and food must be obtained before reaching higher order needs such as psychological and self actualization needs (Maslow, 1968). If children's basic needs are not met, many of them will suffer a great disadvantage in achieving academic success. These children may experience emotions related to their homelessness, including embarrassment, anxiousness, fear, low self-esteem, depression, suspiciousness, and insecurities. These "adult worries" make it understandable that a child might not care about completing their homework. Homeless children are also frequently uprooted from place to place, each time having to adjust to a new school and face peer rejection, which helps to explain a lack of enthusiasm for participating in the academic setting (Stormont-Spurgin & De Reus, 1995). Unfortunately, homelessness is a social issue that most likely will never completely go away (Hall, 2007). Teachers and all involved in supporting a homeless student must familiarize themselves with the causes of homelessness, and look at creating an environment that supports and welcomes homeless children and all children into our schools and classrooms.

It is imperative that we look to practical strategies in supporting homeless children that can be easily implemented without much effort or strain on behalf of the teachers and administrators in the schools. The field of education today provides teachers with a challenge to meet the varied needs of students within the classroom. Teacher training programs have come a long way in including provisions for teacher trainees to learn about diversity and special needs among children, including homelessness. Experienced and newly qualified teachers working in classrooms today need the knowledge and hands on experience in supporting children within an inclusion classroom. Preparing new teachers with the knowledge in supporting students experiencing homelessness is a priority to ensure that homeless students

receive optimal education. It is important to not only provide teachers with the knowledge and background on homelessness but to offer implementation strategies that focus on meeting the needs of these specific population within the classroom. Practical strategies and lesson plans to incorporate learning of homelessness is needed for teachers and administrators alike. The teacher that values an inclusive classroom will use all the resources available to them to aid and challenge the students in her own classroom to thrive and welcome differences. The effectiveness of this approach can only be accomplished with the support of the larger school community. Administration must be aligned with the plight of supporting all families within the school environment, including families experiencing homelessness. Teachers must work with their administrators hand in hand to provide a consistent, continuous message of acceptance and belonging.

Supporting homeless children to increase academic success is an achievable goal. If all involved work together to support the one main goal of providing the best quality care they can to homeless children, we can be agents of change for many children. Many homeless children that are enrolled in school will only visit for a short while. They will continue to cope with the everyday challenges of life. Abuse, neglect, upheaval, and danger continue to face them as they transition from school to school while parents try to find a permanent, affordable home. The hope is that the time spent at school will provide the child with a glimpse of their own self-worth and potential contribution to a world that is not always hostile (Parke & Agness, 2002). Even though the time together might be short, great impact can happen and memories can be built. These memories and learning's can form a foundation for a future characterized by stability, productivity and wonder. This makes the simple steps worthwhile when we know that the outcomes can be life-changing.

After addressing the thematic concern, it is important to take the next step and progress in performing action research. The next chapter will discuss the connection between the major thematic

concerns of supporting homeless children in a school setting to the action research process. It will also discuss and identify steps that will be taken for improvement in this area.

Chapter Three: The Methodology

Introduction

Teachers have a unique role in today's society. Teachers must teach the curriculum expected to students with such varied and differentiated needs. Not only do teachers teach the curriculum but they also teach life skills; resiliency; morality and most importantly they teach children to be hopeful about their futures. They have the responsibility to support all children who enter their individual classrooms and are responsible for creating and maintaining a safe, encouraging and engaging classroom in which all students can learn. Every child brings individual characteristics and unique experiences into the classroom. Each child should be valued for their uniqueness and individualism. Teachers should work from a strengths based approach in dealing with children and recognize that all children have strengths and it is the teacher's responsibility to foster all strengths and make the child themselves realize their own strengths and abilities.

Teachers have the fundamental responsibility to teach all who are in their classrooms and that would include students who might be experiencing homelessness. Teachers should remain responsive to the specific needs of a homeless student and offer solutions to possible issues that may appear with the homeless population within their classroom. Research has proven that children who are experiencing homelessness are at a great disadvantage academically in comparison to their housed peers (Decter, 2007). Teachers should take the time and put in the effort to look at their personal teaching styles and school surrounding to ensure that they are setting up the optimal learning environment to support students experiencing homelessness. Teachers should look for ways to incorporate strategies and initiatives that would best support these children. Teachers should work within the school and the community at large to offer a comprehensive level of support to all students including those experiencing homelessness. In order to do this, teachers must take the role as learners themselves and learn many ways to support and teach the students they are presented with. Teachers should also take an active role in professional development and

continue to fine tune their skills and incorporate new strategies and new skills into their repertoire in order to best meet the needs of the students. Teachers can continue their lifelong learning process by engaging in the process of action research.

Action Research

Action research builds upon everyday skills that people use to make sense of their lives and improve their situation. When trying to improve learning outcomes for students, action research can be used to help teachers answer what they can do to improve their own practice. Action research helps teachers to learn by doing. When teachers are presented with a problem or issue, they work through that problem, identify what worked and what changes need to happen to ensure optimal success. When a teacher completes a lesson, or supports a student one to one, he/she can learn from their interaction and reflect upon what worked and what needs to be changed for the next time in order to improve the expected outcome. Holly, Arthur & Kasten (2004) state "...action research implies an orientation to research, a form of professional practice, a research process, and for teachers, a reflective way of teaching" (p.14). This research supports the belief that educators have the capacity to build their own evidence-based practices. It is a form of self-enquiry undertaken by teachers to improve the rationality of their own educational practices and the understanding of how the practices are carried out.

Action research allows teachers the opportunity to become more involved in the process of change. Instead of being just dispensers of knowledge, teachers can become agents of change by participating and involving action research into their practices. It allows them the opportunity to be responsive and change outcomes based on reflection and evidence from observation. Some reasons for engaging in action research are: it helps change the role of the classroom teacher from technician and transmitter of knowledge to knower and agent; it gives teachers a voice and makes them equal partners in the search for knowledge about teaching and learning; and lastly, it gives teachers a chance of success to

be involved and be part of the change process (Smith & Sela, 2005). Through action research teachers can become agents of change.

Teachers are continuously planning and implementing lessons, observing students, and reflecting on the lesson implemented. They do this by observation of the lesson, asking questions of the students and reflection on what worked and what might need to be improved to achieve specific outcomes. This cycle provides a process for teachers to improve classroom practice and potential outcomes. Action research provides for comparisons over time and for a culture of continuous growth and improvement in schools and more specifically in classrooms. It is extremely important that teachers follow an action research model to improve their own professional development and to create classrooms that are set up to meet the needs of the individual students in each classroom. When discussing action research it is important to take notice of the context in which the action research is being performed. This type of research is very useful in situations where a “one-size-fits-all” approach or philosophy is not possible. In classrooms, there are cultural, learning and behavioral differences that must be taken into account and this means that a “one-size-fits-all” approach is not appropriate or possible to ensure that students will be set up for academic achievement.

Many educators believe that action research is the most effective strategy for bringing about change in the classroom (Tighe, 1999). Prior to starting an action research model, teachers must select an area in the field of education that needs to be researched or improved. In addition, teachers must frame critical questions, collect relevant data, take well-researched action, reflect upon the impact of the action and finally share the results (Schoen, 2007). There are four characteristics of action research and all must be implemented in order to action research to be effective. Teachers must employ: ethical commitment, cycle of reflective thinking, public character and collaboration with others and making work public for credibility. Teachers must come up with conclusions based on evidence on how to better teach the children in his/her own classroom. This should be a fundamental commitment on behalf of all teachers,

including teachers in training to commit to teaching all students no matter what their differences.

Teachers are ethically bound to teach all, and the cycle of action research will allow teachers to become better suited to meet the needs of all students, including ones who are struggling with homelessness.

The cycle of reflective thinking is just as its name applies; it is a cycle of thinking. The cycle of reflective practice is one which allows teachers to engage in a continuous cycle of observation and self-evaluation. It allows teachers an opportunity to understand their own actions and reactions in response to a lesson as well as their learners. The use of reflective practice is used to observe and refine a personal teaching style on a continuous basis. This type of practice forces teachers to ask questions of themselves such as “Which teaching model am I using?” and “How well is it working?” All teachers need to think about what they do and how and why they do it. Reflective practice allows teachers to consider these questions in a controlled way.

In order for the topic being researched to be validated and to ensure accuracy, the findings must be shared with others and made public. This allows the research to stand on its’ own and be interpreted in ways that the researcher has no control over. It does however, allow the researcher to defend and solidify his/her findings and emphasize the context in which the research is being done. The last characteristic of action research is that researchers must collaborate during the process of action research, and work with students and other colleagues (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005). This allows for the cycle of reflective practice and allows the researcher to take the opportunity to work with others to identify areas of improvement to better the research. Teachers find ways to improve their teaching practices by engaging in action research. Individuals who engage in action research increase their individual development, both personal and professional. The collaboration aspect of action research opens up lines of communication with colleagues. Increase in collaboration leads to greater levels of collegiality (Strickland, Corely & Jones, 2001).

The thematic concern for this research project is to raise awareness and promote sensitivity about homelessness within the school system whereby teachers will have increased confidence and productivity in supporting a student experiencing homelessness so that students experiencing homelessness will receive the supports needed to achieve optimal school success. Research indicates that in order for teachers to engage in the action research process, the research must be meaningful to them. Traditional research conducted by university faculty is often not meaningful to undergraduate students (Hopkins, 1993). Teachers seem to make meaningful connections to research findings when they have been a part of the inquiry process. Arnold (1992) states that “in order for teachers to obtain current information, they must be able to not only review current research in the field but also must be able to construct and create new knowledge” (p.6). Pre-service teachers must study the action research process in order to better understand the students they will be faced with. Action research is important to teaching as it forces a teacher to evaluate what they are doing in the classroom on a regular basis. It also allows them to keep up with the many advances in education and take ideas and concepts and incorporate them into their own teaching style. In order for this practice to work effectively teachers must link the information and insights that they gain from the reflective process to make changes in their classrooms. Teachers must remember that even small changes can have a large impact on teaching and learning. The important thing is that teachers incorporate the learning into their planning and decision making and continue the reflective cycle. Teachers who practice this on a daily basis will have the opportunity to have a strong impact on children who are experiencing homelessness. Recognizing that all children are varied and come to the classroom with unique experiences is the first step in wanting to engage and find successful methods of engagement with the students. By incorporating strategies from their learning in a pre-service teaching program, teachers will be better able to respond to the needs of their students.

Through my experience as a social worker I have witnessed the struggles that many homeless families face with the school system each and every day. Many schools have the best intentions of

supporting all those who enter the school system but many do not have specific strategies or policies in place within classrooms and schools to offer support to a child experiencing homelessness. The aim of the proposed workshop would be to increase awareness of the strategies that can be implemented within the classroom setting to support those children who are experiencing homelessness. The proposed audience for the workshop will include teachers, administrators and anyone else working with children who might be struggling with the plight of homelessness. This workshop aims to encourage teachers and administrators to be aware of their own misconceptions and judgments towards homeless individuals. In addition, the workshop will include three lesson plans that will assist teachers in the instruction of teaching housed individuals about homelessness and the struggles that a homeless family could face. The hope is that the workshop will serve as a tool to increase awareness to eradicate stigmatization of homeless individuals within a school setting so that children experiencing homelessness may flourish both academically and socially during their school years. Teachers will be able to take the strategies learned in the workshop and try them out in their own classrooms.

By completing the workshop, teachers will be able to engage in their own action research to see if the strategies identified in the workshop can be implemented within their own classroom and more specifically with the students they will be teaching. Every teacher utilizes their past experiences to incorporate new teachings in their classrooms. In reflective practice, the teacher would apply a theory in the classroom based on their past experiences and reflections. They would then continue to observe and reflect the results of the activity or strategies gained in the workshop. Finally, they would adapt new findings and conclusions for the next time that lesson is planned. This type of continuous reflection and assessment continues throughout a teacher's career as they evaluate new experiences and test new adaptations or theories against them.

After the workshop and lessons have been developed, it is important for the research to be shared and made public. Providing the public with your findings allows your research to be analyzed and

critiqued during the action research process (Holly, Arher & Kasten, 2005). This project will be made public by presentation to the Medaille department of Education. The workshop will be designed and discussed in full in chapter four of this project.

Limitations

Limitations are a natural part of action research. There will always be limitations in action research and they should be identified and presented outright. Limitations are the strengths and weaknesses of a project. In the study of homeless families it must be noted that each family who is struggling from homelessness is unique. No two families are alike and this means that each intervention or strategy implemented will affect the family in distinct and different ways. Strategies that may work for some children might not work for others. Another limitation is that studies such as these are lacking a comparison group from low-income housed families. There is not a lot of research to indicate whether the effects of homelessness are distinct and different from the effects of a child living in poverty but housed. This limitation aside, studies show that the need to enhance services and implement strategies within the classroom to support all children will greatly benefit those who are dealing with homelessness and poverty.

This project would also be limited as it is only a two day workshop. The strategies and interventions outlined in the workshop would be consistent but it is up to the individual teacher to implement the strategies within their own classrooms. It is up to the teacher to apply the concepts learned into their individual classrooms. Teachers have to take into account the varied learning styles and abilities within the class and would also have to incorporate many one to one strategies with a homeless child while still trying to appease the larger classroom as a whole.

Another limitation with the implementation of strategies to support homeless children is assessment validity. Many families who are suffering from homelessness are transient and mobile which makes longitudinal study difficult. The homeless population can be a difficult population to track. When

assessing children who are homeless and the effects of specific strategies on these children it can be hard to assess the full value of progress. While we can measure increased reading levels, homework completion and review attendance results, it is difficult to measure evidence of increased self-esteem, trust or feelings of safety. These measures are not easily quantifiable.

The research presented showed that there was an overwhelming response by teachers that they wanted to learn how to make classrooms more inclusive. This shows great strength in that teachers want to further develop their professional attributes in making their classrooms optimal learning environments. A two day workshop would allow teachers to have a forum to raise their concerns in an unbiased and non-judgmental environment where all views are welcomed and expected. While this workshop will not eradicate all stigmatization in schools about the homeless, it will serve its purpose to start conversations about meeting the specific needs of children who are vulnerable in our classrooms at no fault of their own. Teachers and administrators should know how to work with children who are homeless and this workshop will aim to provide support in achieving this outcome.

Self-Assessment

An important element of action research is the process of reflection. This reflection process must be continual and the workshop presented will allow the opportunity for all teachers to reflect daily on the information that they have learned and the feelings and attitudes that may have felt over the course of the two days. A combination of surveys and interviews will be used. Initially, participants will be given a survey to elicit prior knowledge of homelessness and to identify specific areas of need that are important to the participants. Participants will each be given a reflection journal (AHA book) to record thoughtful findings and measures that can be implemented into their own classrooms. The “AHA” books will be used to highlight and record moments in which teachers will gather a new realization that will help them to better service their students.

In the reflection journals, there will also be prompts that will outline some of the myths of homelessness and teachers will be required to respond. These prompts will form the basis of grand conversation opportunities. Questions to promote reflection will be posed. The use of the reflection journal is a great way to promote self-assessment. Self-assessment is one way in which reflective practice can be incorporated into the classroom. Teachers will be able to pass on this practice of self-reflection to their students in their everyday classrooms. Teachers can do this informally to encourage students to think about their work and what they know in a given subject. Teachers may also instruct students to write in a reflective diary, where students can identify their strengths and weaknesses and put action plans in to place to improve practice. Reflecting on our own performance is critical to the success of classroom learning. Keeping a reflective diary about my own experience as a teacher will help me reflect and learn from my experiences in the classroom. In re-reading my reflective diary I will be able to find that over time I have developed strategies to deal with particular teaching problems. Using a reflective diary in this workshop experience will foster this learning tool for all teachers to continually use with their own students and within their schools.

When the workshop is over there will be an opportunity for teachers to reflect on what they have learned and to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop. Surveys will be used in this process to elicit feedback from participants. Facilitators of the workshop can use the surveys to monitor change and growth over the two days. A survey also outlining the myths of homelessness will also be given out at the end of the workshop to elicit growth in knowledge about the homeless population and the distinct causes and effects of homelessness on children's academic achievement. In addition to this a grand discussion will take place to outline possible strategies and modes of action to take in order to make certain that our school community is inclusive. Groups will be formed to identify different implementations that teachers and administrators can implement in their own schools to support and welcome children experiencing homelessness. Categories such as what can be done immediately, in six months and future endeavors can

be explored. Facilitators can connect with each school six months after the workshop to see if any of the strategies that were outlined in the workshop have been implemented within their school settings and solicit feedback from teachers on the implementation of strategies and any results that have been shown.

Lastly, teachers will be offered three lesson plans that are designed to enhance an inclusive classroom and in particular will touch specifically on the subject of homelessness. Teachers will be asked during the six-month interview how the lesson plans were implemented, if there was any change in classroom behavior and how they felt regarding the compassion levels and acceptance of homeless students by their housed peers. The continued assessment of the workshop, implementation strategies and the lesson plans will provide direction for improving the chance for a child experiencing homelessness to experience school success and belonging.

Conclusion

It is important for teachers and administrators to ensure that they are creating the best possible environment for all students that enter into their school communities. Professional development is one way that teachers can ensure that they keep up with the new research information being discovered to allow teachers some insight to better understand their student's needs. The homeless child is a child that needs such support. While teachers can advocate and fight the fight to end homelessness, they can also ensure that they are making change on a more personal level and take opportunities that will allow them to learn about the different and varied experienced that some children in their classrooms might be facing.

Action research and reflective practice is a way to continually challenge current behavior and ensure that teaching is developed and enhanced. It requires a commitment to continuous self-development and the time to achieve it. Reflective practice may be challenging to some as teachers might not be ready to confront the uncertainty about their teaching philosophies and styles. This workshop is important for all teachers to reinforce that not every child learns in the same way and that some change in the classroom can greatly enhance the opportunity for certain students to meet their full academic

potential. Homeless families are not a static or isolated group. They emerge from a broader population of low-income families living in various housing including emergency shelter, family and friend's houses and the streets. Because homelessness is but one of the many stressors that children living in poverty can experience, it is wise to be mindful of the broader context of poverty in understanding the issues of homeless children (Buckner, 2008). Teachers have a unique opportunity to support those in need of stability and safety from a life of turmoil that many children face daily. They can do this by ensuring that they are taking every opportunity to further increase their potential as a teacher to provide the best and optimal learning environment for each and every student they encounter. This would include researching on how to better meet the needs of homeless children. The chapter to follow will discuss the implementation of the workshop in detail.

Chapter Four: The Design

Introduction

Homeless children are a growing population and teachers and administrators need to look at areas to support this population within their school communities. They need to recognize the need to prepare all students with the knowledge, skills and personal qualities to manage in a world that is rapidly changing. Teachers and administrators have much at stake, not just the health and well-being of their own children, but that of all children. There are no easy answers, and certainly no single program or solution to fully support those in need within our school system. The complexity of a homeless child can only be met through an ongoing process that engages teachers, administrators, parents, community members and other students involved within the school community. All must begin to relate, plan, and act out a new pattern of interaction toward common goals on behalf of all children. Teachers and those who struggle with homelessness need to create a new pattern of interaction that will foster a caring environment for human growth and learning. Things cannot change in any fundamental way unless we can change our basic patterns of thinking and interacting so that learning can be a way of life (Senge, 1991).

Teachers and administrators should be provided with knowledge to help them in their efforts to support children who are experiencing homelessness. By improving the knowledge and skills of the teacher, this will in turn benefit the student's academic and social learning. Lifelong learning and professional development is essential for all educators in order for them to stay current with new research and strategies in order to better meet the needs of their individual classrooms. This workshop is geared towards helping experienced and newly qualified teachers feel more confident when working with homeless children. This workshop is also geared towards teachers who are working in schools where an emergency shelter is located within their school boundary area where they might experience more children who are struggling with homelessness.

The two day workshop will include information on the definition and types of homelessness, the prevalence of homelessness, why people might become homeless, the signs and symptoms of homelessness, strategies to use with homeless children and ways in which the community can become involved and engage in the process of supporting a homeless family. This workshop will also include concrete lesson plans that can be implemented within classroom settings. The focus of these lesson plans will be grades Kindergarten to Grade 3. In addition to this, the workshop will outline resources in the Waterloo Region, including the areas of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo that families can access for support to obtain basic needs such as emergency shelter, food, mental health and counseling resources.

Project Description

Teachers are the key players in ensuring that a child experiencing homelessness is being supported and welcomed in the school community. They are often the first point of contact for a struggling child and it is important that teachers create a sense of calmness and stability upon entrance into the classroom. All students should be afforded equal opportunities to academic and social learning and teachers must implement strategies that would enforce this belief. Students who are homeless do not have the same opportunity to realize their potential as other stably housed students do. They often experience ridicule and stigmatization based on their appearance or lack of cleanliness. Students who are homeless also have difficulty setting up roots in schools and with peers based on the assumption that they might not be staying long and that a move might be imminent.

Homeless students are more likely to experience low achievement test scores, poor grades, educational disability, school behavior problems, grade retention, truancy, and school dropout (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). Homelessness also severely affects the health and well-being of children. Children without a home experience a greater incidence of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and withdrawal. They are twice as likely to experience hunger, have learning

disabilities and have delayed development. These are issues which clearly impacts children's ability to attend school and achieve optimal learning success. In addition to this, homeless students also face numerous barriers to school enrollment and attendance, delays in transfers between schools, lack of school supplies, and lack of transportation (Duffield, 2003). Teachers are positioned in a role where they can have great impact in educating other teachers, parent and the community at large about the effects of homelessness on a student's overall capabilities both in and out of the classroom. Homelessness has a detrimental effect on student learning and teachers have the unique responsibility to support all students including one that come with barriers and struggles in learning. In order for teachers to do this they must be taught themselves specific strategies about supporting this vulnerable population of students.

The workshop will be carried out over a two day period and will be offered to twenty-eight experienced and newly qualified teachers at the elementary level, school liaisons, emergency shelter staff and administrators who have a vested interest in working with children who are struggling with homelessness. The workshop will focus on educators teaching within a school boundary area where an emergency shelter exists. This would allow for discussion outlining personal experiences by teachers who have worked with homeless children and will help the workshop progress through the various stages of learning in a very personal way. By including shelter staff in this workshop, we can expect discussion surrounding how the two systems can work together to best support students academic achievement.

The workshop will have two sessions of three hours each. The purpose of the workshop will be to educate participants and to raise awareness and promote sensitivity about homelessness within the school system whereby teachers will have increased confidence and productivity in supporting a student experiencing homelessness so that students experiencing homelessness will receive the supports needed to achieve optimal school success. The use of reflective practice will take place throughout the workshop in order to allow teachers to reflect on current practices and how they are working within their individual classrooms. The workshop will also provide hands on and cooperative activities that will motivate and

have the participants engage in active discussion. All materials will be provided at the workshop including paper and writing utensils to take notes. All materials presented will be given to each participant to take home for future reference, including local community resources. There will also be an opportunity for participants to sign up for an email list, upon completion of the workshop, where participants can network with each other and offer support to each other in regards to supporting a child who is experiencing homelessness, or any child who might be struggling. By improving the knowledge and skills of the teachers, the workshop aims to improve the quality of education that a child receives.

The first day of the workshop will focus on defining homelessness. Teachers will have opportunities to share ideas and work as a group to define homelessness and to outline homeless student needs. Discussion will include topics areas such as stereotypes of homelessness, what does homelessness look like, the signs of homelessness, and the stressors that a homeless child and their family deal with. Also included will be activities that will engage participants to really feel what is it like to be homeless and to empathize with children who struggle every day. Participants will also be given the opportunity to get to know each other through various hands on activities and open discussion opportunities. Participants will also be given a reflection journal in which they will be instructed to write down feelings about the day's activities and any learning's they feel are important.

The second day of the workshop will discuss the strategies and best practices that teachers can use within the classroom to support children experiencing homelessness. Discussion surrounding the issues that homelessness brings to children will be outlined and practical hands on strategies will be highlighted. During the second day of the workshop, there will also be many hands on activities that participants will be asked to complete with group members. The activities are designed to engage and highlight areas that are beneficial in working with a homeless child. The activities are also designed to increase empathy and gain awareness of the circumstance of homelessness. Day two will also offer ways in which the larger school community can get involved in supporting homeless children.

The workshop will conclude with an overview of learning, and an opportunity to discuss what participants have learned, to pose questions and to raise new concerns. All participants are offered the chance to complete an evaluation survey to provide further input on the workshop. Participants will also be asked to reflect one last time in their journals on a separate sheet of paper to be handed in to reflect on the workshop as a whole. The facilitator will collect these reflections and look for ways to enhance or change certain aspects of the workshop based on the reflections. These reflections will be mailed back to the participant with their certificate of completion no later than two weeks following the workshop.

The Project

The workshop will be presented over the course of two days. Each session is 3 hours long. A flyer (see Appendix A) will be sent via the email system one month prior to the workshop dates to both the Catholic and Public Board's of Education of Waterloo Region. Flyers will also be posted at both the catholic and Public School Board office located in the Region 2 months prior to the workshop. Participants can continue to register for the workshop until one week prior to the workshop date or until it is full. There is a maximum capacity of 28 participants.

A phone number and contact information will be highlighted on the flyer indicating how to register. Those interested in registering for the workshop will be asked to phone their registration in. When they have confirmed their registration by phone an email will be sent out to each participant confirming their registration. Email addresses will be collected during the initial registration call. For those that do not have email, a confirmation letter will be mailed to those specific participants without an email address. Upon entry into the first day of the workshop, participants will be asked to show the confirmation email indicating that they have registered for the workshop.

The workshop will take place at Mary's Place, a local homeless emergency shelter located in the Kitchener area. The room being used is a standard sized board room measuring 20 feet by 40 feet. The room will be equipped with 7 round tables with four chairs at each. There will also be a large table placed

in the back of the room for local community resources and children's literature on homelessness. There will be another table used in the back of the room for refreshments. The front of the room will have a large rectangular table for use by the facilitator. There will be a projector, microphone, chart paper and markers available as well for facilitator use. The room will be organized in a way that supports group discussion and interactive hands on activities. The workshop is free of charge and refreshments will be covered by Mary's Place including coffee, tea and muffins. Parking will be street parking.

Day One

PowerPoint slides 1-52 will be addressed throughout the first day of the workshop. For all PowerPoint slides, see Appendix D. When the participants arrive on the first day they will be to sign in on the attendance sheet (See Appendix H) offering their name, mailing address, email address and a check to indicate whether they would like to take part in a networking group. All of this will be recorded on the attendance sheet. Each participant will also be given a folder containing all workshop materials for the day. Workshop materials include all PowerPoint slides with space to take notes, detailed schedule of the day, reflection journal, book list and the speaker's contact information. There will not be assigned seating and participants will fill in the empty chairs as they arrive.

Once everyone is in attendance, the workshop will begin. The facilitator will welcome everyone and go over housekeeping issues such as location of bathrooms and phones. The facilitator will also go over all of the workshop materials. The facilitator will also let participants know that there are refreshments available but also a table outlining community resources and children's literature outlining themes of homelessness. Facilitator will encourage participants to view the resources at the back and indicate that all resources are outlined on the book list located in their folders for future use. Discussion outlining why we are here and the primary objectives will be offered and the facilitator will then move into the first activity.

The first activity will be an activity that will allow participants to get to know each other. The participants will be paired up in partners and be given 5 minutes to interview each other. After the five minutes is up they will be expected to switch and use another five minutes to get to know the other person. After the 10 minutes we will regroup as a larger group and each participant will get the opportunity to introduce their partner to the group. A sampling of questions will be offered in the PowerPoint display but participants are encouraged to be creative. This activity is used to introduce everyone but to also alleviate some of the anxiety or uncomfortable feeling that participants sometimes get when having to introduce themselves to the crowd.

After the introduction activity is complete, participants will move into their next activity that will allow the facilitator to gauge prior knowledge of the crowd on homelessness issue. The facilitator will ask the participants to offer up any words that come to their mind when she says the word “homelessness.” The facilitator will write all words on a piece of chart paper. This activity will last five minutes or until no more ideas are shared. This chart paper will be placed in the room in prominent view and we will revisit it at the end of the workshop. This activity allows the facilitator to see the background knowledge and experience of the group. It also allows the facilitator to recognize some of the stereotypes or misconceptions that may to be addressed during the workshop about homelessness.

The next stage of the workshop will focus on slides 7-25 (See Appendix D). These slides discuss the various aspects of homelessness such as the definition of homelessness, stereotypes, what it is like to be homeless and shelter living. These slides will give the participants some basic knowledge about homelessness and the increase of family homelessness in particular. The slides will be presented on the overhead projector and participants can easily follow along with the slides located in their workshop booklet. There is room for notes to be taken alongside the slides. Participants will be encouraged to jot down questions or concerns that they may be thinking or feeling during the presentation. The facilitator will elaborate on the slides presented and will not be reading line from line of the slides. The slides are

used as a visual tool to summarize main points. The facilitator will also pose questions and opportunity for reflective discussion based on the material presented throughout the workshop.

At this point the facilitator will move into Activity #3. The purpose of this activity is for participants to increase their understanding of the importance and meaning of having a home. This exercise attempts to accentuate the significant role and meaning that home plays in our lives. By simulating at a personal level what it would be like to lose various aspects of home, it is hoped that participants will develop a deeper appreciation for both having a home and what it means to be without a home, or home-less. The materials required for this activity are pens and paper. All materials will be available on each table.

The participants will be instructed to fold a sheet of paper into quarters. Each person will be asked to identify the four most important things that having a home means to them. For example, a place to "be yourself," a place of protection, a place to be with your loved ones, a place to rejuvenate, etc. Write one each of these four responses on the quarter sections of the paper. Next, the facilitator will announce that due to an unforeseen circumstance, one of these valued aspects of home is taken away. Participants will be asked to tear away one of the quarter sheets, whichever characteristic of home they could imagine parting with most readily. Soon thereafter participants will be asked to remove another quarter sheet of paper as another tragic event occurs resulting in another aspect of home (quarter sheet) being removed. The facilitator will repeat this scenario so that the participant is left holding only one of the quarter sheets. This sheet will contain the aspect of home that the individual values most.

Once the exercise is complete, participants will be asked to reflect on the exercise and to answer the following questions such as what it felt like to complete the exercise; how they made the choices that they did; what did it feel like to imagine losing an important aspect of home; what the last thing that the participants got to hold on to and how can we use this experience to help us support people struggling with homelessness.

Many people who become homeless do so gradually over time. They experience losses in a cumulative manner causing them to spiral downward into homelessness. These losses often include jobs, relationships, health, and finally housing. For others homelessness happens rather precipitously usually due to a major tragedy. And there are yet others we meet who have never really experienced having a home to lose. For them, home is unfamiliar territory, an alien idea. Yet the idea of home seems to be a universally powerful concept no matter what one's experience has been. The intent of this exercise is to explore in a small way the power of the idea of home.

At this point the participants will be given a ten minute break. Participants will be asked to look at the resources in the back of the room and to help themselves to refreshments. During the break, the facilitator will walk around the room and opening up availability to answer questions or comments.

Once returning from break, the facilitator will explore slide 29-39 (See Appendix D). These slides outlines the various aspects of homelessness including signs of homelessness, stressors that homeless children face, common problems associated with homelessness and social and emotional stresses of homelessness. Opportunity for exploration and discussion will be offered throughout.

Slide number 42 (See Appendix D) outlines Activity #4. This activity explores the connection between the structural aspects of a house and the symbolic meaning of those structures that "make a house a home." On a flipchart the facilitator will draw a simple two-dimensional image of a house with roof, walls, foundation, door, windows, and chimney. Participants can imagine the inner rooms of the house. (This image of a house is used for instructional purposes with recognition that it does not fit the reality of most housing available to low-income people.) The facilitator will then identify different structures of the house and ask what function they serve and what do they symbolize in regard to making a house into a home. For example: "What function does a roof have?" "What does a roof symbolize?" The facilitator will offer 3 examples of different structures in the house and functions and then ask the participants to work in their table groups to complete the exercise on their own. The groups will be expected to report back to

the larger group. Each group will have 10 minutes to draw their houses and come up with the components of “home” within the “house.” Once 10 minutes is up, everyone will come together and share their findings. While they are sharing, the facilitator will draw their own house and include the ideas from the participants to make a master copy. Some examples of responses could include participants identifying that a roof is used for shelter, protection from the elements, safety and security. Another example could be doors used for arriving and leaving, welcoming guests, privacy and security. PowerPoint slide 41 (See Appendix D) will incorporate other examples as well. All sheets will be posted around the room and kept up for the duration of the workshop. The activity will be closed by inviting participants to share any insights or comments that may have come up during the activity.

Slides numbered 42-52 will be explored next. The topics introduced during these slides are stress factors of homeless students, effects of living in crowded conditions, impact of frequently changing schools, impact of inadequate personal hygiene, and impact of poor health and nutrition. After outlining these topics participants will be asked to reflect in their reflection journal about the day’s events. In Activity #5, participants will be asked to write about the activities and/or learning that they participated in today. In order for real learning to occur, teachers must practice the process of reflection. A series of questions will be outlined on the PowerPoint slides on the overhead. This workshop will allow the participants to engage in reflective practice throughout the workshop. After the reflection, participants will be thanked for their time and reminded of the start time the following day.

Day Two

Participants will be welcomed back and offered the chance to discuss the learning’s from yesterday. Participants will not be expected to sign in on the second day unless they were absent on the first day. There will not be assigned seating. The facilitator will outline the detailed schedule of the day (See Appendix C). PowerPoint slides 54-112 (See Appendix D) will be covered during the final day of the workshop. The facilitator will remind participants to use their reflection journals throughout the

course of the day to identify learning's and any other questions. After following along with slides 54-58 (See Appendix D) the facilitator will move into Activity #6. This activity is titled "Musical Chairs" and mimics the favourite childhood game of many. The group will be separated into two groups of 14. While music is playing have participants walk around the chairs. Make sure that there is one less chair than number of participants. When the music stops, have the participants find a chair on which to sit. The student left standing is the 'homeless person.' Have that student choose a scenario and read it to the rest of the group. Repeat until all the scenarios have been given out. An extra chair will be placed aside with the scenarios on them in an envelope. The activity will continue until all scenarios have been read. The scenarios will also be shown on the larger screen for reference. After the activity is complete, a larger group discussion will take place identifying how we can help the children outlined in each scenario. Participants will be asked to write in their reflection journal about the activity and how it made them feel.

Slides 70-86 (See Appendix D) will then be introduced offering strategies that teachers can use in the classrooms to support a homeless student. Interspersed throughout the slides are also quotes taken from homeless students, parents and teachers supporting homeless children. Larger group discussion on the slides will take place throughout and questions will be answered if any. After these slides are complete, a 10 minute break will occur.

After the break, the facilitator will work through Slides 86-102 (See Appendix D). These slides continue with outlining practical classroom strategies to support a child experiencing homelessness. This section also includes strategies to support parents who are homeless as well. After the slides are explored, the last activity will take place. Activity #7 is called "The Power of Listening."

The last activity is included in this workshop to increase appreciation for the power of listening in our lives for both the one being listened to and the listener. The materials used will be a CD player and an instrumental music selection. Listening is integral to our lives. It provides us with important information and insights. It keeps us focused, balanced and connected. Listening is essential to how we relate with one

another, with ourselves, with nature, with the spiritual realm, and with other aspects of the world around us. Listening is an art and a technique, an attitude and an activity. It is a difficult skill to master for it requires much more than the use of one's ears and merely "hearing the words." Listening well requires the use of one's whole being. Like any other skill, it needs to be learned and practiced over and over.

The facilitator will move the participants into a period of silence. Even in silence, perhaps especially in silence, there is much to be "listened to" in relationship to oneself and the world beyond. The facilitator will encourage everyone to be as quiet as possible, to close their eyes if they wish, and to listen carefully to the "silence." After three minutes or so, the facilitator will open up a brief discussion about what participants "heard" externally and internally in the silence (e.g. outside noises, their own breathing, a cough, a feeling of calm or anxiety, distracting or creative thoughts, etc.) and how it affected them. As a next step, a piece of instrumental music (e.g. classical, jazz or some other style) will be played for about three minutes. The facilitator will elicit comments about how music can affect us. The main goal of the activity is to show the participants that just as we are impacted when we listen attentively to silence, music, or words, so are we affected when we listened mindfully to another in the context of a relationship. This requires a special commitment of time and attention, but the potential rewards are well worth the effort. It will also be noted that teachers should recognize that all children are unique and that listening to them is the greatest gift that you can give. Listening is perhaps the single most powerful and effective tool that outreach workers have at their disposal. It lies at the heart of this work. Listening is the key to building trust, gaining understanding, and creating the conditions for taking action. Without it, little can be done to effect change or accomplish anything of lasting value (<http://www.nhchc.org/Curriculum/module3/module3C/module3c.htm>). By listening to a child experiencing homelessness, you are validating their feelings and can gain some insight on what the struggles are and needs of the child. It is not until then can we really promote change.

Slides 103-109 (See Appendix D) will be shown. These slides show how administrators and the school community at large can support homeless children. By offering information about this we can then ensure that children who are walking into the school are fully supported by all staff. The hope is that teachers will take this information back to the schools and implement some ideas within the larger school setting to create an atmosphere of acceptance and belonging for all.

The final slides 110-112 (See Appendix D) offer the chance for participants to complete a final reflection to be handed in to the facilitator. This will allow the facilitator to solicit responses from the participants on how the workshop impacted them and any learning that they will take into their respected classrooms. The reflections will be mailed back to participants with their certificates of completion no later than two weeks after workshop completion. An evaluation survey will also be handed out where participants will use a check system to answer a series of questions pertaining to their satisfaction level. The facilitator will thank the workshop participants for attending. The speaker will also stay behind after the workshop is complete to answer questions for 30 minutes. The facilitator's contact information will be placed in the folder for future reference if need be.

Conclusion

All students have the right to an education. All students are capable of learning. All students deserve the right to be listened to without fear or judgment. All students, including those children who are homeless deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential. Teachers need to be knowledgeable and skillful in ensuring that they are offering a classroom that fosters these values. They must work at inclusion and including all students, including ones with significant barriers. Teachers need the opportunity to learn about the various issues that children face in today's classrooms so they are better able to respond to the needs. We cannot expect a teacher to successfully work with students who have

significant barriers if we have not prepared and taught them the skills to do so. Throughout this workshop teachers have the opportunity to engage in reflective practice and offer personal responses in efforts to better meet the needs of a homeless student. This workshop also offers the chance for teachers to network together and discuss some mainstream concerns in supporting a homeless child. It allows an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation with other teachers who may have different a varied experiences from your own. Teachers will be able to learn from each other and leave the workshop with strategies and lessons that they may incorporate into their own classrooms. This workshop not only discusses the issues of homelessness but also provide practical strategies in dealing with a homeless child in your classroom. Through hands on activities participants are able to engage and get the chance to feel what it might be like to be homeless to better be able to understand the children they will be teaching.

As more and more students present with varied needs, teachers must be flexible in meeting those needs. Teachers must look at professional development opportunities as a way to serve their students. By learning about the various issues and how to deal with them they are better prepared in meeting the needs of the classroom as a whole. They can learn that by making some simple changes, all students can benefit. Not only those students who are struggling, but others as well. By implementing certain accommodations all students will be involved in an accepting and caring classroom that welcomes difference and practices understanding.

The added confidence that teachers will gain from this workshop will help to support a homeless child in reaching their full academic and social potential. The final chapter of this project will address a review of the project, including professional review discussions and the need for further research in this ever-changing field.

*Lesson Plan One – No place like homelessness***I. Lesson Data:****Subject Area:** Social Studies**Grade Level:** Grade 2**Type of Unit:** An Integrated Thematic Unit**Unit Title:** No Place like Homelessness**Time:** 40 minutes**Lesson Topic:** Homelessness**II. Instructional Data:****A. Ontario Curriculum Expectation**

Arts-Visual

Overall Expectations:

- Produce two and three dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes and to specific audiences

Language Arts – Writing

Overall Expectations:

- Generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience

Literacy/Language

Overall Expectations:

- Responds to materials read aloud to them
- Uses prior knowledge to make connections to help them understand materials read by the teacher.
- Makes predictions regarding an unfamiliar text that is read by and with the teacher, using prior experience, knowledge of familiar text and general knowledge of the world around them.

New York Standards

1.1 Listening and reading to acquire information and understanding involves collecting data, facts and ideas; discovering relationships, concepts and generalizations; and using knowledge from oral, written and electronic sources.

1.2 Speaking and writing to acquire and transmit information requires asking probing and clarifying questions, interpreting information in one's own words, applying information from one context to another and presenting the information and interpretation clearly, concisely and comprehensively.

4A Students listen attentively and recognize when it is important for them to speak.

4B Students take turns speaking and responding to other's ideas in conversations on familiar topics.

4C Students recognize the kind of interaction appropriate for different circumstances, such as story hour, group discussions and one-on-one conversations.

5.3 Central to civics and citizenship is an understanding of the roles of the citizen within the American constitutional democracy and the scope of a citizen's rights and responsibilities.

B. Essential Question(s)/Overarching Objective:

- This lesson is intended to acquaint students with the difficulties experienced by people without homes and to elicit an empathetic response.
- This lesson also encourages awareness of the disadvantaged in our society.
- Invites students to commit themselves to community service projects.
- Prepares students to address important societal issues and problems, so that they can become caring, informed, proactive citizens.
- To identify ways in which students can help the homeless population.

C. Lesson Behavioral Objective:

- After a read aloud opportunity, 80% of the students in the class will be able to provide empathetic responses in how students can help the homeless population through larger classroom discussion and an independent worksheet. In addition they will be required to draw a scene that displays written information.

III. Materials

A. Materials/Resources

- "Uncle Willy and the Soup Kitchen" Picture Book by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan
- Copies of "I can help homeless people by..." worksheet for distribution
- Pencil
- Pencil Crayons or Crayons

IV. Procedure:

- A. Anticipatory Set/Motivation: (5 minutes)** The word "homeless" will be written on the board to engage student interest. The teacher will ask students what "homeless" means and write some of the responses on the board. This motivation will activate prior knowledge of homelessness and the teacher can gauge the level of comfort within the class regarding the issue. The teacher will keep the discussion to a minimum and tell the class that we will be learning more about this very important issue.
- B. Procedure/Development: (10 minutes)**
- After completing the "homeless" chart on the board, the teacher will then move the students to the reading area in the classroom, ensuring that all students have chosen an appropriate spot to sit on the carpet and are ready to learn.
 - The teacher will present the book "Uncle Willy and the Soup Kitchen" to the class.

- The class will have a discussion about the cover of the book and make predications based on the title and illustrations.
- The teacher will continue with the read aloud stopping at certain sections of the book to elicit responses about how the class is feeling and any information that they may have learned. Possible questions could include “Who ate at the Soup Kitchen” and “Where would these people eat if the Kitchen was not there?”
- After the book is complete, the teacher will ask about the class predications and see if they were correct.

C. Instructional Summary: (5 minutes)

- The teacher will ask the class, “Now that we have read the book, what do you think being homeless means?” The teacher will also ask for the definitions of soup kitchen and shelter. She will make an anchor chart to represent the findings. Sample of anchor chart is found at the end of the lesson.
- The teacher would then ask the class “What can we do to help people who are homeless?” She will also offer other scenarios to solicit responses to verify further understanding. See the teacher dialogue sheet to help you with questioning.
- I will then show the students the worksheet that they will be completing.
- I will then point to the question on the worksheet and read it aloud to the class.
- I will provide the class with two ideas of ways that we can help the homeless.
- I will then ask the class to complete the sheet and to write down 3 ways that they can help the homeless and let them know that they are not allowed to use the examples that I have given.
- After they write their 3 ideas, students can then take one idea and draw a picture of it in the space provided.

D. Application/Guided Practice: (15 Minutes)

- I will then allow for the students to work independently completing their worksheet.
- I will walk the room monitoring the noise level and the conversations of the students.
- I will offer suggestions if students are struggling.

Closure: (5 Minutes)

- I will invite a couple of volunteers up to the board to share their ideas and pictures.
- I will make an anchor chart using the classroom ideas on chart paper.
- I will hang the anchor chart in a prominent spot in the classroom for future reference.

E. Reinforcement/Independent Work:

- To reinforce what they have learned in class students will be asked to talk to their parents about homelessness. Students will be asked to come up with one more idea that they can help the homeless at home with their parents. They will be asked to write it down and bring to school the following day.

F. Assessment:

- Assessment will take place by reviewing and assessing the completed student worksheets. The teacher will collect the worksheets to see if students came up with ways to support the homeless. The teacher will look to see if the student’s picture that

they drew matches one of their concepts of helping. The teacher will also look at the writing for legibility and language assessment.

- The teacher will notice students that have participated in the class discussions and conversations. The students will be assessed on how they demonstrated balance between talking and listening during the larger classroom discussion. They will also be evaluated on how they demonstrated active participation and respect for others during the classroom discussion.

V. Academic Considerations/Other Considerations:

A. Diversity/ Accommodations/Special Needs:

- It is important to take the unique diversity of all students into consideration when teaching. All students will be treated equally and fairly during this lesson.
- Teachers need to pay special attention to students who may have experienced homelessness and may respond to the lesson with feelings of shame or embarrassment.
- Students with learning disabilities will have a teacher's assistant work with them individually.
- Adaptations for this lesson may include hand over hand drawing and scribing if the need arises. Other worksheets which include drawings already outlined showing helpful scenarios could be created in which the student could color in instead of having to draw the picture themselves.

B. Remedial/Enrichment Activities:

- The teacher should create a one to one learning ratio where either the student requiring extra assistance would receive more direct instruction in a smaller group.
- If the student required additional help in understanding the concept, the student can be given other homelessness themed literature to reinforce the concept.
- The student completes each activity under the teacher's direct guidance.
- Students who have a higher understanding of this instruction could apply their knowledge by helping students having difficulty in the classroom.
- Students who have mastered the activity and the concept of helping others less fortunate will be given the opportunity to go to the computer and create a collage about helping others. They can do this collage by gathering clip art to create pictures that show the helping concept. This will also allow them to enrich themselves artistically.

C. Technology:

Enrichment activities will provide use of the computer.

VI. Bibliography:

Di Salvo-Ryan, Dyanne (1997). *Uncle Willy and the Soup Kitchen*. Harper Trophy: New York, NY.

Mills, R. University of the State of New York (2007). *Curriculum resources*. Retrieved on October 26,

2008, from <http://usny.nysed.gov/teachers/curriculum.html>.

Ministry of Education (2007). *Curriculum and Policy*. Retrieved on October 26, 2008, from

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/curricul.html>.

Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators (2007). *Teacher Helpers*. Retrieved on November 8, 2008, from

<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/assess.html>

VII. Reflection Questions on Planning/Implementation:

- Was the choice of book appropriate for lesson?
- Did the topic of homelessness bring up any personal experiences from the students?
- How did students from other countries understand the topic? Did they connect to the material being presented?
- Could I have used a form of technology to get the idea across in a different way?
- Were the different types of learners all equally engaged in this lesson format?
- How can I improve this lesson?
- Did I allow for lots of time to discuss the topic or did I move onto the independent work too quickly?

No place like Homelessness Work Sheet



I can help homeless people by...

Anchor Chart to use with Lesson

What programs are out there to help? What can I do?

- Some programs that help families that are homeless are “soup kitchens”. This is where somebody can go to get a hot meal.
- Shelters are a warm place for people to stay so they do not have to sleep outside.

I can help by:

- Treating people who do not have homes the same way that I would like to be treated.
- Collect blankets, hats, gloves and jackets and bring them to a shelter.
- Talk with my friends and family and tell them what I have learned about homelessness.

Teacher Dialogue Questions – Lesson 1

- Think about a time when you are feeling sick and want to stay in bed and cuddle with your favorite stuffed animal. What if you did not have a bed or your favorite stuffed animal to cuddle with? How would you feel?
- How would you feel if you had to switch schools a lot during the year? How would it feel to have to make new friends and get a new teacher?
- Think about your favorite things at your house; rooms, pets or toys. Now think about how you would feel if your family became homeless and you did not have your favorite things around you anymore.
- Think about getting ready for school in the morning, how would it feel to get ready in the morning at a shelter where there are a lot of other kids getting ready for school too. Would it be hard?

*Lesson #1 Rubric**No place like Homelessness*

<i>Category</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Required Elements</i>	Three or more sentences were completed.	Three or more sentences were completed.	Two sentences were completed.	One sentence or less was completed.
<i>Picture Elements</i>	The picture is related to the sentence the student chose and shows exceptional detail.	The picture is related to the sentence the student chose and shows good detail.	The picture is related to the sentence the student chose and shows minimal detail.	Picture does not relate to the sentence the student chose and shows limited detail.
<i>Picture Neatness</i>	The picture is exceptionally attractive in terms of design, layout and neatness.	The picture is attractive in terms of design, layout and neatness.	The picture is acceptably attractive though it may be a bit messy.	The picture is distractingly messy or very poorly designed. It is not attractive.
<i>Grammar</i>	There are no grammatical or mechanical mistakes in the writing.	There are 1-2 grammatical or mechanical mistakes in the writing.	There are 3-4 grammatical or mechanical mistakes in the writing.	There are more than 4 grammatical or mechanical mistakes in the writing.

*Lesson Plan Two – What do you need?***I. Lesson Data:****Subject Area:** Social Studies**Grade Level:** Grade 2**Type of Unit:** An Integrated Thematic Unit**Unit Title:** No Place like Homelessness**Time:** 50 minutes**Lesson Topic:** Homelessness**II. Instructional Data:**D. Ontario Curriculum Expectation

Arts-Visual

Overall Expectations:

- Produce two and three dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes and to specific audiences

Language Arts – Writing

Overall Expectations:

- Generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience

Literacy/Language

Overall Expectations:

- Responds to materials read aloud to them
- Uses prior knowledge to make connections to help them understand materials read by the teacher.
- Makes predictions regarding an unfamiliar text that is read by and with the teacher, using prior experience, knowledge of familiar text and general knowledge of the world around them.

New York Standards

1.3 Listening and reading to acquire information and understanding involves collecting data, facts and ideas; discovering relationships, concepts and generalizations; and using knowledge from oral, written and electronic sources.

1.4 Speaking and writing to acquire and transmit information requires asking probing and clarifying questions, interpreting information in one's own words, applying information from one context to another and presenting the information and interpretation clearly, concisely and comprehensively.

4A Students listen attentively and recognize when it is important for them to speak.

4B Students take turns speaking and responding to other's ideas in conversations on familiar topics.

4C Students recognize the kind of interaction appropriate for different circumstances, such as story hour, group discussions and one-on-one conversations.

5.3 Central to civics and citizenship is an understanding of the roles of the citizen within the American constitutional democracy and the scope of a citizen's rights and responsibilities.

E. Essential Question(s)/Overarching Objective:

- This lesson is intended to acquaint students with the difficulties experienced by people without homes and to elicit an empathetic response.
- This lesson identifies the difference between wants and needs.
- This lesson identifies the basic needs of daily living.
- This lesson also encourages awareness of the disadvantaged in our society.
- Invites students to commit themselves to community service projects.
- Prepares students to address important societal issues and problems, so that they can become caring, informed, proactive citizens.
- To identify ways in which students can help the homeless population.

F. Lesson Behavioral Objective:

- Students in the class will evaluate the differences between needs and wants with 80% accuracy by completing the backpack activity.

III. Materials

B. Materials/Resources

- "Fly Away Home" Picture Book by Eve Bunting
- Mystery Box
- Paper airplane
- Sleeping Bag
- Blanket
- Bar of Soap
- Piece of Bread
- Copies of Backpack cutout
- Pencil
- Poster Board
- Glue
- Assorted magazines/newspapers

IV. Procedure:

- G. Anticipatory Set/Motivation: (5 minutes) Teacher will have a mystery box located at the front of the class. Inside the box there will be the following items: paper airplane, sleeping bag, bar of soap, blanket and piece of bread. Teacher will invite students to pick an item from the mystery box and make predictions on what the lesson might be about. Once all items are out

of the box, the class will make further predictions before arranging on the carpet for a read aloud. This motivation will activate prior knowledge of homelessness and the teacher can gauge the level of comfort within the class regarding the issue. The teacher will keep the discussion to a minimum and tell the class that we will be learning more about this very important issue.

H. Procedure/Development: (10 minutes)

- After completing the “mystery box” motivation technique, the teacher will then move the students to the reading area in the classroom, ensuring that all students have chosen an appropriate spot to sit on the carpet and are ready to learn.
- The teacher will present the book “Fly Away Home” to the class.
- The class will have a discussion about the cover of the book and make predictions based on the title and illustrations.
- The teacher will continue with the read aloud stopping at certain sections of the book to elicit responses about how the class is feeling and any information that they may have learned. Possible questions could include “Where do you think they will sleep?” “How do they get their food to eat every day?” “How could this happen?” “What do you think they would need to survive at the airport?”
- After the book is complete, the teacher will ask about the class predictions and see if they were correct.

I. Instructional Summary: (5 minutes)

- The teacher will ask the class, “Now that we have read the book, what do you think being homeless means?”
- The teacher would then ask the class “How hard would it be to give up something you really liked to do?”
- The teacher would then ask the class “How hard would it be to give up something you really needed, such as food or shelter?”
- The teacher will continue the discussion on how hard it is to give up – or not have – things that are easily taken for granted.
- I will then ask the students to return to their desks for the next activity.

J. Application/Guided Practice: (15 Minutes)

- Students will be asked to work on this activity independently.
- The teacher will make an announcement to all students. The announcement will read, “You and your family were just told that you have to vacate your home immediately. You have 15 minutes to leave your home. You can take only whatever you can fit into a backpack. What things will you take with you? What things will be hard to leave behind?”
- There will be a cutout of a backpack on each student desk. They will be asked to make a list of items that they will take with them and write them on the backpack cutout.
- They also need to write why they would take that particular item and be ready to explain to the class why they chose that item.
- I will walk the room monitoring the noise level and the conversations of the students.
- I will offer suggestions if students are struggling.

Closure: (15 Minutes)

- Begin the class discussion by asking students to tell the class what they would put in their backpacks.
- When an item is mentioned, ask other students to hold up their hands if the same or a similar item was on their list. Spend no more than 10 minutes on this part of the discussion.
- Ask students to tell the class what they found hard to leave behind and why. This part of the discussion, which should focus on how hard it is to give up—or not should last 5 minutes.
- I will then go over the basic needs in life and the differences between wants and needs.

K. Reinforcement/Independent Work:

- To reinforce what they have learned in class students will be asked to create a collage of items that they would need in their backpacks. They can use newspapers or magazines for this activity.

L. Assessment:

- Teacher will assess students during the larger grand discussion. The teacher will assess the student's ability to respect others and listen while discussion is taking place. Student will also be assessed on the balance between talking and listening. Teachers will also assess students who have actively participated in the discussion.
- Teacher will also look at student's ability to work independently and that they can understand the task without too much direction after instructions are given.
- The teacher will also be collecting the backpack cutout to see if students identified the needs versus wants. The teacher will look to see if the students collage shows the needs versus wants in this activity. The teacher will also look at the writing for legibility and language assessment.

V. Academic Considerations/Other Considerations:

D. Diversity/ Accommodations/Special Needs:

- It is important to take the unique diversity of all students into consideration when teaching. All students will be treated equally and fairly during this lesson.
- Teachers need to pay special attention to students who may have experienced homelessness and may respond to the lesson with feelings of shame or embarrassment.
- Students with learning disabilities will have a teacher's assistant work with them individually.
-

E. Remedial/Enrichment Activities:

- The teacher should create a one to one learning ratio where either the student requiring extra assistance would received more direct instruction in a smaller group.
- If the student required additional help in understanding the concept, the student can be given other homelessness themed literature to reinforce the concept.
- The student completes each activity under the teacher's direct guidance.

- Students who have a higher understanding of this instruction could apply their knowledge by helping students having difficulty in the classroom.
- Students who have mastered the activity and the concept of helping others less fortunate will be given the opportunity to come up with one service idea that they can implement within the school to support the homeless population. They can work on a plan to implement.

F. Technology:

Technology was not used in this lesson.

VI. Bibliography:

Bunting, Eve (1991). *Fly Away Home*. Clarion Books: New York, NY.

Mills, R. University of the State of New York (2007). *Curriculum resources*. Retrieved on October 26, 2008, from <http://usny.nysed.gov/teachers/curriculum.html>.

Ministry of Education (2007). *Curriculum and Policy*. Retrieved on October 26, 2008, from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/curricul.html>.

Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, (2003). *Classroom Curriculum*. Retrieved on October 26, 2008, from <http://www.mnhomelesscoalition.org/resources/curriculum/>

Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators (2007). *Teacher Helpers*. Retrieved on November 8, 2008, from <http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/assess.html>

VII. Reflection Questions on Planning/Implementation:

- Was I able to articulate the difference between wants versus needs?
- Did I incorporate methods to ensure that all learning styles are represented?
- What went well in this lesson?
- What can be improved?
- Was I able to clearly give instructions for the independent work?
- Did I give positive immediate feedback while monitoring the room to students?
- How can I add technology to this lesson?

BACKPACK CUTOUT ACTIVITY



Lesson #2 Rubric

What do you need?

<i>Category</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Contribution of Knowledge</i>	Consistently and actively contributes knowledge, opinions, and skills without prompting or reminding.	Contributes knowledge, opinions, and skills without prompting or reminding.	Contributes information to the group with occasional prompting or reminding.	Contributes information to the group only when prompted.
<i>Consideration of Others</i>	Shows sensitivity to the feelings and learning needs of others; values the knowledge, opinion, and skills of all group members and encourages their contribution.	Shows and expresses sensitivity to the feelings of others; encourages the participation of others.	Shows sensitivity to the feelings of others.	Needs occasional reminders to be sensitive to the feelings of others.
<i>Working Independently</i>	Always does the assigned work without having to be reminded.	Usually does the assigned work and rarely needs reminding.	Often needs to be reminding to do the assigned work.	Always or often relies on help from others to do the assigned work.
<i>Grammar</i>	There are no grammatical or mechanical mistakes in the writing.	There are 1-2 grammatical or mechanical mistakes in the writing.	There are 3-4 grammatical or mechanical mistakes in the writing.	There are more than 4 grammatical or mechanical mistakes in the writing.

*Lesson Plan Three – Shelter in our Car***I. Lesson Data:****Subject Area:** Social Studies**Grade Level:** Grade 2**Type of Unit:** An Integrated Thematic Unit**Unit Title:** No Place like Homelessness**Time:** 70 minutes**Lesson Topic:** Homelessness**II. Instructional Data:**G. Ontario Curriculum Expectation

Arts-Visual

Overall Expectations:

- Produce two and three dimensional works of art that communicate ideas (thoughts, feelings, experiences) for specific purposes and to specific audiences

Language Arts – Writing

Overall Expectations:

- Generate, gather and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience

Literacy/Language

Overall Expectations:

- Responds to materials read aloud to them
- Uses prior knowledge to make connections to help them understand materials read by the teacher.
- Makes predictions regarding an unfamiliar text that is read by and with the teacher, using prior experience, knowledge of familiar text and general knowledge of the world around them.

New York Standards

1.5 Listening and reading to acquire information and understanding involves collecting data, facts and ideas; discovering relationships, concepts and generalizations; and using knowledge from oral, written and electronic sources.

1.6 Speaking and writing to acquire and transmit information requires asking probing and clarifying questions, interpreting information in one's own words, applying information from one context to another and presenting the information and interpretation clearly, concisely and comprehensively.

4A Students listen attentively and recognize when it is important for them to speak.

4B Students take turns speaking and responding to other's ideas in conversations on familiar topics.

4C Students recognize the kind of interaction appropriate for different circumstances, such as story hour, group discussions and one-on-one conversations.

5.3 Central to civics and citizenship is an understanding of the roles of the citizen within the American constitutional democracy and the scope of a citizen's rights and responsibilities.

H. Essential Question(s)/Overarching Objective:

- This lesson is intended to acquaint students with the difficulties experienced by people without homes and to elicit an empathetic response.
- This lesson identifies the different shelters in our community.
- This lesson identifies the basic needs of daily living.
- This lesson also encourages awareness of the disadvantaged in our society.
- Prepares students to address important societal issues and problems, so that they can become caring, informed, proactive citizens.
- To identify ways in which students can help the homeless population.

I. Lesson Behavioral Objective:

- By completing an art piece, students will be able to identify different shelters and the components of a shelter with 85% accuracy.

III. Materials

C. Materials/Resources

- "Shelter in our Car" Picture Book by Monica Gunning
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Poster Board
- Pencil crayons
- pencil

IV. Procedure:

Anticipatory Set/Motivation: (10 minutes)

- Create a KWL chart about homelessness. (What do you know about homelessness? What do you want to know? What have you learned?) Ask class to share what they know about homelessness. Record responses in the first column.
- Read out loud the dictionary definition of homeless: "Without a home of any kind. People without a home of any kind."
- Ask students to discuss this definition with a partner. What does the word homelessness make students think or feel? What questions do they have about people without homes? Encourage them to base their questions on what they already know –from their lives or from books.

- Have pairs share their responses with the whole class and record their questions under the second column of the KWL chart. Possible questions include: Who is homeless? Why are people homeless? What does it feel like to be homeless? What happens to homeless children?

A. Procedure/Development: (10 minutes)

- Introduce the book to students in a large group. Focus this first reading on reading comprehension strategies that will support students in understanding and taking pleasure in the story. Ask students to practice *predicting* the book’s plot and *inferring* what they need to know to make sense of the story.
- Read the title and ask the group if they know what the word “shelter” means. Through discussion, come to a shared understanding of the meaning of “shelter” in this context – a safe place that protects people from the outside world.
- Ask the group to brainstorm reasons why people need shelter, such as bad weather, physical safety, privacy, or protection from other people.
- Read the book aloud to students, modeling fluent reading and reading with expression. Be sure to give students opportunities to examine the illustrations that support the text. Pause after each designated section to check for comprehension, asking questions which prompt students to make predictions and inferences: *Why are Zettie and Mama in the United States? Why did they leave Jamaica? Why does Zettie want Mama to drop her off at the corner instead of in front of the school? What do you think? Why can’t Zettie’s mother “do some other kind of work?” What do you know about Benjie? How do you know? What will happen next? What will Zettie do? What would you do? Why does Mama say, “How would you like to sleep in a bed all summer instead of in our car?”*
- Once you have finished reading the story, ask students to predict what will happen next. Ask them to explain how they used what they know about Zettie and Mama to make their predictions.

B. Instructional Summary: (5 minutes)

- Remind the class that for Zettie and Mama, their shelter is a car, but that most people have other types of shelters. Ask students to find the word for the shelter their family lives in. Take examples.
- Ask students to brainstorm all the different types of shelters that people might live in. Record these words in a list. If you have posted photographs of different types of shelters in your classroom, have students use them for additional ideas.
- Tell the class that shelter is just one of the things that human beings need to survive. Ask students to brainstorm other categories of things people need, such as food, clothing, or warmth

C. Application/Guided Practice: (30 Minutes)

- Ask students to close their eyes and imagine what Zettie’s perfect home would look like. Remind them of all the attributes of a good shelter: it protects people from the elements; it is

comfortable; it has what people need to survive. Walk them through their imaginary shelter, having them think about what they see, hear, smell, and touch in this home.

- Next, tell students that they have the opportunity to create this ideal shelter for Zettie through art. Tell them to draw what they saw, heard, smelt, and touched in their imaginations. Encourage them to think about how they could symbolize something like “warmth” in their pictures.

D. Closure: (15 Minutes)

- Encourage students to share their artwork with the class, explaining what they’ve chosen to draw. As the share, remind students that their homes are located in communities. Ask the group to brainstorm what they would find in their perfect community and make a list of students’ ideas.

E. Reinforcement/Independent Work:

- Dedicate a wall of your classroom to this art project and post students’ work there on top of butcher paper, with considerable space in between each piece of work. The next day, read students the list they created describing the perfect community. Ask the class to draw in the community they described, connecting each individual shelter to the greater whole.

F. Assessment:

- Student art work will be evaluated to identify if the components of a shelter are outlined within their art piece. The teacher will look to see if the drawing shows a clear picture of a shelter and all of its components.
- Teacher will also assess whether student can work independently and is able to follow oral instructions.
- Participation in larger group discussion will also be assessed. Student will be assessed on actively engaging in the discussion and their ability to follow the classroom discussion rules.

V. Academic Considerations/Other Considerations:

G. Diversity/ Accommodations/Special Needs:

- It is important to take the unique diversity of all students into consideration when teaching. All students will be treated equally and fairly during this lesson.
- Teachers need to pay special attention to students who may have experienced homelessness and may respond to the lesson with feelings of shame or embarrassment.
- Students with learning disabilities will have a teacher’s assistant work with them individually.

H. Remedial/Enrichment Activities:

- The teacher should create a one to one learning ratio where either the student requiring extra assistance would received more direct instruction in a smaller group.
- If the student required additional help in understanding the concept, the student can be given other homelessness themed literature to reinforce the concept.
- The student completes each activity under the teacher’s direct guidance.

- Students who have a higher understanding of this instruction could apply their knowledge by helping students having difficulty in the classroom.
- Students who have mastered the activity can create self-portraits or portraits of their families in the style of the illustrations for *A Shelter in Our Car*. Encourage them to use unusual color combinations and exaggerated facial expressions to express their emotions as Elaine Pedlar does. Use chalk pastels and construction paper.

I. Technology:

Technology was not used in this lesson.

VI. Bibliography:

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VII. Reflection Questions on Planning/Implementation:

- Did I communicate effectively and identify the components of shelter?
- Did the activity represent the learning well or should I have used another task?
- Was the picture book a good choice and were the students engaged?
- Was I giving the students feedback on a regular basis throughout the independent work?
- How can I enrich this lesson?
- How can I add technology to this lesson?
- Did I allow enough time for the art component of the lesson?

*Lesson #3 Rubric**Shelter in our Car*

<i>Category</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Elements of Art Piece</i>	Careful planning was evident, a clear idea was chosen and space was used effectively. Exceptional detail was added to the art piece.	Careful planning was evident, a clear idea was chosen and space was used effectively. A good amount detail was added to the art piece.	Planning was not evident and the art piece did not show a clear idea. Space was used somewhat effectively. Minimal detail was added.	Project was completed but planning was not evident and the art piece did not have a clear idea. Space was not used effectively and Limited detail was added.
<i>Creativity and Originality</i>	Many ideas were tried and connections to previous knowledge were made. Demonstrated outstanding problem solving skills.	Few ideas were tried, made decisions and demonstrated logical problem solving skills.	One idea was presented and carried out adequately, but it lacked originality. Not much original thought was used.	Assignment was completed but no evidence of originality was shown.
<i>Effort and Perseverance</i>	The project was continued until it was complete. Effort was given that was far beyond what was required. Pride is evident.	Project was continued until it was complete. Effort was given and pride is evident.	Project was finished. Little effort was given and work was careless.	Project was completed with minimal effort.
<i>Attitude/Cooperation</i>	Sensitive to the feelings of others, followed all the classroom rules and willingly participated in class discussions.	Sensitive to the feelings of others, followed most the classroom rules and willingly participated in class discussions.	Somewhat sensitive to the feelings of others, followed some of the classroom rules and needed prompting to participate in class discussions.	Did not show much sensitivity to the feelings of others, did not follow the classroom rules and needed prompting to participate in class discussions.

Chapter Five: The Conclusion

Introduction

Imagine what it would be like to play “hide and seek” and be left unfound. You get lost and can’t find your way home. You are left to wander, to make your own way, in a strange and hostile world with no one caring. This bleak scenario is lived by many children and youth in America today. They are homeless children, who in America *are* hidden. They are “playing” usually involuntarily, with unclear rules and often without seekers. They want very much to be sought and found, to be cared for, to be valued (Shane, 2007).

As previously discussed in other chapters, homelessness does not discriminate based on race, gender or age. It can affect anyone, including children. Homeless children can learn and should be granted every opportunity to learn in environments that welcome and accommodate them. This research paper serves to inform teachers and all those involved in the education of homeless children strategies and concrete tools that they can use to support a child who is experiencing homelessness.

Throughout this paper, topics such as the prevalence and causes of homelessness, what homelessness looks like, strategies and tools that teachers can use in the classroom to support homeless children and how administrators and others can get involved in the support process of homeless children have been discussed. The learning’s from the information gathered allows teachers the ability to increase their confidence levels in supporting homeless children by participating in professional development and by engaging in the process of reflective practice. Action research and reflective practice combined is the pathway for a more effective classroom environment that fosters the potential of all students so they can come out of hiding and reach their full learning potential.

During the course of this chapter, connections to the action research process will be made by revisiting the workshop development. Also discussed will be the need for additional research and the

professional review process. To conclude the project, there will be a reflective summary on the entire project experience.

Review of Project

A thorough review of current research on homeless children was essential in ensuring that a credible workshop focusing on educating teachers about homelessness could be delivered. The research concluded that by raising awareness and promoting sensitivity about homelessness, teachers would be more confident in their ability to support a student experiencing homelessness to achieve optimal school success. Strategies were also outlined that offered teachers distinct options in terms of supporting students. By giving teachers the opportunity to take place in a workshop that offers practical strategies to support homeless students provides an opportunity for all to be effected by the teachings. Efforts must also be put in place to make sure that the workshop is relevant and updated as years pass by.

Throughout this research paper I applied the four characteristics of action research. The first step in doing this was to ethically commit to the project. As a future teacher I want to meet the needs of all students in my classroom and it is my responsibility to commit to learn about the exceptionalities that each student has and incorporate strategies to support them in their journey of learning. Each chapter of this research paper incorporated the cycle of reflective practice. There was a continuous cycle of action, observation and reflection during each stage of the research paper. The last component of action research was completed by sharing the information with others. I was able to share my information with two professionals in the field of education. I solicited feedback from my colleagues about the research gathered.

The major component of my research project was the decision to share my findings in the form of a workshop. This workshop was geared toward teachers and takes place over the course of two days. The workshop was also designed to solicit feedback from the participant's on the material presented thus continuing the cycle of reflective practice. The workshops main goal was to equip teachers with strategies

and tools needed to create a supportive and welcoming classroom for children experiencing homelessness. During the workshop teachers are asked to participate in many hands-on activities that allow teachers a first-hand experience in feeling what it could be like to experience homelessness themselves. Although these activities are simulated, the experience can be quite real thus increasing awareness and sensitivity for the homeless population. This workshop was developed to raise awareness and promote sensitivity about homelessness, in efforts that teachers would be more confident in their ability to support a student experiencing homelessness to achieve optimal school success. The intent of the workshop is for teachers to gain knowledge and skills that would make classrooms more effective not only for students experiencing homelessness but for all students.

Throughout the three day workshop, teachers will explore the answers to the sub questions of: How prevalent is homelessness? How do teachers know who is homeless? What strategies do experienced and newly qualified teachers need to support a student experiencing homelessness? And lastly, how can teachers involve administration, parents, peers, students and the community at large in promoting sensitivity about homelessness in our schools? The workshop is an intensive workshop that provides newly trained and experienced teachers information and tools to incorporate into their own classrooms thus making them more inclusive for students experiencing homelessness.

Working with the homeless population for the last ten years has provided me with a unique opportunity to see the depths of strength and survival that many homeless children possess. This was the underlying reason why I chose this as my research topic. I believe in creating a classroom where all students are welcome and supported. I believe in a classroom where no matter what you bring in through the classroom doors you will be provided with the opportunity to learn. I have seen homeless children suffer in the school system and feel excluded because of their current living situation. By gathering information on how best to support homeless children in the classroom and presenting this information to teachers who might be directly involved with homeless children, I believe that we are supporting these

children to reach potential that they may have otherwise not been able to achieve. All children have the right to an education, including those that are suffering from the plight of homelessness. While this research project identifies many areas of improvement and discusses practical strategies to support homeless children, further research is required.

Need for Additional Research

The need for additional research in the field of homelessness is apparent. The homeless population is a difficult population to track as homeless families tend to be quite transient. While this research focused on the prevalence of homelessness and strategies used to support homeless students, more research must be done to outline the underlying systemic causes of homelessness such as the lack of affordable housing and the high rental housing costs that do not match current wage structures. Research on the larger systemic issues would offer information on how some families and adults become homeless. Research on these issues would also provide an understanding of how difficult it can be for a family to live within this society and survive on a minimal income.

Another needed area of research is that of tracking procedures for the homeless. Tracking changes over time is one way to measure if interventions have made a difference. The homeless population can be a difficult population to track. When assessing children who are homeless and the effects of specific strategies on these children it can be hard to assess the full value of progress. Tracking families who are homeless over time would allow for measurable results on the success or failure of certain interventions and this would be a valuable tool in the research process. If teachers were able to track homeless children as they move from school to school they would be able to see a continuum or lack of support. Identification of specific areas of need based on observations over time could happen. The hope is that as prevention efforts increase over time, there would be a decrease in the incidence of homelessness. By researching ways to track homeless families a before and after picture of a homeless family can be

obtained, illustrating that a family's situation has improved, remained the same or declined over time. Such research would only help to reassess intervention strategies and make changes as necessary.

Another area that needs further research would be how to address evaluation techniques of homelessness strategies implemented. By researching the best ways to evaluate the effectiveness of services we can then look at ways to improve them. While certain items can measure quantifiable results, it is difficult to measure evidence of increased self-esteem or feelings of safety. These measures are not easily quantifiable. Measuring increased levels of self-esteem and feelings of security can be a difficult task but measuring these items is important to track. Information that can be gathered about the self-esteem levels of a homeless child can help to further implement services and strategies that could benefit homeless students in the long run.

Further research on the differences of homeless children versus children living in poverty but housed is imperative. Research that compares the differences between these two groups could show the true impact of not having a home versus being poor but housed. Gathering this type of data can prove beneficial to developing specific strategies in dealing with the two researched groups of students. Many strategies might overlap, but identifying the different needs of each control group is can be gathered. Homeless students often get linked up with the students who are lower-income. While homeless students are living in poverty their needs may be different due to the fact that they do not have a home to call their own. Studies looking at these two groups could discover valuable information that could lead teachers and administrators to better serve these very distinct populations of students.

Lastly, I think it is very important to focus some research effort on gathering stories and tracking results of homeless children who have been through the school system and have succeeded. By evaluating their success, ways can be learned in which to support the younger generation of students who are struggling with homelessness. Gathering a collection of success stories would allow the opportunity to reflect on strategies that were implemented in that person's life and possible intervention that worked.

Sharing these stories with students who are currently experiencing homelessness could also instill hope and a sense of pride in looking toward a future that is successful and stable. It could show students that life is not already pre-determined for them and that they too can make significant changes in their life along the way to increase their individual chances of reaching their full potential. This sort of research could prove to be an extremely valuable tool in servicing the future generations.

Teachers should always be looking to improve their practice. They can do this by participating in action research. Teachers can be their own researchers and evaluate their own feelings and experiences on a daily basis in supporting students who are homeless. This personal information that they gather can be of assistance to future planning in the field. By teaching the practical skills and strategies to work with homeless children, teachers can be supported to become more confident in their own ability to offer a classroom that is welcoming and stable. Teachers will be more comfortable in their everyday activities within their own classroom and this will carry forward to the children. The increased confidence in teachers will benefit everyone in the classroom and improve the academic and social learning potential for success of all students, including those who are homeless.

Professional Review

The professional review process was a very valuable experience for me. I was able to share my work with two professionals in the field of education and receive constructive criticism regarding the work. Each reviewer was asked to identify areas of strength as well as suggestions for improvement. Professional Educators recorded their opinions on the Capstone Professional Review Forms (see Appendix I and J). The experience of having someone else reflect on your work is a way to engage in the cycle of reflective practice. This review allowed me to really look at all of my research and see how it can affect others. I welcomed this step of the action research process and was encouraged by the comments received.

My first professional review was completed by Martina Altomare, of the Waterloo Region Catholic School Board. She is a Grade 1/2 teacher who has been teaching for over 8 years. I was fortunate enough to complete one of my student teaching placements with her and learned valuable skills from her modeling in the classroom. After meeting with her and explaining my project, she asked if I was ready to implement this across the Board as she felt the information was too valuable to not be used. She was ready to share my research with others and see how it can be implemented as part of a professional development day within her own school and possibly a community of schools in the future. This was encouraging to me and made me realize that some teachers would find this information valuable and want to learn more. Ms. Altomare was extremely thorough with her review and provided excellent feedback regarding enhancement of my project.

The areas of strength that Ms. Altomare provided discussed the research itself and the thorough job that I had undertaken regarding the background and the basic information on homelessness. She was pleased with this background information on how and why people can become homeless and felt that the activities presented throughout the workshop reflected this as well. We took the time to discuss each workshop activity and she was inspired to try to bring it down to the level of the student and see if she could use any of the activities within her own classroom. She explained that offering the hands on activities really allows teachers to be placed in a reflective mode within the workshop thus allowing them to really think with their hearts as well as their minds. She felt that the workshop flowed at a good pace and that there was a lot of opportunity to reflect on the information presented in the workshop throughout the day.

Ms. Altomare was also pleased with the strategy component and that there were so many easy to implement strategies that could be easily incorporated within classrooms. The strategies that were presented were easy to implement and did not take much of effort on behalf of the teacher. This is a key element when presenting to teachers. Teachers are strapped for time each and every day and it is often

difficult to get everything in throughout the day that was intended. By ensuring that the strategies were simple and easy to implement more teachers will take notice and discover that it is not that difficult to make small changes to support children who homeless. Overall, Ms. Altomare was very pleased at the work that went into a project of this magnitude and is excited to share the findings with others.

We also discussed areas of improvement regarding the research project. One of the main areas of criticism for project was that she was hoping more of my personal experiences in working with the homeless population would come up throughout the writing. The research was all warranted and cited but she wanted to get a feel of what it is like to work with individuals who are homeless on a personal level and she felt that with my past experiences with homeless families that I would be able to provide that level of awareness. She wanted me to add more personal thoughts and experiences to the paper in an effort to really show the reader that I am a skilled worker in dealing with the homeless population and that my opinion counts. She felt that it was a good review of literature on the subject area but was hoping for a personal narrative on certain experiences and struggles that I have faced when working with homeless families and the school system. In addition to this, Ms. Altomare felt that the workshop was very time constricted and could have been spread out even further, allowing for more time to reflect and more time spent on the hands on activities. Teachers who attend workshops look at the timetable with a close eye and if the table is too restricted, it can feel overwhelming. Ms. Altomare stated that there have been many workshops where the facilitator tries to overload with information and participants start to tune out. She does not feel that this will happen in this workshop because there are good breaks for activities but she cautioned me that when presenting it she feels that we might go over the time allocated for different sections and that it will take much longer to go over the information than previously allocated. I feel that Ms. Altomare gave me some very valid and excellent suggestions to improve the research project.

My second reviewer is Nancy Ehiorobo. Mrs. Ehiorobo is a second grade teacher with the Waterloo Region Catholic School Board. She has been teaching for 7 years and was very excited to see

the research that I had completed. Mrs. Ehiorobo is very active in her local community church and she has seen personal experiences of homelessness within her own church community. She has always believed in helping others in need and was excited to see what changes she could make to enhance her classroom to support all students, including those who are homeless. Ms. Ehiorobo commented on my PowerPoint presentation and was quick to discuss how the material was presented and laid out. She was engaged as she was reading slide by slide and felt that the organization of material was well done. She also really enjoyed the activities presented throughout the workshop and felt that these activities were easy to adapt into other community organizations to promote a feeling of sensitivity about the homeless. She was also encouraged at the level of research that went into this project and was excited by the depth of knowledge that was brought forward. Mrs. Ehiorobo also commented on my lesson plans and liked how they reached out to the primary grades. She felt that oftentimes we leave this sort of “social learning” to the older grades and that we should be teaching about this at a younger level. She was encouraged by the lessons and felt that they were well developed and easy to implement.

Suggestions from Mrs. Ehiorobo also included sharing some more of my own thoughts and feelings towards the project. While the review of literature was comprehensive, she would have liked to see more of the personal story attachment that I have discovered over the years of working with the homeless population. She also felt that the presentation of strategies within the workshop was a little overdeveloped and felt that I was trying to get too much information out there all at once. She indicated that I could have put up my main ideas and followed up with a booklet of strategies that teachers could take home and share with others. When teachers have to sit through the entire day and listen to strategies without have the time to reflect they might tune out. By going over a few of the main strategies in working with the homeless population and providing other material to take home would allow for teachers to focus on the main strategies and not feel overwhelmed by the material being presented.

I was very pleased with the professional review process and felt that my opinions mattered and were encouraged. Sometimes when I was working with certified teachers throughout my teaching placements, I felt that some of my ideas did not have a voice because I was not a certified teacher. After completing this process I felt that my opinion mattered and felt encouraged in sharing more. This review process also allowed me to showcase the work that I have been doing. I felt proud sharing this research with others and encouraged when they were excited and eager to implement strategies and concepts from my research into their own classrooms. This made me feel very proud and validated for the work that I have done. I appreciated the time and effort that both of the reviewers took to enhance my research project.

Conclusion

Homelessness is a very serious issue with serious educational implications for children. The face of homelessness has changed and family homelessness has increased drastically over the last decade. This is a problem that is not going away. This is a problem that needs to be addressed. This is a problem that must be given a voice so that change can occur. Homeless children are vulnerable, expected to fail in school and often out-casted by their peers and adults that surround them. They are not given the chance to reach their full potential and this is the reason why it is so important for teachers to look at their own classrooms and see what they can do to support homeless children. It is an educator's responsibility to support children in their quest for learning. It is an educator's responsibility to provide opportunities for all students to learn and it is their responsibility to provide a classroom where safety and security are upheld. All students include those students who are homeless. This is a huge undertaking and responsibility but with increased confidence in knowledge and skills, teachers can ensure that it happens.

Homeless children are the same as all children, except they do not have a place to call home. They have the same wants, needs and dreams but their worries are drastically different than that of their housed peers. Children experiencing homelessness wonder if they will ever have a home, if they will

have enough food to eat, and what will happen to their parents. These are worries that not all children face. Although the life of a homeless child can be very overwhelming, there is hope for the future. There is information that we can gather that will better help us meet the needs of the homeless student. This research project aimed to do just that; support teachers so they can better support children experiencing homelessness. By offering a two day workshop, teachers are encouraged to participate in activities that increase the understanding of what it might be like to experience homelessness. Teachers are also given valuable information that can be carried out in their classes. This would hopefully encourage all children to feel compassion and warmth toward each other thus creating a classroom of acceptance.

There are reasons why families become homeless. Children do not make decisions to become homeless; they are victims of their circumstances. Homelessness can touch all no matter gender, ethnicity, or age. Homelessness does not discriminate. Many of the reasons why families are homeless are social systemic issues that are difficult to overcome. Issues such as high rental costs and not enough affordable housing are just a couple of issues that force a family into homelessness. Other issues such as loss of job, health concerns and domestic violence are just a few others that push families closer to not having a place to call home.

The effects of living a life of homelessness on children are very real. Homeless children suffer greatly because of their current living situation. They are forced to live in sometimes crowded living conditions, have poor health and nutrition, forced to switch schools multiple times, to live a life of transience, lack basic resources, have no place to play or do homework and are often ostracized because of their appearance and lack of personal hygiene. While these are all factors that many homeless children face on a daily basis there is still room for hope. There is still opportunity for these children. Children who live in uncertain and unstable environments can be supported and move forward to succeed both socially and academically. Teachers play a very strong role in helping homeless children along their personal journey of struggle to reach a place that they can overcome and move forward. They have a

distinct role in supporting a child in increasing their sense of self-esteem and offering an environment of stability that they crave. By increasing knowledge and implementing strategies to support homeless children, we are helping. We are helping the children themselves but we are also being helped personally. By increasing our knowledge base we are increasing our confidence level in working with a child who is homeless. We do not have to shy away from these children, we can be confident in our skills to support them and to look for ways to have the most impact in the short time that they may be in our classrooms.

The two day workshop helps us to achieve this. It helps teachers learn what they can do personally but it also makes connections on how teachers and other community members can join the fight to help homeless children. It is set up to offer many opportunities to reflect on the information being presented and to share experiences with others. After reading this paper and reviewing the workshop materials, teachers will have the building blocks to set the foundation for a classroom that cares about all students who struggle. Teacher confidence and productivity levels will increase and teachers will share out their learning in efforts to help others. The underlying theme in the workshop is to listen and the hope is that teachers will take this message to heart. Ideally, the information presented in this project will show teachers that by joining with students who are homeless and involving them in the learning process as partners, much more learning will occur.

In order for us to truly understand what it is like to live in the life of a homeless student we must listen. We must listen to witnesses who speak from their own day to day experiences. We must listen to the boys and girls who tell us what they go through, list their difficulties and worries, and give expression to their hopes, their wishes, their anticipations or expectations. We must place the student in the role of a teacher and learn from them. In doing so, we will gain a sound understanding and knowledge of the child's present life, their past disappointments and their dreams for the future.

Homelessness is a nightmare that leaves permanent scars. It devastates children's education, health and self-esteem. It strains family relationships. It brands children with stigma in the eyes of their

peers. Yet these children seem somehow to endure it and still retain their hopes and dreams for the future, and they should. They can succeed and we must teach them that they have the power and ability to do so. We must show them that they are worth something and that their living environment does not carry a death sentence. We must show them that they have potential and the ability to achieve whatever their dreams may be. It is our responsibility but more importantly than that, it has to be our privilege as teachers to do so.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Workshop Flyer

Appendix B - Detailed Schedule of Day One

Appendix C – Detailed Schedule of Day Two

Appendix D – Workshop Slides

Appendix E – Reflection Journal Cover Page

Appendix F – Evaluation Survey

Appendix G – Workshop Certificate of Completion

Appendix H – Attendance Sign in sheet

Appendix I – Professional Review #1

Appendix J – Professional Review #2

Appendix A – Workshop Flyer

**What are the myths and realities about homelessness?
Why are children homeless?
How can I help?**



TEACHERS...DON'T MISS THIS EXCELLENT WORKSHOP!

January 10 & 11, 2009

9am to 12 noon on both days

Mary's Place, 84 Frederick Street

When we think of the homeless, we often think of a man holding up a “will work for food” sign or a woman pushing a cart in an alleyway. However, family homelessness is the fastest growing population of homelessness in Canada and the US. Children and youth are moving from place to place while trying to attend school or establish friendships. This workshop will address the multiple issues facing homeless children. And provide practical strategies in supporting homeless children in the classroom.

To register contact Heather Papp at (519) 222-1559.

This is a free workshop.

Snacks and beverages provided.

Presenter: **Heather Papp**, Masters of Science in Education student, Medaille College
Heather has also been working in the field of homelessness for over 10 years servicing families and children who are homeless

Appendix B – Detailed Schedule Day One

No Place to Call Home Agenda

Saturday, January 10, 2009

9:00am-12:00pm



- 9:00-9:40 – Registration, Welcome and Introductions
- 9:40-9:45 – Activity #1 - Shout Out
- 9:45-10:00 – Stereotypes of Homelessness
- 10:00-10:15 – What is it like to be Homeless?
- 10:15-10:30 – Activity #2-What does home mean to you?
- 10:30-10:40 – BREAK
- 10:45-11:15 – Signs of Homelessness
- 11:15-11:30 – Activity #3 – What makes a house a home?
- 11:30-11:50 – Stress factors
- 11:50-12:00 – Reflection and Wrap-up

HAVE A GREAT AFTERNOON! SEE YOU TOMORROW!

Appendix C – Detailed Schedule Day Two

No Place to Call Home Agenda

Sunday, January 11, 2009

9:00am-12:00pm



9:00-9:30 – Welcome and Homeless in Waterloo Region

9:30-9:45 – How do children become homeless?

9:45-10:05 – Activity #4 – Musical Chairs

10:05-10:30 – Stress of Changing Schools Frequently

10:30-10:45 – BREAK

10:45-11:00 – Basic Resources not being met

11:00-11:15 – Stress of Constant Moving

11:15-11:30 – Parental Involvement

11:30-11:45 – Activity #5 – Power of Listening

11:45-12:00 – How can we get administration involved?

Reflection, Wrap-up and Survey

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Appendix D – Workshop Slides

Please see PowerPoint attachment

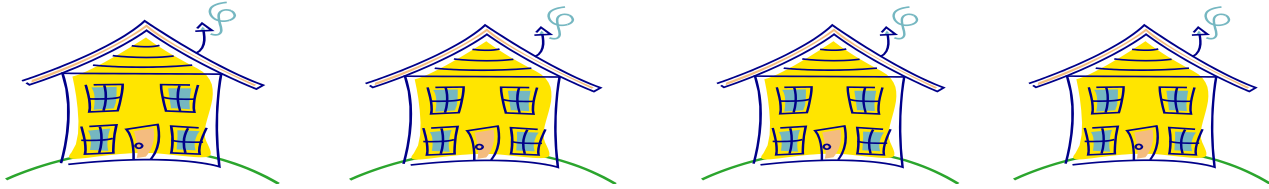
Appendix E – Reflection Journal Cover Page

Reflection Journal



*Please use this journal
throughout the workshop
to reflect on the information
being presented.*

Appendix F – Evaluation Survey



Workshop Exit Survey

Please complete the following questions below by checking the response you most agree with. Thank you.

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Was the information presented helpful?					
2. Will you use some of the strategies presented within your classroom or working environment?					
3. Did you learn new information about homelessness?					
4. Did this workshop increase your confidence in working with homeless students?					
5. This workshop was professional and well organized.					
6. Were your expectations met?					
7. I will recommend this workshop to others.					

Additional Comments:

Name: _____

Appendix G – Workshop Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion Medaille College

This certificate is presented to

Name of Recipient

*In recognition of successfully completing
“No Place to Call Home” workshop.*

Signature _____ Date _____

Workshop presented by: Heather Papp



Appendix H – Attendance Sign in sheet



“No Place to call Home” Workshop
Saturday, January 10, 2009
9:30am – 1:00pm

	Name	Mailing Address	Email Address	Please check if you would like to participate in a networking group.
1.				
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26.				
27.				
28.				



“No Place to call Home” Workshop
Sunday, January 11, 2009
9:30am – 1:00pm

(If you were in attendance yesterday, please just write name.)

	Name	Mailing Address	Email Address	Please check if you would like to participate in a networking group.
1.				
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Capstone Project Professional Review Form

Name of Student: Heather Papp

Capstone Project Advisor: Josephine Scott

Name, Title & Contact Information of Professional: Martina Altomare, 519-745-7847
Grade 1/2 Teacher – St. Anne’s School
250 East Avenue, Kitchener, ON. N2H 1Z4

Capstone Project Thematic Concern: To raise awareness and promote sensitivity about homelessness within the school system whereby teachers will have increased confidence and productivity in supporting a student experiencing homelessness so that students experiencing homelessness will receive the supports needed to achieve optimal school success.

Capstone Project (Describe workshop, unit, community service project focus):

- 2-day, 6 hour workshop for newly qualified and experienced teachers who work in a school boundary area where a homeless shelter is situated.
- 3 lesson plans to implement within own classroom after completion of workshop.
- The workshop and lesson plans are geared toward creating awareness and sensitivity to increase the confidence levels in teachers working with homeless children.

Professional Reviewer, please consider the candidate’s project for professional relevance of the topic. Please list 3 project strengths and 3 suggestions for project improvement.

Strengths:

- Very thorough research
- PowerPoint was outstanding and activities were exceptional to allow the participant to feel what it might be like to be homeless.
- Love the strategies that were outlined. Very easy to implement within schools right away.
- Excellent background knowledge and personal experience with the homeless population as evident.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- Wished writer would have included more personal experience and personal opinion into the research. Would have liked more of the writer’s personal reactions to the research.
- Timeline for workshop might be too rigid and participants might feel overwhelmed with amount of material to cover.

Martina Altomare

Signature of Professional Educator

November 8, 2008

Date

Heather Papp

Signature of Medaille College Student

November 8, 2008

Date



Capstone Project Professional Review Form

Name of Student: Heather Papp

Capstone Project Advisor: Josephine Scott

Name, Title & Contact Information of Professional: Nancy Ehiorobo, 519-745-7847
Grade 2 Teacher – St. Anne’s School
250 East Avenue, Kitchener, ON. N2H 1Z4

Capstone Project Thematic Concern: To raise awareness and promote sensitivity about homelessness within the school system whereby teachers will have increased confidence and productivity in supporting a student experiencing homelessness so that students experiencing homelessness will receive the supports needed to achieve optimal school success.

Capstone Project (Describe workshop, unit, community service project focus):

- 2-day, 6 hour workshop for newly qualified and experienced teachers who work in a school boundary area where a homeless shelter is situated.
- 3 lesson plans to implement within own classroom after completion of workshop.
- The workshop and lesson plans are geared toward creating awareness and sensitivity to increase the confidence levels in teachers working with homeless children.

Professional Reviewer, please consider the candidate’s project for professional relevance of the topic. Please list 3 project strengths and 3 suggestions for project improvement.

Strengths:

- The writer got across the message loud and clear that we have a responsibility to support all children and it was carried throughout. The writing was very passionate and insightful. The research was relevant and useful.
- PowerPoint was easy to understand, flowed well and the use of personal stories in the musical chairs game was outstanding.
- The lesson plans were geared toward the primary level. Most of times I find these topics are geared toward the middle to higher grades. I felt that we should be able to teach compassion at a young age. I can now thanks to this project!
- The workshop was comprehensive and all details were thought of. Loved how there will be resources to take home and that there was time for reflection throughout the workshop. It is so important to do this as the information presented is a lot to take in and participants would need time to process the information and relate it to their own personal life. You have allowed time to do this...way to go!

Suggestions for Improvement:

- I would have loved to see the writer add more personal experience and personal connections stories throughout the research. I know the writer is a new teacher but I believe that she has some valuable input to share with others.

- Workshop could have been spread out over three days and added the possibility of local statistics and case studies that teachers could work on to get that local perspective. Maybe inviting in a shelter worker to discuss what life is like living in a shelter could help teachers understand the space limitations and noise levels of shelter living. Maybe asking the shelter workers to contribute ideas on how the connection between school and shelter could be better utilized would help.
- It would also be nice to see guides developed to share with administrative staff, bus drivers and other who deal with homeless children on a daily basis that offered strategies to support them in their work. I feel that this would be an enhancement of the project as a whole.

Nancy Ehioroba

Signature of Professional Educator

November 8, 2008

Date

Heather Papp

Signature of Medaille College Student

November 8, 2008

Date