“SEEN, HEARD, AND VALUED”: EXAMINING HOW ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, AND FOSTER FAMILIES COLLABORATE TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

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Abstract: This study explored how administrators, teachers, and foster families collaborate together to support young children in foster care by analyzing the relationships between them. Participants were three educators, three foster families, and three administrators. Interviews with open-ended, semi-structured questions concerning their support of children in foster care were conducted with the participants. The themes that emerged were: collaboration, training, access, and connections. The sub-themes that emerged were: trauma, trauma-induced behavior, and services. Results are discussed in terms of implications for research, theory, and practice among educators, administrators, and foster families in their support of children in foster care.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Children in the foster care system are perhaps one of the most overlooked populations in the United States, and as a result are one of the most vulnerable populations in the school system exhibiting great difficulty succeeding in school (Nowak-Fabrykowski, 2015). This vulnerable and overlooked population in the United States has an astounding number of 437,465 children reported in foster care as of 2016 (AFCARS Report, 2017). In early childhood settings alone, children ranging from ages birth to eight, there is an aggregated number of 243,358 children in the foster system, with a median range of years spent in the system at 7.8 years (AFCARS Report, 2017). For children in foster care, life is full of uncertainties and chaos. Often, foster children have had experiences of abuse and neglect and their lives are more characterized by loss than they are by security and consistency (McKellar & Cowan, 2011).

The public school classroom with its routine, consistency, safety, and responsive educators has the potential to be a place of refuge for all children, especially those in foster care. For an educator, developing a classroom community that provides the skills and needs that these students in foster care require can be achieved by forming meaningful, positive relationships with students. According to Copple and Bredekamp, educators can make an intentional effort by creating a "caring community of learners" (2009, p.35) with every demographic and socioeconomic status present in the classroom.

Unfortunately, many educators feel ill-equipped to fulfill the needs of their students in foster care. This may be because educators simply do not understand what their students need. Educators may feel unsupported and unencouraged by administration in their endeavors to address the needs of children in foster care. In a research study examining teacher perceptions on children in the foster system, researchers found upon studying school support in aiding teachers with their challenges in the classroom that "general education teachers and most of the special education teachers (60%) indicated that there was no special assistance to deal with the challenges or address the unique needs of their foster children" (Zetlin, Macleod, & Kimm, 2012, p. 10). For educators to feel the confidence and hone the skill sets needed to provide these children with what they need, they must feel supported and have the knowledge base of how to do so. In order to serve and educate this overlooked group, it is important to have meaningful conversations with the ones who spend the majority of their day with children in foster care as well as ensuring that their voices, needs, concerns, and perceptions are heard. These conversations must happen with educators.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how educators form relationships with their students who are in the foster care system. Specifically, this study examines general attitudes of educators towards their students in the foster system, potential biases they may have, challenges and successes in the classroom, the level of sensitivity and warmth within these teacher-student relationships, as well as motivation and ideas toward strengthening and improving relationships with their students. After conducting interviews with early childhood educators, administrators, and foster families about how teachers form relationships with their students in foster care, responses were examined and discussed.

The research was conducted by examining educators', foster families, and administrators' responses without violating the confidentiality of this vulnerable population of children in the foster system or putting them at risk. Not only does it add insight into the current attitudes and practices of educators in Oklahoma towards students in state custody, it also provided ideas and strategies for teachers to reflect upon their own attitudes, strategies, practices, and potential biases they bring into the classroom when teaching and interacting with this vulnerable population. This study also compiled teachers', foster families, and administrators' ideas toward improving relationships with their students in the foster care system, which may foster more positive, meaningful relationships with them.

Research Questions

The three research questions for this study are as follows:

Research Question 1: What are early childhood educators' attitudes, biases, challenges, successes, level of responsiveness, and motivation toward improving relationships with students in state custody?

Research Question 2: What potential factors impact teacher-student relationships with students in state custody?

Research Question 3: How do early childhood educators' attitudes toward students in state custody affect their perception of the teacher-student relationships?

Key Terms

The key terms found throughout the research are as follows:

Teacher-Student Relationship: the relationship between an educator and student measured by the significance and level of sensitivity, warmth, responsiveness, and/or conflict (Sabol & Pianta., 2012).

Foster Care: a temporary arrangement in which adults provide for the care of a child or children whose birthparent is unable to care for them (http://www.adopt.org/what-foster-care, 2018).

Foster Family: adults unrelated or related to children in foster care who have been approved by the State to provide children in foster care with shelter and care ("Family Foster Care").

Self-Efficacy: people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 2018).

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Of the theories that could possibly be used as the basis for the present study, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory and Attachment Theory were the ones which best addressed the research questions. These theories are described below and are discussed in relation to the lives of children in foster care.

Bioecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory describes the interconnectedness of a person's environment and the influences it has in his or her life, specifically, how these systems impact a person's life. Through Bronfenbrenner's theory, the crucial interactions of multiple environments are interconnected. Environments such as school, neighborhood, peers, media, and family not only influence each other, but the child as well (Isenberg, 2006). Bronfenbrenner discusses and details four levels of interconnectedness within a person's life: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem. Each system represents an individual environmental system that impacts the child's life. Although the systems are unique, each one connects not only with the child, but also with the other systems.

The first and most central level to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory is the microsystem. The microsystem is "the setting in which the individual lives, or the near environment" (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2014, p. 9). This includes the home, school, and

community. Because this level is the most directly tied to the child, it is often considered the level that is most closely and directly affecting development (Trawick-Smith, 2018). Within the microsystem, everything holds a significant level of influence—namely, institutions influence the child and the child influences the institutions. The microsystem also includes molar activities, which are behaviors that are demonstrated by the developing child or behaviors that are demonstrated by others within the direct sphere of influence to the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Because of the prevalence of social roles within the microsystem, the various people within the child's life, their friends, family, and teachers—have a direct and significant influence on the child and his behaviors and, in turn, the child has a direct and large influence on those people and their behaviors.

The mesosystem is the second level in Bronfenbrenner's theory. The mesosytem embodies the interconnectedness of the microsystem and is a primary influence in the child's behavior and development (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2014). Because the mesosystem primarily concerns connections within the microsystem, it is also where child and adolescent development is positively enhanced (Trawick-Smith, 2018). This could take the form of a family who invites a child's teacher over to their home for dinner, and soon the parents become friends with the child's teacher. The educator is then actively involved in the child's school and home environment. Other examples of this may be that the educator attends the child's sports events, or spends time with the family at community events.

The exosystem is the layer following the mesosystem. The exosystem is comprised of institutions and individuals who do not directly touch or influence the child's behaviors and development. Within the exosystem, the child is an inactive participant. This means that the institutions and conditions affecting the adults in the child's life then become what influences the

child's life and development. For example, this could be demonstrated within the caregiver's work site and co-workers. A co-worker that spends a vast amount of time with the caregiver of the child, whether intentionally or not, has an indirect influence through the caregiver to the child.

The macrosystem is the fourth level of Bronfenbrenner's theory. The macrosystem is composed of values such as laws, customs and culture of a particular society, and ideologies (Trawick-Smith, 2018). Although seemingly insignificant and perhaps incapable of directly influencing a child's behavior, the macrosystem has a large possibility of impacting and influencing the child's development. For example, the ideas and worldviews of a child living in a small town in which there are many churches and a large number of individuals practicing their spiritual beliefs will undoubtedly influence the child's behavior. This is because of the people whom the child comes into contact within his hometown on a daily and regular basis.

The chronosystem is the final level of the Bioecological Systems Theory. This final level does not embody an experience, event, or person that is tangible and can be applied to a child's development. The chronosystem instead represents time, such as the period of time that will affect the child's development and behavior (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2014). The chronosystem is representative of certain experiences and events that occur in a child's life and have a direct and impactful influence on the child's behavior and development. For example, a child who grows up during the Great Depression will undoubtedly be influenced specifically by the events and experiences unique to that era.

For a foster child, the microsystem—consisting of the interpersonal relationships in the children's lives—directly affects the mesosystem, which involves the interactions between the school and the child's family. Because foster children have so much uncertainty and

inconsistency in their lives, often the relationship between the child's family and the school is strained, if not nonexistent altogether. A child's foster family may try their hardest to communicate with the child's teacher, but the lack of in-depth knowledge of the child, lack of secure attachments, difficulty obtaining medical records, and learning how to interact with a new person in the household can make it challenging for the foster caregiver to effectively and efficiently communicate well with the teacher. The teachers and administrators, in turn, may feel ill-equipped in teaching the student to the best of their ability, and may even feel frustrated with the lack of communication and feel discouraged in their academic endeavors. Caregivers can collaborate with teachers and work together to encourage their foster children to pursue extra-curricular activities, advanced placement courses, and other special programs. Unfortunately, however, many foster children simply do not have the opportunity or are not encouraged to pursue these beneficial extracurricular activities (Vacca, 2007).

Attachment Theory

Children, from the moment they first enter the world upon birth, look for someone to take care of them. Not only do children search for someone to take care of their needs, but they search for a caregiver with whom they can form an attachment. The first 0-12 months of an infant's life are the crucial when the crucial moments of attachment are formed. For an infant, "the essential task of the first year of life is the creation of a secure attachment bond between the infant and the primary caregivers" (Craig, 2016, p. 28). Bowlby explains in his attachment theory that attachment is biological in nature and is an evolutionary response in order to aid the child in surviving (Gold, 2011). This evolutionary response causes children to strive to form an attachment with a caregiver that is sensitive and responsive to their needs. It is here that the infants will form a very specific relationship in which they have a preference with one or a small

number of caregivers (Sroufe, 2000). However, it is not simply up to the child alone to find a caregiver suitable to care for his needs. There is an essential element of reciprocity between the caregiver and the child. By the age of 10-12 months the child will "form a specific, 'preferential' relationship with one or a small number of caregivers" (Sroufe, 2000, p. 69). Within his attachment theory, Bowlby describes four different attachment styles: secure attachment, insecure/ambivalent attachment, insecure/avoidant attachment, and disorganized/disoriented attachment.

If a child has a caregiver who is sensitive and responsive to the infant's needs, then this child will form a secure attachment with her caregiver. Secure attachment is optimal because it is based upon a strong, positive relationship between caregiver and child. Secure attachment "reflects a relationship in which the caregiver provides protection and support" (Huber, McMahon, & Sweller, 2015, p. 558). The Strange Situation experiment was a longitudinal evaluation of infant-mother attachment conducted in 1970 (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970), with many recent studies replicating this experiment. The Strange Situation evaluated attachment according to the infant's response to his or her mother upon re-entrance into the room. As observed in the Strange Situation experiment, babies who have a secure attachment will typically play and explore securely and happily within a new environment when their caregiver is in the room. If this caregiver departs, the child may cry when he leaves, but will greet the parent joyously upon his return. Within a secure attachment, the child also has the tendency to be friendlier in social situations and to have a more positive view of self in later childhood (Trawick-Smith, 2014). Fortunately, this attachment style is the most common, as approximately 70% of babies born in the United States form secure attachments (Trawick-Smith, 2014).

Another attachment style is insecure/avoidant. Children who display this style of attachment have not formed a secure bond with their caregivers. Characteristics of a child displaying insecure/avoidant attachment is demonstrated within the Strange Situation experiment by the child crying when the caregiver leaves the room. Upon her return, the child will ignore the caregiver and will possibly even move away from her (Trawick-Smith, 2014). Children with insecure/ambivalent attachment "alternate between extreme upset and angry rejection when the mother returns to the playroom" (Trawick-Smith, 2014, p. 90). For example, the child may show extreme distress when the caregiver leaves an unfamiliar play area, but when he/she returns, the child will be inconsolable. The child may even "alternate between desperate clinging and angry rejection during the reunion" (Trawick-Smith, 2014, p. 190). For a child who is insecurely attached to his caregiver, this child will have more aggressive tendencies, be less cooperative and more impulsive in decision making (Trawick-Smith, 2014).

The fourth—and least common—attachment is disorganized attachment. Children with this type of attachment may appear confused, dazed, or depressed upon reunion with their parent. They express flat emotion or may even cry out unexpectedly after having calmed down (Berk, 2013). In fact, these children are often associated with difficult life circumstances, and will "leave them with no coherent strategies for seeking comfort or security" (Howes & Ritchie, 1999, p. 252). Upon entering older childhood, these children often will tend to have aggressive and hostile tendencies, as well as struggling to trust adults with caring for them (Howes & Ritchie, 1999).

Many children in foster care have failed to form a secure attachment with their caregivers. In fact, infants and children who have experienced high levels of trauma and adversity and whose relationships with their caregivers are characterized by this will adapt to

these circumstances. This adaptation, however, is accompanied by a heightened level of arousal, greater reactivity in the limbic system and brain stem, as well as having very low stress tolerance (Craig, 2016). Infants who have formed insecure attachments can be affected on the neurobiological level. This means that consistent traumatic experiences in a child's life are subject to synaptic pruning, in which repeated experiences form stronger bonds in the child's brain (Craig, 2016). These stronger bonds require greater effort from positive adults to reverse the negative synapses that were formed in children with insecure attachments as infants (Craig, 2016). Reversal can occur with the presence of a positive, secure relationship within the child's life. In fact, research indicates if a child who is exposed to trauma or has a history of trauma has one person consistently in their lives who loves them, cares about them, nurtures them, and gives them encouragement, then they are more likely to develop resiliency to overcome the trauma they experienced and become healthy adults able to function well in society (Gwinn & Felitti, 2015).

Teacher-student relationships are much more complex than what a person not familiar with the specific community, culture, and ecosystem of the classroom may observe. In order for the child to feel safe to explore his classroom environment and learn, he must have a secure, strong, positive attachment and relationship with his teacher. Because the child knows he can trust the educator with his safety and to meet his basic needs, he then knows that he can trust his teacher to keep him safe and secure while he continues in his learning. This, however, can be challenging for children who have spent any amount of time in the foster system. In many cases, children in foster care have failed to form secure attachments with their caregivers. They then often find it difficult to form secure attachments with their educators and the people that are caring for them.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Time was spent visiting Oklahoma State University's library archives in order to obtain literature pertaining to the expected subjects involved in the present study, as well as some of the key words. Information from these various sources was organized according to the level of information deemed important to the present study, and frequency of themes among sources. The following topics are presented here: Foster child, Trauma, ACES, Federal laws, Challenging Behaviors, Teacher-student relationship, Foster families and school experiences, Administrators and children in foster care.

Foster child

A foster child is a child who has been removed from the caregivers in his home and placed with either a foster family or is in state custody. The reasons a child may be placed in the foster system are many and expand over a wide range. Reasons may include substance abuse, physical or emotional neglect, caregiver domestic violence, or even mental illness in the parent or caregiver (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017). Children in the foster care system frequently live with uncertainty. For example, they may spend as little as one day in one foster home, and often they may experience changing schools (Special Fducation Parent Handbook*,* 2006). Many children spend time with multiple foster families. This inconsistency in placement location has the potential to cause cause children to be absent from school as well as receiving an out-of-school

suspension. Children in the foster system are also up to three and a half times more likely to receive special education services (Palmieri & La Salle, 2017).

Trauma

The nature of the foster system removes a child from their home because of insufficient living conditions and are placed in alternate care. Many children in the foster system suffer from trauma. In fact, Palmieri and La Salle state in their study that "students are often placed into foster care settings because of adverse child-rearing experiences, resulting in increased risk of social-emotional, behavioral, and academic problems" (2017, p. 118). Trauma is caused by the experiences they have had. It is now known that trauma can affect the child not only in outward ways, but also impacts the development of the brain. Because of the great plasticity of the brain, its "architecture is socially constructed within the context of a child's first attachment relationship" (Craig, 2016, p. 27).

Between the ages of birth to five, the brain's plasticity is the highest, and this is a crucial time for a strong attachment to occur. Neuronal connections are made in the brain when certain experiences are made, and the more these connections in the brain are used, the stronger they become (Craig, 2016). This means that when experiences with caregivers, whether positive or negative, occur, these experiences produce synapses that stick in the brain and become stronger the more they are repeated or used. It can be a good thing when the experiences are positive. When negative experiences occur, they can cause problems for the child in the long run. However, children who have not formed a secure attachment with their caregivers at an early age are capable of learning to trust if provided with support and comfort from their teachers and other adults in their lives. This is possible only if the patterns of their insecurity are recognized by adults and responded to in a way that repairs the early damage done (Craig, 2016).

ACES

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) refers to those negative experiences that have occurred in a person's life that impact their development and behavior. Participants in the ACEs study were given questionnaires in which they were asked which ACEs had occurred in their lives. These items include recurrent physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, emotional and physical neglect, a family member (especially the mother) treated violently, parental separation or divorce, an incarcerated household member, an alcoholic or drug abuser, and a household member who is chronically depressed, suicidal, institutionalized or mentally ill (Hunt, Slack, & Berger, 2016). The results from the study found that participants who had experienced three or more ACEs were more likely to suffer from health problems such as heart disease, liver disease, depression, autoimmune disease, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and even early death (Hunt et al., 2016).

Because many children have been removed from their homes due to less than satisfactory, and even dangerous, conditions reported within their homes, the likelihood is high that they have experienced at least one ACE in their lifetime, with an even higher possibility that they have experienced three or more. This puts them in a category that is dangerous, as it exposes these children to great risks of health problems and early death if an intervention does not occur. Adverse childhood experiences can prove detrimental to the mental, physical, and emotional health of a child. Research indicates that the consistent presence of at least one caring, nurturing adult has the potential to help children overcome their adverse experiences (Craig, 2016). This can prove challenging for a foster child. Consistently moving from home to home, the stress of not knowing where they will be placed next, or whom they will be placed with is

enough to threaten the possibility of an intervention from an adult providing a positive, nurturing relationship with the child in foster care.

Federal laws

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that works to protect student's education records (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 2018). This law applies to any school that receives funding from the U.S. Department of Education and prohibits school officials, whether the child has transferred or not, from viewing the child's educational records without the caregiver or child's consent (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 2018). Without consent, schools may disclose 'directory' information such as a student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 2018). However, the law prohibits any other educational records from being viewed by teachers, administrators, therapists, or other administrators without parental consent. This can pose a very real challenge for educators who have a foster child in their classroom, as information can be withheld due to lack of parental consent that could benefit not only the students at an academic level. The lack of information can potentially impact the formation of the teacher-student relationship because the teacher lacks basic educational information needed to teach, nurture, and help the child develop to their greatest potential.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) consists of the HIPAA Privacy Rule and the HIPAA Security Rule, which both essentially protect certain health information of individuals in the United States (Summary of the HIPAA Security Rule, 2018). HIPAA ensures that confidential health information is protected (HIPAA, 2018). While confidentiality and protection of health records is a good thing, it can provide potential barriers

to teachers and therapists who need to know possible pertinent health information of their students within the foster care system that would enable them to better serve their students.

Challenging behaviors

Children exposed to interpersonal trauma are often affected at the neurological level because of the repeated nature of their experiences. Experiences that can cause this include betrayal, sexual or physical assaults, abandonment, or exposure to domestic violence (Craig, 2016). This repeated exposure may lead to a general distrust of adults and creates within these children a reflex to defend themselves and survive. Because their attention is not focused on academic learning and instead is focused primarily on keeping themselves safe around any adult or person they come into contact with, challenging behaviors can ensue (Craig, 2016). Challenging behaviors such as aggression, emotional instability, defiance, and rebellion may appear in the classroom from these students. These challenging behaviors do not occur simply to frustrate or irritate the person who is around the child. These behaviors manifest due to an indirect or direct wound or injury, which is often inflicted by the caregiver. Injuries vary from physical, emotional, mental, or social maltreatment (Craig, 2016).

These behaviors are often very difficult and challenging for a child to control, and they need assistance from emotionally intelligent, capable adults on how to correctly and effectively handle these intense emotions and behaviors. Palmieri and La Salle discuss their findings concerning their findings in that early relational trauma pose significant results in a child's difficulty to self-regulate, specifically the regulation of the intensity and frequency of their impusles and feelings (2017). Impulsive behavior from children can prove to be some of the most challenging behavioral forms to manage as an educator, and requires not only a high level

of patience but also the knowledge that these children have been impacted neurologically and need aid in repairing their trust of adults and aid in managing their behaviors.

Teacher-student relationship

Teachers, on an average school day, can spend anywhere from five to seven hours a day with their students. It is imperative that children in foster care must establish secure, positive relationships with their teachers within these hours. Because many students in foster care have difficulty forming secure attachments with their caregivers, it can be extremely challenging for these students to form secure, positive relationships with their teachers. Research indicates that interventions in the form of establishing high-quality teacher-child relationships can serve as beneficial for lowering the potential of lower levels of achievement for children who are at risk (O'Connor & McCarthy., 2007). The reverse is also true that students with low-quality teacher-student relationships may pose a possible risk for low academic achievement.

Teachers have the power and influence to serve as a positive role model and adult presence in their students' lives. The quality of the teacher-student relationships can either help or hinder students. Many educators feel ill-prepared with having students in their classrooms who have had adverse childhood experiences and feel as if they need to know very specific strategies in order to aid children in overcoming all of the negative effects from their early years (O'Connor & McCarthy., 2007). In order to help students overcome their challenging experiences, teachers must recognize and understand the plasticity of the brain changes within nurturing, social relationships (Craig, 2016). Teachers must realize that their intentional, positive interactions and relationships with their students have the capability of healing and helping these students exposed to traumatic experiences. It is then, in the healing environment, that the student's need can be met in the school (Craig, 2016, p. 25).

Foster families and school experiences

When families make the decision to foster children in their homes, they are making a very intentional, deliberate action to provide shelter, food, and companionship to these children. However, the relationships between families and the school their foster child attends plays a crucial role in the development and education of a child. Comer (1999) states that "Children's—and also teacher's, administrator's, parent's… in short everyone and everything's—development depends on relationships." (Comer, 1999; p. xxiv). Children who are in the child welfare system from the ages of 6-17 have a very low school engagement status at 39% (Kortenkamp & Ehrle, 2002). Because these children do not have a biological family to advocate for them or be involved in their school experiences, foster children rely on their foster families to fill that need. Research on foster parents' involvement in their children's education is extremely limited and almost non-existent (Wells, 2006). According to one of the few studies conducted on this topic, foster parents reported to the researchers that they did indeed have a moderate level of parental involvement within the school system, and suggest that for foster parents who were involved in a partnership-focused role with the school system and received more support that levels of parental involvement were higher (Wells, 2006). The foster child's education is enhanced positively when foster parents take an active role in their child's education. In contrast, their education is affected negatively when foster parents take a passive or nonexistent role in their children's education (Mires, Lee, & McNaughton, 2018). However, a low-quality relationship between teachers and foster parents may exist. This is due to four possible reasons, as stated by Mires et al. (2018), which are high rates of school mobility, inconsistent and lack of advocacy for the child's education, lack of communication between parents and teachers, and lack of knowledge concerning the child's background, needs, and history.

Administrators and children in foster care

Administration within the school system has many responsibilities and demands that can prove to be very challenging throughout the day. With every eye on administration to provide direction and leadership, this can prove a daunting task for any principal. However, many people fail to realize that administration not only makes decisions on curriculum to use, whom to hire, and what philosophy they desire their school as a whole to follow, among many other things, they are also often involved in the less glamorous and arduous task of discipline and guidance with the students when teachers become overwhelmed. As with the limited research on foster families and school experiences, the research concerning administration and children in foster is almost nonexistent. Because of the lack of research on this topic, one could instead look to a principal's role in supporting educators for their students' behavior challenges. This comparison is drawn by observing that children in foster care often have behavioral challenges due to their traumatic experiences (Craig, 2016), and that this often is a point of difficulty with educators to discern how to handle these students.

The roles of school principals are unmistakably vital to a child's education success and progress (Manders, 2015). Their roles in advising, encouraging, and providing support to the educator translates into how the educator is able to interact with the student. Because the responsibility of the principal to provide this support to educators is so crucial, they must have "a clear understanding of the fundamental elements of effective instruction" (Hartzell &Petrie, 1992), as well as skill in translating them into ways the educator is able to understand and put into practice. Principals also exercise a very strong influence on their educators and school systems through their values, beliefs, and attitudes (Wood, 2014). Because of the amount of influence and leadership exhibited by administration within a school system, it is absolutely

crucial for the principal to play an active role in partnering with educators and foster families in order to help the foster child succeed and progress developmentally and academically.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of three educators ranging from grades Pre-K through third grade, three principals, and three foster families in Oklahoma. The participants offered different relationships, circumstances, and perspectives from the educators, families, and principals alike in order to more closely examine the various relationships between systems, how they work together, and how they can be improved. One educator, principal, and family represented a rural setting, one from a suburban setting, and one from an urban setting. While each of these educators, families, and principals shared many of the same challenges, they each had unique perspectives and relationships because of the different locations. Participants were found using the recruitment flyer developed for the study that was sent to a variety of schools. It asked for volunteers to participate who were educators and administrators. The educators and administrators who participated were purposively recruited due to their experience in supporting children in foster care. Foster families were chosen by way of personal contacts.

Procedures

After IRB approval was obtained, interviews were scheduled. The procedures used to collect data for this study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with each of these nine participants. Interviews were conducted in a variety of places outside of their place of work to

enable them to speak freely. However, Administrator 1 was unable to meet outside of her school, and agreed to conduct her interview in her office at the school in which she worked. Meeting places included coffee shops, and their homes. Participants were given consent forms listing the purpose of the study, privacy concerns, and the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time if so desired. Prior to the interview, demographic information such as setting, years of age, educational level obtained, years taught, and number of foster children supported of the years was requested and collected (see Table 1). No identifying information was a part of the demographic information collected. Participants were given names according to title: Administrator 1, Administrator 2, Administrator 3, Educator 1, Educator 2, Educator 3, Foster Family 1, Foster Family 2, Foster Family 3. Participants were then asked questions for the interview portion. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were comprised carefully to not only address the research questions but to enable freedom for the participants in what they chose to share. Follow-up questions were used to clarify the questions asked. Descriptive field notes recording attitude and attention-span of the participant, and environment in which the interview were conducted both during and immediately after each interview (Saldana, 2016).

After interviews were conducted, verbatim transcriptions were made of each interview and sent back to the participant as member checks to ensure accuracy. No participant changes were suggested to be made, as 100% of the participants reviewed the transcripts and did not request to make any changes. The transcriptions were read by a second reader, a scholar-practitioner with over 15 years of teaching experience in public schools and a qualitative methodologist. Using NVivo 12, transcriptions were then examined, themes were identified and analyzed across all interviews. This took place by reading through individual transcriptions

multiple times and highlighting pertinent themes and information related to supporting students in foster care given by the

Table 1

Demographic Information of Interview Participants (N=9)

Characteristic	N	% of Sample
Administrators		
Gender		
Male	0	0.0
Female	3	100.0
Educational Level		
Bachelors Degree	0	0.0
Masters Degree or Higher	3	100.0
Community Lived/Worked		
Rural	1	33.3
Urban	1	33.3
Suburban	1	33.3
Number of Children in Foster Care Supported		
0-15	0	0.0
16-30	2	66.6
31-45	0	0.0
46-60	1	33.3
Years Taught		
0-10	1	33.3
11-21	2	66.6
22-32	0	0.0
Educators		
Gender		
Male	0	0.0
Female	3	100.0
Educational Level		
Bachelors Degree	2	66.6
Masters Degree or Higher	1	33.3
Community Lived/Worked		
Rural	1	33.3
Urban	1	33.3
Suburban	1	33.3
Number of Children in Foster Care Supported		
0-5	1	33.3
6-10	1	33.3
11-15	1	33.3
Years Taught		

0-10	1	33.3
11-20	1	33.3
21-30	1	33.3
Foster Families		
Gender		
Male	0	0.0
Female	3	100.0
Educational Level		
Bachelors Degree	1	33.3
Masters Degree or Higher	2	66.6
Community Lived/Worked		
Rural	1	33.3
Urban	1	33.3
Suburban	1	33.3
Number of Children in Foster Care Supported		
0-10	2	66.6
11-20	0	0.0
21-30	0	0.0
31-40	1	33.3
Years Supported Children in Foster Care		
0-5	1	33.3
6-10	0	0.0
11-15	1	33.3
16-20	1	33.3

participants, as well as cross case analysis to identify emergent shared themes and similarities within each group of educators, principals, and families. Each highlighted portion was then sorted into themes. This search for words or short phrases that are symbolic in providing a theme or attribute is known as coding (Saldana, 2016). Patterns in the data were identified by the repetition and consistency in which these words or phrases occurred more than twice (Saldana, 2016). The most frequent-occurring themes were identified and discussed in relation to these groups' perceptions on forming relationships and aiding in the academic success with those in foster care.

Grounded theory was the approach used in gathering and recording this data. Grounded theory is a systematic, methodological approach to qualitative inquiry in which specific types of

codes are applied to the data in order to form a theory that is grounded in the data (Saldana, 2016). For example, with this data, the themes that emerged were taken directly from the data instead of approaching the data with preconceived ideas about what the themes might be. This allows the data set to speak for itself as to what themes might emerge through analyzing and highlighting frequently occurring phrases and ideas.

The position of the researcher concerning children in foster care is that of an empathetic researcher striving to bring about awareness on their situations. The author's position comes from personal experience with a foster child enrolled in a pre-kindergarten class in which the researcher was the lead teacher. This foster child had experienced a very traumatic background, and therefore was exhibiting many of the behavioral challenges and cognitive affects that trauma causes. The researcher felt extremely ill-equipped and unprepared to aid him, and for the duration of this child who was in foster care's time in her class, the researcher never received training on how to effectively interact with him. This feeling of helplessness and unpreparedness led the researcher to desire to conduct the present study.

Potential biases of the data from the researcher were eliminated using grounded theory in that constant comparisons were made throughout the coding in which similarities as well as differences were checked for consistency (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Initial coding, or open coding, was used to break down the data into parts in which they are then closely examined and compared for similarities and differences (Saldana, 2016). Open coding is an open-ended approach to coding this data that allows the researcher to reflect deeply on the contents of the data and draw conclusions (Saldana, 2016).

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH FINDINGS

After interviews were completed, four major themes emerged from across all transcriptions: collaboration, training, access, and connections. Three sub-themes also emerged from the data: trauma, behavior, and services. The sub-themes were prevalent across the data, but did not appear as frequently as the major themes.

Theme one: Collaboration

Collaboration was one of the most prevalent themes throughout the interviews. Specifically, collaboration between each relationship: educators, foster children, administrators, and foster families. Frequently, the interviewees spoke of working together—along with DHS caseworkers occasionally—to create a plan of action in order to help manage behavioral challenges exhibited by a foster child. Administrator 1, when questioned as to what areas and situations she participates in collaboration with the foster families, spoke of a success story in which she stated: "if we have repeated behaviors we call the family in, we sit down, we make a plan we talk about what the behaviors are, why it's a problem, what our end goal is, input on how do we get there." She gave a specific example of a student in foster care with behavioral issues who "came to the meeting with us and he helped come up with a plan." This particular administrator supported collaboration across all stakeholders strongly, and even stated that in

some of the more challenging behavioral cases, “we had to call DHS on that because my thing is, we’re going to start with a plan.” After forming the plan, her “goal is to give them choice. Because like I said, if everything’s been taken away from them, they [students in foster care] need to feel some sense of power. Like we all do.”

Collaboration with foster families and their level of closeness with educators and administrators seemed to range widely across the data. When asked if she likes to include foster families in her activities and in collaborating, Administrator 1 responded with, “I include foster families…they’re considered their family so they will be treated accordingly.” Administrator 2, on the other hand, appeared to have somewhat of a different story. She stated that,

> Some of my other foster parents I’m not as close to. Um, so I really think it just depends on the needs of the students. I think when the needs are greater I’m closer to the parents and have more of a working relationship with them. When the…uh, needs of the student aren’t as much and they really just come in like any other student, then I don’t get to know them or their parents as well.

When asked if she believes that there is a communication gap in general between the educators at her school and foster students, she responded with: “there is. And they just get moved around caseloads.” Because foster students so often are moved around—sometimes without notice to the educators—it can be challenging to maintain and establish a meaningful, positive relationship with the student.

Also, frequently emergent among the theme of collaboration was the lack of communication and collaboration between caseworkers and educators. Administrator 3, when reflecting on working with caseworkers for her foster students, said “I didn’t even know who some of these people… Like you’re who? Oh you’re the foster… the foster care worker not the

DHS worker? I mean, there's all kinds of people. So you're just like okay I don't know who you are." Because the foster child often has many different stakeholders in his or her life, it can be challenging for effective communication to occur. With this obvious lack of communication and collaboration, Administrator 3 expressed that "there's just not a lot of continuity and care" for the foster child. She continues to discuss that she wishes, "there was more connection there so you'd be helping the kid more in the school environment as well."

Foster families and administrators also expressed concern and frustration with the lack of positive collaboration between caseworkers. For example, Administrator 3 stated that "A caseworker's not returning my call, or they say they can't do this yet because of whatever, and it's difficult." When caseworkers are difficult to reach, frustration can easily build on the part of the foster families and school administrators. With this lack of communication from caseworkers, occasionally the services that are available to foster children are not communicated as well. Foster Family 3 discussed how she was not thoroughly made aware of the services and condition of her foster kids by her caseworkers and says of this, "we didn't know anything about IEPs…we didn't even know they were on IEPs." She also reflects on a time when all three of her foster kids had to travel to different schools and how difficult that was for her and, "what I didn't know was they [school administrators] have to transport. Nobody told me they have to transport." Had a caseworker informed her these services were available, it would have aided in making all of their lives easier.

Collaboration between educators and foster families also arose among this theme. Foster families were asked if they felt supported by their individual schools, and the answers varied. For Foster Family 2, she stated that she felt like she had no support from her school. When communication is lacking between these two groups, it is difficult for meaningful and effective

interventions or planning for the foster child's wellbeing to occur. Foster Family 1 wondered aloud that maybe if teachers "knew what was wrong with this kid, we could come up with some interventions or something that could help the parent at home and you at school and build better relationships and stuff." Foster family 3, whose foster children have some minor cognitive disabilities, describes feeling worried that her foster children aren't being protected at school, and that she wishes she knew more of what was going on there. She feels "if the teacher communicates what's happening at school, the parent feels more involved, you know." She continued to discuss that concerning challenging behaviors exhibited by her foster kids at school, she wanted to know what they were doing so that she could intervene. She stated that: "when your kids are acting out at school, you want to know. You need to tell counselors, you need to tell whatever, but you need to know. You can't just have your kid acting out and you never know it." Her experiences in the past with this lack of collaboration speaks to the need for it currently. For her, "the number one thing to me would be to communicate what's going on in your classroom."

A story of when collaboration was successful was told by Foster family 3. She revealed that she never would have known what kind of services her children needed and were available if it wasn't for a teacher who communicated and collaborated with her, explaining what kind of services might be needed. This teacher strongly advocated for her foster children, and because of it, she felt strongly, "if you have a good teacher, then I think you should only have to drop your kids off at school. You shouldn't have to advocate for them. your teacher should be advocating for them."

Theme two: Training

Educators and administrators have many hours of required professional training, and have typically spent much time learning how to be successful in schools. However, it emerged that there was a major lack of specific training concerning how to meet the needs of their foster children. Each educator and administrator interviewed demonstrated that they desired more training. They strongly desired to meet the needs of their students in foster care successfully and effectively, but many admitted that they did not receive the training they needed. Specifically, Administrator 1 explained that she believed educators and administrators absolutely need to "meet the needs of your learner," yet when asked if she had received any training to help her meet the needs of her students in foster care, she stated that she had "not had any official training" in working specifically with children in foster care.

Because training as a word itself is very general and can encompass a wide variety of meanings and practices, some educators and administrators described specific ways that word could be applied. For example, Administrator 1 believed that there needs to be "more trauma-informed practices," as well as "if more teachers knew how to meet those needs and knew how those affected… just more information. More education on it and more training." Teacher 3 expressed that she desired more training on how to handle a situation in which a child in foster care was leaving the classroom due to moving to another foster home. Specifically, how to handle the emotional needs of that student when leaving, as well as how to handle the emotional needs of the friends and classmates that he or she is leaving behind and may have questions about it. Administrator 2, on the other hand, explained that for her personally, "child abuse and neglect training… [was] one of the biggest, most impactful" ways in which she was educated on how to effectively work with foster children. In fact, she described a meaningful occasion at her school in which a police officer came in and helped to educate them on the reality of what it

means to be a foster child. He showed Administrator 2 and her colleagues photos of living conditions for some of the children that were removed from their homes. After the training, she explained that, for her, "that was probably the best training I could say, is knowing when I look at a kiddo that is in a foster care placement, I can also now see these vivid pictures of what they could have been in to get to where they are now." Because of the strong impression this experience made on her, she believes that educators need to see "real-life situations. And so we can truly know and get a grasp" of the lives that are reality for children in state custody. When asked if more training would be beneficial, she stated that "training would all be beneficial. Always."

Finding the time and resources for effective training can often be challenging. However, several interviewees provided ideas for effective ways in which this might happen. Foster family 1 believes that "it would be really awesome if we could do a professional day where they talk about foster kids and what their issues are. And then maybe teachers could have more of an understanding of why they're peeing in their pants in the second grade." She discussed the many professional hours required for educators, and how educators might possibly instead use some of those hours to be trained on how to work with foster children. She goes so far as to say, "I think it would be really beneficial if teachers could attend some kind of professional training to learn about why they… why they behave the way that they do," as well as "if we could even know the kind of trauma they've been in." Professional development hours are required by every school district. Planning and scheduling part of this time to provide effective training on how to support children in foster care would potentially be a great use of that time.

The lack of training for educators and administrators can occasionally have the potential to come across as educational professionals seemingly not caring for their students in foster care.

For example, an educator who is untrained in the effects of trauma on a child's brain may interpret her foster student who is exhibiting challenging behaviors as simply a difficult child and use guidance techniques not sensitive to his particular needs. However, educators and administrators—more often than not—do in fact care very much for their students. In Foster Family 2's experiences working with educators and administrators, she knows that educators love her foster children, but simply aren't equipped to meet their specific needs. She states that "educators love kids and they want to do, you know, but they aren't equipped. I don't blame the educators." Instead, she casts the blame elsewhere, stating that: "I blame our system for not equipping them." She believes that equipping educators perhaps could take the form of helping them to understand the trauma that foster students often go through, and the potential cognitive effects on the child. She believes that,

> If they [educators] understood, like if they just understood flight, fight or freeze, if they just understood the trauma reaction. Um, the can't versus the won't… but they can't understand the can't versus the won't. Like this kid won't do this, they won't do this, they won't do this, versus the can't.

By being educated on trauma and how it can inhibit a child from producing desired actions in the classroom, educators can use different guidance techniques to meet their needs. Foster Family 3 also thinks that trauma-informed programs would really help teachers to understand where foster children are coming from. When asked if more training for educators would be beneficial, she states that "definitely there needs to be more training. Trauma training so that teachers understand the behaviors of their students, maybe they're not just bad." Teacher 3 shared that there is "so much put on teachers that we're not trained to do." When asked if she

believes educators could use more knowledge and training in working with foster children, Foster Family 2 replied: “Absolutely.”

The educators interviewed drew upon their own personal experiences to communicate what training they believe would be beneficial to themselves and other educators. Teacher 1 believes that it would be useful to have some knowledge of foster students’ background. She states that “I think having a little bit of knowledge of their background like, you know, why they’re in foster care, were they addicted to drugs, you know, were, you know, were they neglected, were they not fed” would be useful. Teacher 2 thinks that professional training from DHS caseworkers to educators would be beneficial as well. She paints this picture as she says, “I think if they could get some DHS workers to come and speak to teachers on their dealings of how they go about dealing with kids when they pull them from the home, and what they’ve witnessed, I think, I think it’s a great need that needs to be addressed.”

Theme three: Connections

Connections and positive relationship building between educators, administrators, and foster families with their foster students was also a major theme among the interviews. Because educators and administrators are with their foster students throughout a major portion of the day, making connections to maintain and build positive relationships with foster students is of the utmost importance.

Connections can be made by small actions throughout the school day. For example, Administrator 2 places a high value on making her students feel welcome before they even enter into the school. She believes “having that opportunity to just make a positive connection before they even walk into our building” is important and something she places as a high priority. She feels strongly that “when the student walks in the door from the time the walk in the door to the

time they go home, your whole focus should be on that relationship with that kid. Because when they leave your room, that's what they're going to remember, is how you treated them." Administrator 3 believes that as far as creating a safe, welcoming space for her foster students, she thinks one of the most important ways to do so is to "make school a happy, safe place and that they can come to me whenever they want to." By opening up the lines of communication between herself and her students, she communicates to them that she cares about them and wants to provide a safe space for them to reach out to her if they so desire. When asked how the educators at her school build positive relationships with their students in foster care, Administrator 3 shares that her teachers spend a lot of their time "going out of their way to try and foster a relationship and build a relationship right away." When asked what kind of techniques she provides to her educators regarding how to effectively meet the needs of their foster students, she responded with, "I would say just build a relationship. That's the number one thing." She strongly believes that relationship building and connection forming is one of the most important ways educators and administrators can meet the needs of their foster students, and continues to reinforce this idea by saying that "just relationship I think is number one. In teaching, in anything. Just if you don't have that then you're not going to get much further."

Trauma and the uncertainty faced by foster students in their lives can often manifest through challenging or unwanted behaviors in the classroom and at home. Foster family 2 realized quickly that connecting emotionally with her foster child was more successful and effective than correcting his behavior was. She verifies this in saying,

> What I needed to do was drop the correcting piece for a while, spend time connecting, making sure that the kids that I let into my home were seen, heard, and valued, and once

> they had the seen, heard, and valued piece, they knew that I was partnering with them instead of like making them fix something.

By empathizing with her foster children, she's able to make those crucial connections. She believes that some connections can be made by normalizing her foster children's feelings and making them feel and know that they aren't alone. She helps to normalize and talk about some of the feelings her foster children are having by explaining that, "I can say I'm so sorry, I'm sad sometimes too, and we normalize it." She continues to reinforce this idea of connecting with her foster children by stating, "It's all about connecting. I connect before I correct, I connect, connect, connect, connect." She believes that when working with children in state custody, "It's all driven by relationships because if they don't feel safe and there's no relationship, they can't respect you and they can't learn from you."

Educators interviewed gave success stories of positive connections made with their students in foster care, and how that affected their behavior and academic success. Specifically, Teacher 2 described her techniques of making connections in that,

> I would always treat my classroom as a family and tell them we are a family and tell them that family members don't put down one another, we don't make fun of one another, we welcome each other, we are nice to one another, we help one another.

She knew that forming relationships and making intentional effort to get to know her students matter because "kids know when you care about them and when you don't." Some educators may find that it's very challenging to make connections with their students during the busy teaching day, but Teacher 2 has the perspective that, "I could build that relationship day in and day out. Six hours a day where P.E. and music they only got him every other day." Teacher 2 knew that for her foster students who had lives of constant uncertainty, in order to form

connections with them, it was important for them to feel safe in her presence and in her classroom. She stated, “As long as he was in my four walls with me in there, he was fine.” She strongly believes, “It goes a long way if you can show them you care about them and their well-being in school and out of school… it does go a long way.”

Because of the experience the foster families interviewed had with forming meaningful connections with their foster children, the foster families had some ideas for how educators can form these meaningful, positive connections with their students in foster care. When asked how teachers can help to make positive connections with their students, Foster Family 2 responded,

> Teachers [can] be really vulnerable and saying I don’t know it all, and I made a mistake and that’s okay and the kids like love that, like you’re a real person, oh okay we can connect with you because you’re safe and you’re real and authentic.

By being vulnerable and admitting that mistakes are made by adults as well, this opens up a door for teachers to relate to their foster students. Foster family 3 explains a way for educators to make connections and care for their foster students by explaining,

> A lot of them [foster children] haven’t been cared for, so they haven’t been you know, fed, and they don’t know how to bathe and they don’t know, I mean I think also explaining to them what love looks like, I think, showing them and explaining it to them because their view of normal is way different than traditional families’ view of normal.

Foster Family 2 was highly educated in Attachment Theory, and so much of her conversation and ideas were influenced by that perspective. She believes that when forming positive relationships with foster children, “It’s about healthy, secure attachment. Because it’s about meeting people’s needs, giving people a voice. Like I see you, I hear you, I value you, it’s being a good human being.” Foster family 3 also believes that educators forming meaningful

connections is so important because "the difference between [a] successful person and not can be just one person. Like one person that cares.…It doesn't have to be the parent, it can be a teacher."

Theme four: Access

Access to information regarding who is in foster care was a major theme among the participants interviewed. Most educators expressed that they were not told directly which of their students were in foster care unless they sought out the information themselves. However, two of the administrators expressed that they were aware, and it was up to them to communicate that information to the educators. Administrator 2, when asked if she knew which students were in foster care, stated that "as a counselor, I do. Now, your teachers will typically because of the way their enrollment form is because they will say foster parent on there." Administrator 2 is a school counselor at a rural school in Oklahoma, and she was zealous in her desire to provide that information to the educators in her schools, even though "all of our teachers are given access to all of [their] students." This particular rural school had a very thorough and efficient system of communicating information on their students in that "their [the students'] cumulative file—when we get them—are passed to counselor, principal, assistant principal, and classroom teacher." This, however, is a school-specific method. Administrator 1 demonstrated a different perspective and experience. She expressed frustration with not knowing which students are in foster care, stating, "They [foster families and DHS] just don't share that information with us." When questioned as to what some of her challenges were in working with children in foster care, her response was "not knowing which ones maybe are and then finding that out." She even went so far as to say, "There's actually probably kids in our school that I don't even know are in foster

care." Administrator 3 stated that in her school, "Teachers have that access too, they just have to seek it out for themselves."

A similar thread emerged among the teachers' responses to this theme in that they expressed other faculty, such as the counselors, were the ones who were supposed to communicate to them who was in foster care. Foster Family 1, who is also a special education teacher in Oklahoma, reinforced the idea that educators are often unaware of who is in foster care when she shared, "Sometimes we don't even know that these kids are in foster care. I get to find out because they have IEP meetings that I'm a part of." It appears from the data that there is no consistent method regarding which educators are told directly and immediately which of their students are in foster care. Statements from educators such as Foster Family 1 reinforce this by saying, "it's up to the counselor to share with the teacher," and from Teacher 2, "We're not told they're in foster care." Teacher 3 also expressed her confusion if a particular student in her classroom was in foster care, so she sought out that information from the counselor at her school herself, saying, "I had to go seek it out first… I had to go ask the counselor." She expressed her frustration at having to seek it out herself, saying, "I felt kind of like, somebody should have told me this before I had to go find out for myself."

It appeared throughout the interviews that the educators were unsure of who was required to give them this information. Teacher 3 posed the question of who is required to tell the educators that information by asking directly, "Who should tell you that?" When asking Administrator 2 why it may be that some teachers are unaware of their students who are in foster care, she responded,

> Teachers—in any school—can come and look in their kids' cumulative file. Every child in your district has a cumulative file, and any teacher in any building can come look for

it. It may be that some schools keep them locked up and don't share them readily like we do.

Teacher 1, who lives in and teaches in a rural community, stated that the foster parents usually let her know which students are in foster care.

Sub-theme one: Trauma

Almost every person interviewed discussed the trauma that a child in foster care has been through, and how that may manifest in the classroom. Some administrators and educators interviewed were trained and educated on trauma and its effects, while others were not. Administrator 1 expressed incredulity at the fact that some teachers, when experiencing behavioral challenges from a foster student who has experienced trauma, are "expecting him to come in and just be a student." Because of how strongly she feels that educators should be trained on trauma, she also stated that she has taken matters into her own hands and has contributed to their school being a trauma-informed school. Administrator 2, when discussing how foster students end up in the foster care system in general, knows that these foster children are in state custody for a reason. She states, "There's a reason they're there. And they've been through most of us as adults have gone through." She discussed how a DHS worker had previously come into her school to showed herself and her coworkers the reality of what their foster students may have been through. The caseworker accomplished this by showing them pictures and cases of real situations in which children were removed. She recounts one such experience, "The rafters were open in the kitchen, water was leaking through, um, there were dead animals on the floor, there were maggots in the refrigerator in the food, um, there was no running water." She recounts another story told to her by the caseworker, "The police have to come and wipe down their [foster children's] clothes because they have bugs all over them.

Well, then you know the kids have had bugs all over them." Administrator 3, when discussing the uncertainty and inconsistent lives of foster children, stated,

> They don't know where they're going day to day, and they're told the day of, you know, go pack your bag and they literally come to you with their stuff in a plastic bag. Like they show up with plastic bags with holes.

She also brought up the point that with all the trauma that foster kids have been through, "school is their safe place." She believes that trauma is "a true health crisis," and that all stakeholders in the foster care system should be educated and working to meet the needs of foster children.

Educators often are frequent recipients of the ways that trauma manifests itself with students in the classroom. Teacher 1 shared her personal experience with one of her students who had confided in her, "When their foster family ate dinner, they had their own children, the foster mom and dad and their children would sit at the big table. And then the foster kids… there were three little boys that were brothers. They had to sit at a different table." In a typical day as a teacher, it might be challenging to remember that some students don't have typically-occurring familial experiences, even at home, because for that particular student,

> That obviously made an impression on him because he told his teacher when they were talking about you know, you know something like when you're eating dinner at night and he was like well we don't sit at the table. Like that's for their family. We sit at our own table.

Foster families also have experiences in dealing with the trauma of their foster children. Foster family 1, who is very experienced in the foster care system, stated that it is "very common to have neglected kids and kids that have issues." Foster family 2 told the story of her now-

adopted son, at the time when he was her foster child, "14 people before me did not keep him in the home. So, you know what I'm saying he had 14 placements between the ages of 3 and 10, so he just he told me I don't like people." She discussed how the schools had failed her students largely due to their misunderstanding of trauma and how to handle it well. She told a story of her son experiencing the effects of trauma at school. He was "in a classroom and [he would] hear something outside and be like (gasp), like because his amygdala was on fire, like he was always trying to think like am I safe? Am I safe? Am I safe?" Her son's thoughts at school were frequently riddled with thoughts if he was safe, and this has the very strong potential to inhibit any academic learning that may occur. When discussing whether educators at her son's school understood trauma, she stated, "They [teachers] did not understand trauma, and so they would provoke, provoke, provoke, and so he would get more and more fearful and sad." She expressed how hard it is for foster students to behave in the calm manner that their teachers perhaps desire and expect because they're constantly thinking about "danger, and food, and fighting, and drugs. Yeah, everything. Danger, danger, danger. Fear, fear, fear."

Foster family 3 discussed, "Teachers don't understand the trauma a lot of times," and that when interacting with foster children, "you have to listen to them talk about their trauma," and that can be challenging. She also discussed how trauma can be generational, stating "I think in a lot of fostering situations it's generational. Generation after generation after generation. So they don't really… they're just doing what was done to them, so at some point in time you have to break that." Foster Family 3 finished by stating, "Almost all foster kids have had trauma. Even just being removed from their parents is trauma." Teacher 2 shared the story of one her foster students and how he "was in the 29th foster home" when he was only in fifth grade.

Understanding that many times foster children are the recipients of abuse, neglect, and possible multiple placements, it is unsurprising to consider that they may be suffering from trauma.

Sub-theme two: Trauma-Induced Behavior

Because many foster children are removed from their homes due to uncertain and/or undesirable circumstances, there are often trauma-induced behavioral challenges linked with them. The theme of behavioral challenges and how educators, administrators, and foster families dealt with these challenges came up frequently in this study. Trauma often manifests itself through behavioral challenges, and so it is easy for educators and administrators to see the trauma as a behavioral challenge that needs to be eliminated. Foster family 1 describes that for some foster children, the trauma that they've experienced can manifest itself in extreme behaviors in the classroom. She explains that for so many foster children, their lives are uncertain and often chaotic, then "they get to the classroom and it's like oh I'm going to make a decision and I'm going to go under this desk and screw that teacher. I don't care what she wants, I'm going to be under his desk and I'm controlling what's going on with me." Teacher 1 shared some stories of behaviors with her foster students. She describes a particular foster student who exhibited some extreme behaviors in the classroom: "he and his behavior was just outrageous. I mean he would throw chairs at me, throw desks. He, he just didn't know what to do. He was like a feral child. I mean he just didn't know how to react to anything."

Administrator 2 recounts a story in which she "had one student last year that I would have never guessed in a million years um, I would have never seen the behavior coming, but 100% shut down on the playground, um, so much so we ended up calling mom and I think we ended up calling police." Some challenging behaviors exhibited by foster children have the potential to be extreme, while others are more mild. Foster Family 1 shared a story of her foster

children exhibiting some extreme behaviors. She recounts: “I’ve had several foster kids that have slept under the bed instead of on top of the bed… When you sleep under the bed towards the wall it’s hard for an adult to grab you and get you out.”

Foster family 1 describes how she believes educators and administrators need to be “trying to be understanding about some of their [foster students], some of their defense mechanisms,” instead of seeing it as a behavioral problem that needs to be extinguished. Foster family 2 discusses how for her foster children, the school misidentified the trauma as simple behavioral problems. She continues to explain that in this area, “The schools failed… almost every one of my kids.” She shared that when her foster children were exhibiting behavioral challenges at school, “It was all about the behavior and trying to extinguish it and using really punitive uh, harsh, um distancing, um techniques to get kids to fall back in line.” When asked what sort of techniques the educators and administrators at their school used, she responded with, “Lots of shaming techniques, so I’m going to separate you from the class, I’m going to take away your recess, I’m going to send you out in to the hall, a lot of separating and a lot of shaming.” She expressed how this kind of treatment and guidance was not at all what her foster children needed, as they had already had many shaming techniques used on them before they were removed from their homes. She pleads, “They already come from a shame core that’s so big we need to be loving them well so that they can heal from that.”

Administrator 3 expressed why she believes that foster children have behavioral problems. She believes it’s because, “Lots of these kids unfortunately have a lot of baggage that’s not always good to put with other kids.” Administrator 2 believes that it’s because, “There’s trauma, trauma, trauma, and we’re not doing anything. But you expect them to come to school and behave.” Foster Family 1 explains that she believes more understanding needs to be

given to foster children because, “They’re a product of their environment.” Pertaining to the negative behavior exhibited by many foster children, she said, “Often times it’s, it’s the old thing: I’d rather have negative attention than no attention at all.”

Sub-theme three: Services

Services such as therapy, counseling, transportation to schools, and many more was a theme that emerged throughout the data, specifically, their availability to foster students and a lack of knowledge on how to receive them. It emerged that many foster students were not receiving the services they needed, and that foster families were unaware of the services made available to them from the schools. Services are important because without them, as Administrator 2 states, “They [foster students] can’t do that [think, process and study] unless they have additional assistance.”

The foster families interviewed revealed their frustration in how they felt as if they weren’t informed properly on what services were available to their foster kids and how to access them, both from caseworkers and the schools. Specifically, Foster Family 1 shared that along with parenting her foster children and working with their emotional needs, “that was a big part of my job too was getting them services that I thought they needed.” She continued to share that she only knew about advocating for services at the school because she worked for the school as a special education teacher. With her position, she knew what she could access and advocate for. Foster Family 3 shared that she felt very unsupported by the school system when they first started fostering kids because she knew,

> Nothing about advocating at school, or that you need… that you could go get counseling for your kids, or the services that you could get, none of that. We were not equipped. But at the beginning no, I mean we didn’t have any—services, nothing. I mean we knew that

> trauma caused problems, and we knew some things, but we really didn't know how to be supportive. So I'd say the worst thing was we didn't know what services were available.

She shared her gratefulness and relief in how a teacher at their school came to the rescue and taught her about advocating for services at the school for their children, and that "now we're getting all the support we need because we threw a fit."

Throughout the interviews, it appeared that there was some confusion as to whom was required to educate foster families, administrators, and educators as to what services were offered for foster students, and what services were available. Administrator 2 shared that one of her positions in the school was a foster care coordinator, and that every school should have a foster care coordinator. She revealed that her primary job is to "help coordinate and work with the foster family." She continued to share that one of the services provided to foster students is that of transportation. Specifically, when foster children move out of their previous district, they can still come back to their original school and aren't required to change schools, but, as Administrator 2 pointed out, "most parents don't know that." When asked why that might be, she responded with, "It's probably not shared, because I think it may even be that we have to provide transportation." Teacher 2 expressed her confusion in not knowing whether it was mandated by DHS for certain services to be provided for foster students. She shared,

> No matter what, I think there needs to be a child therapist that meets with them every so often. To let them talk or whatever, but I mean I know they have that within the DHS system, but I don't know if it's utilized? Or mandated?"

Administrator 3 expressed how difficult it can be for foster children to receive services they might need because foster parents may not know how they're going to get those services. She describes that,

> It's not an easy process to get them set up with a counselor and to get true therapy… I'm just like why are these kids not in therapy? I've had that conversation a lot with DHS workers, like why are they not in true therapy?

Teacher 2 made a firm point in stressing to the author that, for foster students, "while they are in foster care, they should go to monthly mandated meetings or whatever. And not 15 in a class…Put that somewhere in your paper."

Receiving services for foster children was not only a major theme, but one filled with emotion when these children finally received the help that they needed. When sharing her successes with her foster students, Teacher 3 shared that for one of her more challenging students, "They [foster parents] knew he [foster student] had issues and they did have him in counseling and support." Administrator 2 shared that for foster students, "being able to get them the counseling help they need, or know they're working with a counselor and being able to work with those families is all we can do." She continues, "When they [foster students] finally get the help they need—you know, what a relief for them."

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings, discussion, and implications

Three research questions were proposed in order to guide the direction of the study. These questions were answered through the responses of the administrators, educators, and foster families interviewed. The questions and their answers are as follows:

Research question 1: What are early childhood educators' attitudes, biases, challenges, successes, level of responsiveness, and motivation toward improving relationships with students in state custody?

Early childhood educators' attitudes toward improving relationships with students in state custody was overall positive. Each educator expressed interest in and demonstrated enthusiasm towards building more positive relationships with students in foster care. The theme of connections, the process of forming them and the desire to continue to form them, played a primary role in answering this research question. Administrator 2 exclaims, "I love seeing when kids are successful, and when kids are happy." Educators expressed that while in the classroom, they treat their students like they treat every other student, and do not find it burdensome to have

foster students in their classrooms. Teacher 3 explains that her attitude towards her students in her classroom is that she's "glad that I can be there for them during that transition time, but it's also terribly heartbreaking when they do find out that they're moving."

Research question 2: What potential factors impact teacher-student relationships with students in state custody?

The theme of access and lack thereof concerning which students are in foster care potentially impacts the teacher-student relationship with students in state custody. Educators expressed that they often are unaware of which students in their classroom are in state custody, and that this has potential to hinder their relationships. The educators explained that this is difficult because children that have behavioral challenges in the classroom are often dismissed as simply acting inappropriately and are disciplined as such. Educators expressed that if they were privy to information on which students were in state custody, they would take their background and potential trauma into consideration. Teacher 2 discussed that even though the behaviors of some of her foster students might be challenging to handle, she believes that "the one that I know that's been uprooted? I'll give him or her a little more lenience."

The lack of forming strong connections between administrators and educators with their students in state custody also has the potential to impact the teacher-student relationship with students in state custody. If educators and administrators do not personally know their students and what is going on in their lives, it is difficult to practice empathy and know how to support them. Lack of knowledge and training on trauma and its impacts also potentially affects the teacher-student relationship with children in foster care by making it difficult for educators and administrators to understand some of the trauma-induced behaviors exhibited by their students who are in foster care.

Research question 3: How do early childhood educators' attitudes toward students in state custody affect their perception of the teacher-student relationships?

Because educators' attitudes towards their students in state custody were positive and laced with compassion, they viewed the teacher-student relationship as one of advocacy and guidance. Each of them demonstrated that they believe building connections is of the utmost importance in the teacher-student relationship. Administrator 2 states that this can be accomplished by,

> Finding positive ways to build one on one getting to know them—whether that's through an interest inventory that you send out to all of your kids to get to know them better, but building relationships is going to be by far the most important.

With training and education on how to more effectively build connections with students in foster care, the positive attitudes of educators towards their students in foster care can only more positively affect their perception of the teacher-student relationship. Collaboration with other educators in exchanging ideas on how to build connections will further enhance the teacher-student relationship.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

This study interviewed administrators, foster families, and educators from three different geographical areas: rural, urban, and suburban, who are major stakeholders in the foster care system. This allowed for multiple perspectives and experiences to be analyzed. The educators interviewed were highly qualified and experienced in their educational careers. The administrators interviewed were very knowledgeable about trauma, who their foster students were, and were passionate about meeting their needs. The foster families interviewed also were very passionate about meeting the needs of their foster children and were strong advocates for them who sought out the information and education necessary to help them be the best that they

could be. These strengths provide a glimpse into the field of the stakeholders in the foster care system who strive to build better lives for their children in foster care, and provide many different perspectives and experiences to draw conclusions upon.

Limitations

One limitation was that only a total of nine individuals were interviewed: three educators, three administrators, and three foster families. Another limitation for this research was that all the families interviewed were very passionate about their foster children, and finding them the services and resources they needed to help them thrive. However, no families that were perhaps fostering for financial benefit or families that were less than enthusiastic about fostering were interviewed. This limitation applies to educators and administrators as well. All educators and administrators interviewed were experienced and successful in their educational careers and were passionate about meeting the needs of their students. No educators or administrators were interviewed who were inexperienced or alternatively qualified to be in the educational field.

Through the process of analyzing the data, the author realized that the missing voice in this research is the DHS caseworker, who could have potentially provided a different perspective. Caseworkers could have addressed the reasoning for lack of connections, addressed the shortage of foster homes and caseworkers, the lack of collaboration between caseworkers and educators, foster families, and administrators.

Implications for Research, Theory, and Practice

Theory

The theories used as the foundation for this study, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory and Attachment Theory, continued to be supported throughout the study and also emerged through the themes.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory was discussed for this study in that every system in the child's life affects the other systems. Specifically, for a foster child, the microsystem—which involves the child's interpersonal relationships—directly affects the child's mesosystem. The mesosystem, according to Couchenour and Chrisman, is the system that most directly influences the development of the child (2014). Because of the trauma and hardship that the foster child has likely been through, experiences with interpersonal relationships from the past can directly influence relationships in the present. Teacher 1 demonstrates this in a story of one of her foster students who "had been abused, he'd been neglected. Um, he was sitting at a table and a pencil rolled off. When I went to catch it he flinched and went down under his desk like I was going to hit him." This student's instinctual reaction was to flinch and protect himself from his educator because of experiences he'd had in interpersonal relationships in the past.

This study also expressed that there is a very real need to have all stakeholders involved in the foster care system such as caseworkers, foster families, educators, administrators, therapists, and counselors to have a firm understanding of relationships in that particular system. Foster family 2 expressed this need when she stated, "We need to relearn how to have good relationships with people and how to connect." When positive relationships are forged, communication is stronger.

Attachment Theory emerged through many of the interviewees expressing the need for connections, as well as the systematic way that attachments are formed. Foster family 3 expressed this need for connections when she said that, concerning connecting with foster children, "you have to listen to them… you have to try and also understand where they're coming from, too. Even though you're trying to get them to understand you, you have to understand them, too." Without these connections being formed, foster students are at risk for a

decrease in self-esteem and self-confidence as well as a lack of trust in other relationships, believing that people involved in their interpersonal relationships are uncaring and unresponsive (Blakely & Dziadosz, 2015). To ensure this doesn't occur, all stakeholders involved in the foster system should strive for positive connections with their children who are in foster care. This is of the utmost importance and simply cannot be left to chance.

Research

This research indicates a need for future research for collaboration between stakeholders in the foster care system, thorough training for foster families and educators, access to information on who is in the foster care system for educators and administrators, building positive connections between foster children and educators, teachers, and administrators. Further research is needed to confirm if more educators desire training in how to work with children in foster care. The sub-themes that emerged also indicate further research needed for educators and administrators understanding trauma and how it affects the child's life, why behavioral challenges can occur with foster students and how to work with them, and what services are available for foster children and foster families and how to access them.

Practice

The themes emerged from this study are indicative of the kinds of practices that can be gleaned from the findings. Collaboration between educators, administrators, foster families, and caseworkers is encouraged. Opening the lines of communication between these stakeholders is necessary to collaboration. Specifically, these groups communicating with one another on how to best meet the needs of their children in foster care, and then creating a plan on how to accomplish that goal. While all of this occurs, the lines of communication should be open and safely used to express ideas and concerns for how to make this plan.

Training as a theme indicated that there is a need for educators to participate in more frequent and thorough training on how to meet the needs of their students in foster care, as well as how to understand trauma and the effects that it has cognitively and behaviorally for foster children. One way to accomplish this, as Foster Family 1 suggested, was to use mandatory professional development hours to participate in this training. Or, as Teacher 2 suggested, invite caseworkers into the educators' world to educate them on ways that they can meet the needs of their foster students. Teacher 3 also suggested that a caseworker come to the school and answer questions that educators may have concerning their children in foster care.

The practice of building connections between educators, foster families, administrators, and foster children was also a major theme that emerged. Building meaningful, positive connections can be accomplished not only by educating each of these stakeholders about the importance of building these connections, but also by teaching them how to do so. Administrator 1 expressed that one way in which she accomplishes this is by making them feel important and valued by stating that she "greet[s] them every morning… say hi to them and hug them." Making intentional time throughout the day to not only check in with the students and see how they are, but to really listen to them and ask meaningful questions. Administrator 2 puts it simply: "you just love them."

Addressing behavioral challenges in the classroom is a practice which also emerged as a theme. Educators can take specific action to encourage their students in how to handle their emotions. Administrator 1 suggested actions such as "set[ting] up things within the classroom where they regulate their feelings," and "teach[ing] them how to regulate those feelings." By helping children with behavioral challenges learn to regulate their feelings, educators are giving them the tools they will need presently and later in life to begin to learn how to self-regulate.

Understanding trauma and the role that it plays in contributing towards challenging behavior is also important. Educators, administrators, and foster families can be further educated on trauma and its effects by attending seminars, providing training during professional development days, and joining foster family support groups online.

Needing more information regarding services available to foster children was also a necessary practice and theme. Caseworkers have the opportunity to communicate with foster families, educators, and administrators about the amount, quality, and level of need of particular services available to children in foster care, and how to access those services.

The practice of providing consistent access to information on which students are in foster care was also a theme. Many educators feel as if they should know this information. Teacher 3 expressed that she believes knowing which students are in foster care is important, stating, "I felt like that was something I needed to know." One way in which to address this need is for administrators to ensure that their educators are being notified as soon as possible which of their students are in foster care. Concerning this topic and how to improve upon it, Teacher 2 reinforces this idea by suggesting "an email or something should be sent from the office saying so and so your new student is in foster care. Because it does have an impact on how that kid is interacting with others. Because a lot of them have safeguards put into place," and "letting teachers know right at the beginning if they're foster students or not."

Final thoughts

This study was extremely revealing regarding the potential improvements needed between administrators, educators, foster families, and DHS caseworkers. There are many implications and actions to be taken in the future for research, for theory, and for practice. There are also many positive aspects in the interviews to be acknowledged as educators, administrators,

and foster families recounted multiple success stories in supporting and connecting with their children in foster care.

One of the major points in this study was that children in foster care must be sought after as far as being supported. They are products of their environment, and often fall through the metaphorical cracks in the foster care system. As Administrator 1 says, "These kids are used to hopelessness…they know how to live through adversity. They know how to be survivors." The goal should not be to simply help children in foster care be survivors, but to excel at the life that they are given. They deserve compassion, love, empathy, and care. They do not deserve this because they behave perfectly, but because they are humans with feelings, emotions, memories, trauma, baggage, and are more than capable of love. Children often love unconditionally, and as Foster Family 1 says, "No matter what has happened to kids they—somewhere in them they love their parents." They desire and deserve to be loved back with this unconditional love, and despite the experiences and setbacks that may have occurred, Foster Family 1 states, "Everybody can reach their full potential, no matter what your disability is."

There is much progress to be made in this area, but there is hope. That hope is demonstrated in the participants interviewed for this study. There are educators who genuinely care for their students and go above and beyond to meet their needs. There are administrators who recognize the lack of training among their staff and community needed to reach their students with trauma and push to be trauma-informed schools. There are foster families who advocate strongly for their foster children and stretch themselves emotionally, physically, and mentally to meet their needs and form meaningful connections with them.

There is hope to improve collaboration. There is hope in pushing for more effective training for stakeholders in the foster care system. There is hope in opening the lines of

communication for educators to know as soon as possible which of their students are in foster care. There is hope for administrators, educators, and foster families to form positive, meaningful connections with their children in foster care. There is hope for more education and application on how to positively and effectively handle behavioral challenges and trauma, and reaching those affected by it with services such as therapy. Hope is what inspires educators, administrators, and foster families to connect with and pursue one of the most vulnerable populations: foster children. Hope is that which causes all three groups, when dreaming of making the world a better place for this vulnerable population, to say to themselves and others; “maybe someday.”

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Educators

1. Why did you decide to pursue a career in education?
2. How do you foster positive relationships with your students?
3. How do you feel about having students in the classroom who are foster children?
4. As you begin the school year, do you know which students are in foster care? If so, how? If not, do you seek that information?
5. Are other students aware of their fellow classmates who are foster children?
6. What are the interactions like between students in foster care and students who aren't?
7. What are some successes you've had with your students in foster care?
    a. How did those experiences make you feel/how did they affect you?
8. What are some challenges you've had with your student in foster care?
    a. How did those experiences make you feel/how did they affect you?
9. What specific techniques and/or practices do you implement or keep in mind when interacting with students in foster care?
10. What are some ways the relationship between educators and foster students could be improved?

11. Have you received any training to help prepare you to meet the need of children in foster care? If yes, what was it? What did you learn?
12. Do you believe additional training or knowledge would be beneficial to you to help foster positive relationships with foster students?
    a. If so, what would be beneficial?
    b. If not, why?

Administrators

1. Why did you decide to pursue a career in education?
2. How do you foster positive relationships with your students and staff?
3. How do you feel about having students in your school who are foster children?
4. As you begin a new school year, do you know which students are in foster care? If so, how? If not, do you seek that information?
5. What are the interactions like between teachers and students in foster care?
6. What are some successes you've had with your students in foster care?
    a. How did those experiences make you feel/how did they affect you?
7. What are some challenges you've had with your student in foster care?
    a. How did those experiences make you feel/how did they affect you?
8. What specific techniques and/or practices do you encourage teachers to use when they interact with their students in foster care?
9. What are some ways the relationship between educators and foster students could be improved?
10. Have you received any training to help prepare you to meet the need of children in foster care? If yes, what was it? What did you learn?

11. Do you believe additional training or knowledge would be beneficial to educators to them help foster positive relationships with foster students?
    a. If so, what would be beneficial?
    b. If not, why?

Foster Families

1. Why did you decide to pursue fostering children?
2. How do you foster positive relationships with your foster children in your home?
3. What specific techniques and/or practices do you implement or keep in mind when interacting with your children in foster care?
4. How do you feel about your foster children being in the classroom?
5. As you begin a new school year, have you felt supported by educators and administrators? If so, how? If not, do you seek that?
6. What are some successes you've had working with schools for your children in foster care?
    a. How did those experiences make you feel/how did they affect you?
7. What are some challenges working with schools you've had with your children in foster care?
    a. How did those experiences make you feel/how did they affect you?
8. What are some ways that you think the relationship between educators and foster students could be improved?
9. Have you received any training to help prepare you to meet the need of children in foster care? If yes, what was it? What did you learn?

10. Do you believe additional training or knowledge would be beneficial to educators to help foster positive relationships with foster students?
    a. If so, what would be beneficial?
    b. If not, why?
11. If you could tell a new teacher something about how to support a child in foster care, what would it be?

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	12/06/2018
Application Number:	HS-18-82
Proposal Title:	Educator's Perceptions on Forming Relationships with Students in Foster Care
Principal Investigator:	Macey Brown
Co-Investigator(s):	
Faculty Adviser:	GRETCHEN COLE LADE
Project Coordinator:	
Research Assistant(s):	
Processed as:	Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-3377, irb@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Oklahoma State University IRB

VITA

Macey Brianne Brown

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: "SEEN, HEARD, AND VALUED": EXAMINING HOW ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, AND FOSTER FAMILIES COLLABORATE TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

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