

**Being Seen: An Analysis of Fifth Grade Language Arts Textbooks' Representation of
Children Experiencing Homelessness**

by

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This dissertation was designed to explore how children who are experiencing homelessness encounter examples of their lived experience within the pages of their reading basals. The study included a comprehensive review of the literature related to the criteria used to identify families and children as homeless, as well as demographic overview of the population and the academic indicators achieved. A focus was developed to review three national textbook series, as used in the fifth grade language arts curriculum in six districts in Western Pennsylvania.

This study concentrated on reviewing the fifth grade language art textbooks from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, the American Reading Company, and McGraw Hill. Each text was analyzed to determine if it included any texts that had a person experiencing homelessness, particularly a child. If the text included a story, an in-depth analysis was completed to determine the authenticity of the portrayal. Additionally, six districts were identified that used these textbooks, and data were gathered to create a profile of each including census data, income data, and number of students experiencing homelessness.

Results from the study indicate that school leaders need to plan purposefully for the inclusion of stories, novels, and thematic studies that include characters who are experiencing homelessness and housing issues because the national textbook companies are not. Students deserve to see themselves reflected in the texts that they read and to encounter stories that inform and empower.

Finally, schools need to embrace their role as a vaccine against homelessness by proactively planning for how they will work with families who are experiencing housing instability. The work begins with admission procedures that are supportive and respectful of a family who is enrolling without secure housing. It builds with induction and professional development; teaching teachers and staff the possible signs a child is experiencing homelessness. It is reflected in the policies that enable children to receive the appropriate transportation and ensures that children have the supplies and supports they need to be successful.

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Preface

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my students, both past and those to come. You are my motivation, my purpose, and my passion.

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To my Pap, William F. Lucci, who always knew I would be a Dr.

To my sister Erin, who never stopped telling me to just get it done. To Luke who told me about a story he read in school about a kid who wanted to turn a basketball court into a garden for homeless people and to Sabina Bea who gives the best pep talks, "You got this Cici." Remember it is the hard thing that is worth doing, that I believe that you can do whatever you set your mind to accomplishing and to believe in the possibility of yet...

Finally, to my husband, Anthony, I cannot express how important your encouragement was throughout this process. Your unwavering faith in me fueled my desire to complete the process, and your confidence reassured me that I had something worth sharing.

1.0 Introduction

Each night, in cities and small towns across America, children and young adults go to sleep on benches or on the couches of friends, in abandoned buildings or in parked cars, in shelters and under bridges. According to the last complete Point-in-Time count available from January 2020, 171,574 people experienced homelessness in the United States as part of a family with at least one adult and one child under the age of 18, while approximately 34,000 people under the age of 25 experienced homelessness on their own as “unaccompanied youth” (USHUD, 2020, p. 17). Starting in 2021, in response to the COVID pandemic, communities were permitted to modify their collection practices and/or request an exception to some or all of the counting protocols for unsheltered PIT count, thus HUD only published data of sheltered homeless persons, including 131,377 persons in households with at least one adult and one child as well as 1,471 unaccompanied youth (USHUD, 2021).

While society has inconceivably come to accept homelessness in America as inevitable, those over the age of 40 grew up in a world where today’s number of youth who are experiencing homelessness would be unimaginable. Matthew Morton with Voices of Youth Count (VoYC) at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago estimates that approximately 660,000 households with 13- to 17-year-olds and 2.4 million households with 18- to 25-year-olds reported or self-reported individuals in that age range experienced homelessness in the past 12 months (Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2016, p. 5).

Youth experiencing homelessness is not only the explicit evidence of our failure as a society, but also a dire situation for the young people experiencing it. Data suggest a high risk of exposure to a range of physical and mental health problems, violence, substance use, early

pregnancy, and early death (Kidd, 2012; Morewitz, 2016). These children also experience greater mobility and chronic absenteeism than their housed peers, causing interruptions to their education and increasing their risk of dropping out (United States Department of Education, 2016). With approximately 1.3 million students experiencing homelessness enrolled in public schools every year, schools are in a unique position to both intervene in a child's life in an "upstream" attempt to prevent homelessness as well as to identify, support, and coordinate care for homeless children and their families (National Center on Homeless Education, 2021).

1.1 Statement of Problem

Public school leaders are accountable for a myriad of interconnected responsibilities. Leaders aspire to create a supportive, encouraging culture of achievement, design a rigorous and culturally relevant curriculum, ensure that teachers are proficient in their content area as well as masterful instructional leaders, and actively partner with parents and the larger community to support families and their students inside and outside of school. While important for all students, implementation of these roles allows schools to identify and better serve students in danger of or experiencing homelessness (Hallett et al., 2015).

Since the advent of state accountability procedures with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the reauthorized Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), schools must demonstrate that all students, regardless of race, socio-economic status, English learner status, or with a disability as identified in IDEA are able to demonstrate mastery on identified standards. This spotlight ensures that schools cannot hide behind "good scores," and stipulates students that are experiencing economic poverty and/or homelessness are identified and supported academically. The literature

and data reveal a gap in academic achievement between children identified as experiencing homelessness and their housed peers. School leaders must anticipate and purposefully plan for the needs of children and unaccompanied youth without a stable residence and implement practices and cultural norms that support the students' academic achievement.

1.2 Purpose of Study

The aim of this study, informed by the review of literature, was to document current trends for youth experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania and six Local Education Associations in Western Pennsylvania. Furthermore, an analysis was completed of the fifth grade adopted reading curriculum of the LEAs to identify the degree to which the lived experiences of children experiencing homelessness are represented in the textbooks, as well as the accuracy of the depiction.

1.3 Research Questions

This study reviewed and analyzed federal, state, and regional data and reports identifying students experiencing homelessness and the academic trends for identified students in Pennsylvania. In addition, the adopted fifth grade reading textbook for six Local Education Associations in the greater Pittsburgh region were analyzed for multicultural approaches specific to representation of children experiencing homelessness.

The following research questions guided data collection and analysis:

1. What conditions does an individual have to experience in order to be identified as experiencing homelessness?
2. What are the demographic indicators for children experiencing homelessness in the sample schools?
3. How are children experiencing homelessness represented in the fifth grade adopted reading textbooks in the identified school districts?

The sub-questions are:

- a. What genres are included in the literature depicting youth experiencing homelessness?
- b. Based on insights gleaned during the literature review and professional experience working with the population, does the text accurately reflect lived experiences in terms of setting, character portrayal, and events?
- c. Based on insights gleaned during the literature review and professional experience working with the population, does the text perpetuate or rely on stereotypes, generalizations, or misrepresentation?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Since the 1960s, various approaches have been used to reform curriculum so that schools have the potential to transform and prepare all students to learn and function effectively (Banks & Banks, 1995). Banks (1996) identified five dimensions of multicultural education: (a) content integration, (b) knowledge construction process, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) an equity pedagogy and (e) and empowering school culture (p. 69). This study is informed by Banks' work in content

integration which deals with the “extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts, principles, generalizations and theories in their subject area or discipline” (p. 337) and occurs in four distinct levels: contribution, additive, transformation, and social action (Banks, 1999).

In the contribution approach, content transformation is limited to a focus on “heroes and holidays,” such as Cinco de Mayo celebrations, studying the speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, and putting up pictures of famous women during Women’s History Week (Banks, 1999, p. 30). While the contribution approach is the easiest approach for schools to use to integrate their curriculum, it has several limitations. This approach has students experience these cultures as additions to the curriculum rather than integral parts of the development of our nation. Teaching ethnic studies through the use of heroes, holidays, and contributions also tends to gloss over important concepts of victimization and oppression and the groups’ struggles against racism and poverty as they seek to obtain power and recognition (Banks, 1998).

In the ethnic additive approach, ethnic content, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing the nature or structure of the mainstream curriculum. For example, during the study of World War II, a teacher would show a video clip of Japanese internment. However, the perspective would still be from the mainstream culture not those of the Japanese Americans who were removed from their communities and placed within the camps. The additive approach allows teachers to include ethnic content into the curriculum without undertaking the substantial effort of a more radical curriculum revision effort that would integrate it with ethnic content, perspectives, and frames of reference while also failing to help students view our communities and culture from diverse perspectives and better understand the manner in which the

histories and cultures of our nation's diverse ethnic and cultural groups are inextricably intertwined (Banks, 1998).

With a transformative approach, no longer are lists of ethnic heroes and contributions added to the curriculum as carve-outs, but rather various perspectives, frames of reference, and content are directly infused into the curriculum to extend students' understandings of the nature, development, and complexity of U.S. society (Banks, 1999). This approach calls on teachers to focus on how U.S. culture and society emerged from a "complex synthesis and interaction of the diverse cultural elements that originated within the various cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious group that make up American society" (Banks, 1999, p. 75).

In the final approach of the framework, decision making and social action, teachers include all the elements of the transformation approach and require students to make personal decisions and take action related to the concept, issue, or problem they have studied in the unit. Knowledge is an essential part of our children's education; yet in isolation it will not help students to develop empathy or a commitment to a more democratic and just society (Banks, 1999). Social action calls for students to take action – to gather data, analyze values and beliefs, identify alternative courses of action, and finally decide what, if any, actions they want to take. It empowers students to take ownership of their own learning and their role in their community. For example, in a thematic unit focusing on water, students can identify a water related issue in their community, brainstorm actions to take, and mobilize their classroom to take action such as creating a rain garden to collect run off water or sample bodies of water in the community to look for evidence of contamination.

1.5 Significance of the Study

After five years of teaching high school English, I entered the world of school leadership and found my passion. I went into education, not just because I loved great books and teaching students how to write well, but because I believe that education is the linchpin in addressing generational poverty and that schools should be at the heart of community reform. Leading urban schools allowed me to do both. Our learning teams created collaborative time for teachers to meet specifically about student progress and plan interventions. Social justice was at the heart of our teaching, data teams were developed to break down standards and design benchmark assessments, and we focused on supporting students emotionally by creating daily advisories, peer mentorship programs, and highlighting positive ways to deepen relationships with students. While being a high school principal gave me the responsibility of ensuring that all children were learning at high levels and that they were prepared to be successful in both college and a career, it did not come with the power necessary to make the sweeping types of changes necessary to achieve the aforementioned tasks.

Later, as I expanded my leadership skills to consult for non-profits, I was faced with creating systems to assist young adults who were experiencing homelessness and addiction to find a path to recovery and self-sufficiency. Many of these individuals shared characteristics with my former students: lack of academic success, broken homes, and a history of trauma. Similarly, our team has focused on higher expectations for clients, relationship building, and more intense substance use treatment counseling. Yet as a small behavioral health unit we still struggled to meet all the needs of our clients.

In both settings, I was able to reconceptualize the mandates of accountability from NCLB / ESSA and the McKinney-Vento Act as a catalyst for improving teaching and learning to support

the achievement of all children. We “reculturated” our school, developing new norms, beliefs, and values, placed a focus on relationships, and ensured that all students were able to “see” themselves in the literature and content taught (Banks & McGee Banks, 2010; Fullan, 2001; Rorrer & Skra, 2005, p. 57). Unfortunately, in each case, we were not able to make the comprehensive impact we were seeking because we were still working in isolation. Our individual schools did not have the political power to address the larger district’s academic program or to change how we worked with community partners, thus limiting our influence on academic interventions.

My review of the literature on children experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied youth points to factors that contribute to students’ homeless status and lack of achievement. This study reviewed and analyzed federal, state, and regional data and reports, identifying students who are homeless and the academic trends for identified students in Pennsylvania and explored how these students encounter representation of their experiences in the texts they read in school, in order to provide school leaders with information that can better inform their curricular practices and support youth who were experiencing homelessness.

1.6 Background of the Problem

While families without homes and orphaned children have existed throughout human history, in America, homelessness among families emerged as a health and human service issue in the 1980s in numbers only previously seen during the Great Depression. Characterized by a plethora of political and socioeconomic factors including a decrease in low-cost housing, a recession, and a drastic reduction in social welfare and educational programs resulted in a number of people experiencing economic poverty (Grant et al., 2013; United States Interagency Council

on Homelessness, 2015; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Robertson & Greenblatt, 1992). As numbers exploded, the homeless became more visible and the demographic began to shift from primarily single adult men to women accompanied by children.

In decades past, the homeless were essentially a sheltered population. In other words, people who experienced homelessness were able to and/or chose to utilize emergency shelters. Now a growing majority were living on the streets with “skid row” and tent encampments springing up in cities and towns alike. Historically, homeless men were blamed for their homelessness, attributed to flaws in their character and/or substance abuse (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). As the population of the streets has become “democratized,” more attention was given to the role of economic and housing trends and government policy (Hombs, 2001, p. 10). By 1993, 43% of homeless people were families with children and 30% of the total number of people who were homeless were children (Grant et al., 2013). This increase resulted in the creation of the McKinney-Vento Act in 1987 which required state and local educational agencies to review and revise, if necessary, policies and procedures that removed barriers to a high-quality education for homeless children and youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). To date, families with children remain one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population (USHUD, 2020; Nath & Hallett, 2015).

1.7 Glossary of Key Terms

A variety of terms and acronyms are used when discussing homelessness, and more specifically, youth who are experiencing homelessness. Terms are significant to this study as

accurate depiction within texts of the settings, events, and characters is critical to the overall efficacy of the texts' inclusion in the curriculum.

In this study, terms are used as defined when referencing a specific agency's nomenclature. In practice, the author references individuals as "experiencing homelessness" or having had "lived experienced." Table 1 defines key terms and acronyms used in this study. As definitions can vary based on the agency defining it, where appropriate, attribution has been given to the specific agency.

Table 1. Definition of Key Terms

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Bridge housing | Transitional housing facility designed to provide housing and appropriate supportive services to homeless people to facilitate movement to independent living within one year. People utilizing bridge housing are still considered to be homeless (Allegheny County Department of Human Services, 2020, p. 2). |
| Chronically homeless individual | Refers to an individual with a disability who has been continuously homeless for one year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years where the combined length of time homeless on those occasions is at least 12 months (USHUD, 2020, p. 2). |
| Chronically homeless people in families | Refers to people in families in which the head of household has a disability and who has been continuously homeless for one year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years where the combined length of time homeless on those occasions is at least 12 months (USHUD, 2020, p. 2). |
| Continuums of care (CoC) | Local planning committees responsible for coordinating the full range of homeless services in a geographic area (USHUD, 2020, p. 2). |
| Couch surfing | Moving from one temporary living arrangement to another without having a secure place to be (Chapin Hall, 2019, p. 2). |
| Doubling up | Living with a family, not necessarily your own, in order to have a place to stay or numerous families living in a living space that exceeds the expected number of inhabitants (National Center for Homeless Education, 2022). |
| Emergency shelter | Facility with overnight sleeping accommodations. People utilizing emergency shelters are considered to be homeless (USHUD, 2020, p. 2). |
| Housing inventory count | Inventory of beds produced by each CoC available for people who are experiencing or leaving homelessness (USHUD, 2020, p. 2). |
| Parenting youth household | People who are under the age of 25 who are the parents or legal guardians of one or more children (under the age of 18) (USHUD, 2020, p. 2). |
| Permanent supportive housing (PSH) | Combines housing with intensive services for individuals with one or more chronic disabling conditions. There is no limit on the amount of time a person can stay in a PSH facility as long as they pay their portion of the rent (determined by a sliding scale not to exceed 30% of their income) and follow the rules of the lease. People living in permanent supportive housing are not considered to be homeless (USHUD, 2020, p. 2). |
| Point-in-time counts | Unduplicated one-night estimates of both sheltered and unsheltered homeless populations required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and conducted by CoCs nationwide during the last 10 days of January (USHUD, 2020, p. 2). |
| Rapid re-housing | Programs designed to assist individuals and/or families who are experiencing homelessness to move as quickly as possible into permanent housing. People utilizing rapid re-housing services are not considered to be homeless. |

1.8 Summary

Public school leaders are accountable for a myriad of interconnected responsibilities. Leaders strive to create a supportive, encouraging culture of achievement, design a rigorous and culturally relevant curriculum, ensure that teachers are proficient in their content area, as well as masterful instructional leaders and actively partner with parents and the larger community to support families and their students inside and outside of school. While important for all students, masterful implementation of these roles allows schools to identify and better serve students in danger of or experiencing homelessness (Hallett et al., 2015).

This study reviewed and analyzed federal, state, and regional data and reports identifying students experiencing homelessness and the academic trends for identified students in Pennsylvania. In addition, the adopted fifth grade reading textbook for six Local Education Associations in the greater Pittsburgh region were analyzed for multicultural approaches specific to representation of children experiencing homelessness.

Chapter Two presents a review of literature that begins with defining homelessness as it pertains to families experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied youth. Federal and state reports were reviewed to capture the population, and data were presented on the educational attainment of students identified through the McKinney-Vento Act as homeless.

Chapter Three offers a description of the study analyzing six Local Education Associations' adopted fifth grade reading textbooks for their representation of children and/or families experiencing homelessness. The study explored the genres including the texts' depiction of lived experiences in terms of setting, character portrayal, and events, and explored if the text perpetuated or relied on stereotypes, generalizations, or misrepresentation.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the analysis of the three fifth grade reading textbooks for representation of children and/or families experiencing homelessness.

Chapter Five offers analysis and discussion regarding the findings, strengths, and limitations of the study design and recommendations for future study.

2.0 Review of the Literature

In the following sections, literature will be reviewed to explore the lived experiences of children and youth and the impact these experiences with homelessness have on their educational lives. This includes how homelessness is defined, the scope of the population, and the experiences of children and unaccompanied youth in schools.

2.1 Defining Homelessness

Definitions are important, if for no other reason than they identify who is eligible to receive services. Yet, as a collective we struggle to accurately characterize young people whose “unstable and impoverished living circumstances have left them living on or spending large amounts of time on the streets or who are otherwise disengaged from social institutions and ways and places of living that are congruent with mainstream cultural values” (Kidd, 2012, p. 249). Struggling to identify these children is to define how society has failed. When children lack a stable, safe place to live, our schools, churches, and social service agencies – the entire social service safety net – has failed. Despite our discomfort, definitions allow schools and communities to provide resources. From a research perspective it identifies who could be counted and from a policy perspective it allows for planning and relevant policies (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

The overarching definition of a homeless person or individual is from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (2020) and includes the following description for category one:

An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:

- Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation;
- Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs);
- Is exiting an institution where s(he) has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.

The Department also provides a description of individuals or families in imminent risk of homelessness (category two), if the nighttime residence will be lost within 14 days, no subsequent residence has been identified and the individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing.

Reauthorized in 2015 by Title IX, Part A, of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is the primary federal legislation that provides for the education of homeless children and youth. The act is designed to ensure that homeless children and youth have the same access to a free and appropriate public education, including pre-school, as other children do. Section 725 (2) of the McKinney-Vento Act differs slightly in its definition of homeless children and youth, specifically by addressing “doubling up” and “couch surfing”:

Homeless children and youths are individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The term includes—

Children and youths who are:

- sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as “doubled-up”);
- living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- living in emergency or transitional shelters; or
- abandoned in hospitals;

Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;

Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above. (2016)

For unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age the Department of Housing and Urban Development acknowledges the differences found across various federal statutes and departments and casts a broader net in defining category three of homelessness:

Unaccompanied youth, under the age of 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who:

Appendix 1.1 Are defined as homeless under the other listed federal statutes;

Appendix 1.2 Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing during the 60 days prior to the homeless assistance application;

Appendix 1.3 Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during the preceding 60 days; and

Appendix 1.4 Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to special needs or barriers (for example, an individual with a substance use issue or chronic untreated mental health diagnosis may be resistant/unable to comply with the terms of the housing and/or rental agreement).

Unaccompanied youth are sometimes more narrowly defined by researchers based on the reasons they became homeless. For example, McCaskill et al. define runaways as young people “who leave home for at least 24 hours without their parents’ permission and whose parents do not know their whereabouts” (1998). Throwaway youth are children who have been told to leave home and are not permitted to return (Hallet, 2007) and “system kids” are adolescents who have been in and out of government systems such as juvenile justice and foster care and become homeless when their placement becomes problematic or they “age out” of the system (Murphy & Tobin, 2011, p. 16).

2.2 Capturing the Population

While we struggle to define it, there is consensus in Western culture that these young people represent a distinct population, and that services and programs need to be directed towards serving their needs. The Chapin Hall-based Voices of Young Count, a public-private partnership designed to generate a more “complete understanding of youth homelessness in America by combining a unique blend of scientific research and policy expertise while partnering with youth who have experienced homelessness” (Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2016) have stated the importance of being able to count and characterize the population consistently over time. Yet documenting homeless children and youth and unaccompanied youth has remained difficult.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development has required a Point-In-Time (PIT) count of homeless individuals on a single night, during the last ten days of January since 2005 for all communities who receive funds to cover homeless services. While PIT counts have always included a distinct count of minors, both unaccompanied and as members of families, it was not until 2013 that a separate count of 18- to 24-year-olds was added (2020). A reliable count continues to be stymied by youth who go to great lengths to hide their homelessness and avoid places where homeless youth assemble and whose homelessness is hidden by their couch surfing. In addition, the same underfunded county government entities tasked with providing the programs geared to ending youth homelessness are entrusted with the count. An argument can be made that there is a political disincentive to accurately count unaccompanied youth as larger counts could suggest ineffectual public investments.

According to the 2020 PIT (the most complete data as of April 2022), there were roughly 580,000 people experiencing homelessness in the United States on a single night in January 2020. Approximately 61% of these individuals were staying in sheltered locations – emergency shelters or transitional housing – while 39% were found in unsheltered locations such as the streets or in abandoned buildings (see Table 2). This data represents the fourth consecutive year of increases in the number of people experiencing homelessness and of course was taken prior to the full effects of the COVID 19 pandemic. African American/Black people remain overrepresented in the homeless population, as 39% of all people experiencing homelessness identify as Black or African American, while only making up 12% of the total U.S. population (United States Housing and Urban Development, 2020, p. 1).

Table 2. Point-in-Time Count 2020

| | |
|---|----------|
| Total number of individuals experiencing homelessness | 580, 000 |
| Percentage found in sheltered locations | 61% |
| Percentage found in unsheltered locations | 39% |

On a single night in January 2020, 171,575 people experienced homelessness as part of a family unit with at least one adult and one child under the age of 18, representing 30% of the total homeless population. The majority of families were sheltered, only 10% or 16,667 people were found in unsheltered locations. Children under the age of 18 make up 60% of the people experiencing homelessness as a family (see Table 3) (United States Housing and Urban Development, 2020, p. 30, 32).

Table 3. Point-in-Time Count for Families 2020

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Total number of individuals experiencing homelessness | 580, 000 |
| People experiencing homelessness as a family with at least one adult and one child under the age of 18 | 171,575 or 30% |
| Children comprising the number of individuals within the families | 60% |

There were 34,000 people under the age of 25 experiencing homelessness on their own on a single night in 2020. The majority of these individuals (90%) were between the ages of 18 and 24 and, compared to all individuals experiencing homelessness, were more often non-white: 52%

of youth verses 46% of all individuals and 39% female verses 29% (United States Housing and Urban Development, 2020, p. 44).

Each year, Allegheny County, in Western Pennsylvania, participates in the PIT homeless count as required by HUD. The 2020 count occurred on January 29 and the temperature was 25 degrees Fahrenheit – much higher than the -7 degrees temperature recorded for the 2019 count. During the 2020 PIT count, 887 people were found to be experiencing homeless, which is 113 more people than in 2019. There were 76 families with children counted – a slight increase from 2019. There was also an increase in the number of people residing in locations not meant for habitation, which could be a result of a milder winter and more areas of the county being canvassed. On a positive note, no households with children were found living in places not meant for human habitation (2020, p. 3).

The Allegheny County PIT report specifies the difficulties of accurately counting unaccompanied youth because these youth tend to stay with friends or in motels. In 2020, youth outreach teams participated in the count through the Allegheny County Youth Action Board, a group led by youth with lived homeless experience. The count identified 55 unaccompanied youth in 2020, and four parenting youth households, which included eight children, were identified in emergency shelters (see Table 4). Of the 55 unaccompanied youth counted, 11 were living in places not meant for human habitation, and no unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18 were identified, which is consistent with Allegheny County’s child welfare practice to provide housing for all under 18 unaccompanied homeless children (Allegheny County Department of Education, 2020, p. 12).

Table 4. Point-in-Time Count, Allegheny County, January 29, 2020

| | |
|--|-----|
| Total number of individuals experiencing homelessness | 887 |
| People experiencing homelessness as a family with at least one adult and one child under the age of 18 | 76 |
| Unaccompanied youth | 55 |

Unlike the PIT count, which utilizes a single night in January, the Department of Education counts homeless minors in schools over the course of a year as prescribed by the McKinney-Vento Act. Centered at the school level, the McKinney-Vento count does not include out of school youth or young adults and only captures data about children in public schools thus providing only a slice of the total picture. The number of children experiencing homelessness in public schools in the United States during the 2018-2019 school year was 1,387,573, while the state of Pennsylvania reported 31,822. Students reported sharing housing or “doubling up” due to a loss of housing or economic hardship in 77% of the cases. Twelve percent resided in shelters, seven percent resided in hotels or motels, and four percent identified as being unsheltered. While the total number of public school children experiencing homelessness increased by two percent in the 2016-2019 school year, the percent of unaccompanied youth increased by eight percent for a total of 125,729 children (National Center for Homeless Education, 2021, p. 12).

The University of Chicago’s, Youth Voices Count takes a slightly more robust approach to counting homeless youth, particularly unaccompanied youth. Applying a youth-centered count methodology across 22 partner communities during the summer of 2016, young people who had or were experiencing homelessness were employed to plan and conduct the count. In addition to a “head count,” YoVC also conducted in-depth interviews of approximately 200 diverse youth living

in Cook County, IL; Philadelphia, PA; San Diego, CA; Travis, TX; and Walla Walla, WA in an attempt to capture the diversity of experience among this population (e.g., former foster youth, LGBTQ youth, youth with juvenile justice involvement, racial-ethnic minority youth). The interviews produced knowledge about the total housing experience of homeless youth, identified context and conditions and revealed how they navigate housing instability and seek supports. They also partnered with Gallup to survey 30,000 adults about the 13- to 25-year-olds in their households who have run away, couch-surfed, or experienced homelessness during the past year (Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2016, p. 4–7).

As this section demonstrates, while data are collected in a variety of ways, the ability to influence positive change is stymied by the publication timeframes. The data for the January 2020 Point-in-Time Count were published in March of 2021. The most recent federal data for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth are for the school years 2016-2017 through 2018-2019 and was published in April 2021. We need to count homeless youth effectively and then put that data in the hands of people who can respond in a more timely, efficacious manner.

2.3 Schools and Homelessness

The National Center for Homeless Education, reports that 1,387,573 students enrolled in public school districts during the 2018-2019 school year experienced homelessness (2021). The Pennsylvania Department of Education (2020) identified 39,221 students and the Allegheny Intermediate Unit identified 5,600 (Johnson, 2021). While this number is astounding, it is just the tip of the iceberg as families are still known to not report their housing status out of fear or privacy concerns, and it does not account for children who dropped out of school, especially taking into

account that over 40% of formerly homeless youth surveyed reported dropping out or not attending school while they were homeless in middle or high school and in qualitative interviews many students reported that **no one** at their school knew they were homeless (Ingram et al., 2016). Longitudinal data show us that of 100 homeless children in ninth grade, only three will obtain a four-year college degree and over 50% will remain homeless as an adult (Tierney, 2015). Yet, in a survey of 504 state and local educational agency homeless liaisons, despite the challenges, 88% stated they were optimistic regarding the potential of their homeless students to graduate from high school, college, and career ready (Ingram et al., 2016, p. 8). If society remains indifferent to the hypocrisy of children wandering the streets without a safe place to live in the world's most privileged nation, perhaps the untapped potential economic resource of these young people will motivate our communities to intervene.

Before diving into the difficulties students face trying to navigate school while homeless, it is important to recognize the opportunity that exists in the days, weeks, and months before families become homeless. Regardless of the reason that eventually pushed families out of their home (e.g., loss of work, overwhelming debt, substance abuse, trauma) there is an inflection point where the families' limited economic capital could have been augmented through an influx of social capital (Auerswald & Adams, 2018; Miller, 2011). The duality of experiencing limited economic and social capital forces families to make heart wrenching decisions. Intervening "upstream" before families are out of their homes and providing children with intensive wrap-around services could spare children from having to endure the negative consequences of homelessness (Heath, 2020).

While there is no universal homeless student experience, research has identified an assortment of school related issues. The most prevalent being academic difficulties, poor school

attendance patterns and elevated mobility rates between schools (Hallett et al., 2015; Miller, 2011; Miller et al., 2015). Whether doubled-up or living in a shelter, students often find these environments cramped, stressful, and/or dangerous which can also have a negative impact on the resilience of the student (Hallett, 2010; MacGillivray et al., 2010).

The Education for Homeless Children and Youths program, authorized under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, is designed to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness and to ensure their educational rights (United States Department of Education, 2016). First enacted in 1987 as the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, it was reauthorized as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 1990 and again as part of Every Student Succeeds Act in 2016. The reauthorization in 1990 shifted the policy of requiring access to education to facilitating success in education (Stronge, 1993).

In addition to requiring that each State educational agency (SEA) and each local educational agency (LEA) review and revise policies that might create barriers for children experiencing homelessness to receive a high-quality education, each LEA must designate a local liaison to identify students that are homeless and to provide an equal opportunity to find success. The McKinney-Vento Act also requires that:

- students may stay in their school of origin, regardless of where they are currently living, if that is in the student's best interest;
- if it is in the best interest of students to change schools, they must be enrolled immediately regardless if they do or do not have the records normally required for enrollment to include unaccompanied youth not having to show proof of guardianship;
- transportation must be provided to the school of origin at the request of a parent, guardian, or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the liaison;

- homeless students must have access to all programs and services for which they are eligible, including special education services, preschool, school nutrition programs, language assistance for English learners, career and technical education, gifted and talented programs, magnet and charter schools, summer learning, online learning and before and after-school care (United States Department of Education, 2016).

Yet again, these protections are only in place if the child identifies as homeless, and mere admission to school is no guarantee of academic success.

Since each state creates their own academic standards and assessments, it is not possible to make comparisons from state to state regarding the academic performance of children experiencing homelessness. According to the National Center for Homeless Education, during the 2018-2019 school year, approximately 30% of students experiencing homelessness achieved proficiency in reading and language arts, while only 25% achieved proficiency in mathematics. These percentages are eight to nine percentage points lower than economically disadvantaged students (2021, p. 22). As a point of comparison, 34.1% of children experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania were proficient in reading and language arts and 17.7 in mathematics (2021, p. 22–24), while economically disadvantaged students scored 42.1 in reading and language arts and 27.8 in mathematics (2021, p. 31). States also submitted data on graduates based on the adjusted cohort graduation rate/ACGR (the cohort is identified by all first time ninth grade students who graduate with a regular diploma in four years, adjusted by adding all students who transfer into the class, and subtracting all who transfer out, are incarcerated, or die) for the homeless student subgroup with graduation rates ranging from 49% to 86%. Pennsylvania reported a 70.1% ACGR for homeless students (2021, p. 32–33).

Table 5. Academic Indicators for Children Experiencing Homelessness 2018-2019

| Demographic | Percent Proficient |
|--|--------------------|
| Nationally, students experiencing homelessness achieving proficiency in reading and language arts | 30% |
| Nationally, students experiencing homelessness achieving proficiency in mathematics | 25% |
| In Pennsylvania, students experiencing homelessness achieving proficiency in reading and language arts | 34.1% |
| In Pennsylvania, students experiencing homelessness achieving proficiency in mathematics | 17.7% |

To combat these educational failures, the states provided an average per-pupil amount of \$94.99 in McKinney-Vento funding to school districts to provide additional supports to students experiencing homelessness (National Center for Homeless Education, 2020, p. iv). As a means of contrast, in the Pittsburgh area, high school math tutoring costs between \$30 and \$50 an hour. Even when one accounts for the economy of scale, it is clear that \$94.99 per pupil is not adequate to mitigate the risk factors that children experiencing homelessness encounter.

2.4 Conclusion

We have witnessed an explosion of children and families experiencing homelessness in the past forty years, and while Congress has written and twice reauthorized legislation to ensure that children who are homeless are identified and allowed to enter schools, we have yet to tackle the larger economic conditions that lead to homelessness nor have we given the wider networks of

practice, the intersection of family, school, and community supports, the attention it deserves (Miller, 2011). We must explore ways to develop an early warning system that engages schools, health providers, and community agencies to track and communicate when risk factors are identified (Auerswald & Adams, 2018), and intervention strategies should focus on strengthening the lacking protective factors while reducing the risk factors (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2015). In addition, the long-term effects of the COVID 19 pandemic on families' housing status, as well as the inevitable loss of learning that occurred for students without appropriate access to online learning platforms have yet to be documented.

Research must move past classifying and identifying children and unaccompanied youth and focus more deeply on evaluating models and interventions that address risk factors associated with experiencing homelessness, build resilience, and support academic achievement. Education continues to be the “critical vaccine” against homelessness, as well as the negative consequences experienced by youth living on the street (Auerswald & Adams, 2017, p. 2).

3.0 Methods

3.1 Description of the Study

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the reading textbooks that fifth graders encountered in six districts in Western Pennsylvania to determine if children experiencing homelessness had the opportunity to read texts representative of their lived experience. Answering this question is significant to both teachers and district leadership as text selection is significant to literacy instruction and student engagement, and children experiencing homelessness exhibit lower academic achievement markers, graduation rates, and college completion.

The study was situated in the concepts from relevant literature and focused on two major areas: district demographics and a review of the approved fifth grade reading textbook. The study used and analyzed two datasets that included a review of federal, state, and county reports as well as the data collected from the review of the approved fifth grade reading textbooks.

The demographic analysis of each district was conducted to identify current and past student demographics of students experiencing homelessness, while the federal, state, and county reports were explored so as to contextualize the data within the larger narrative.

3.2 Research Questions

This study reviewed and analyzed federal, state, and regional data and reports identifying students experiencing homelessness and the academic trends for identified students in

Pennsylvania. In addition, the adopted fifth grade reading textbook for six Local Education Associations in the greater Pittsburgh region were analyzed for multicultural approaches specific to representation of children experiencing homelessness.

The following research questions guided data collection and analysis:

1. What conditions does an individual have to experience in order to be identified as experiencing homeless?
2. How are children experiencing homelessness, represented in the fifth grade adopted reading textbooks in the identified school districts?

The sub-questions are:

- a. What genres are included in the literature depicting youth experiencing homelessness?
- b. Based on insights gleaned during the literature review and professional experience working with the population, does the text accurately reflect lived experiences in terms of setting, character portrayal and events?
- c. Based on insights gleaned during the literature review and professional experience working with the population, does the text perpetuate or rely on stereotypes, generalizations, or misrepresentation? (see Table 5)

Table 6. Research Questions

| Question | Method | Evidence |
|--|--|---|
| 1. What conditions does an individual have to experience in order to be identified as experiencing homeless? | Identification of demographic characteristics. | Key terms and characteristics used to identify children as experiencing homelessness. |
| 2. How are children experiencing homelessness, represented in the fifth grade adopted reading textbooks in the identified school districts? | Textbook analysis | Textual evidence of representative texts included in the approved fifth grade reading textbook. |
| a. What genres are included in the literature depicting youth experiencing homelessness? | | |
| b. Based on the insights gleaned during the literature review and professional experience working with the population, does the text accurately reflect lived experiences in terms of setting, character portrayal and events? | | |
| c. Based on the insights gleaned during the literature review and professional experience working with the population, does the text perpetuate or rely on stereotypes, generalizations, or misrepresentation? | | |

3.3 Study Rationale

District leadership is faced with many challenges including contending with an ever-widening political landscape, managing state ordered reform mandates, including health guidelines all while trying to provide exceptional learning opportunity for their children even as financial resources are constantly in flux. Even before the COVID Pandemic, the numbers of families who were experiencing homelessness was rising and, in some communities, the long-range effect of lost jobs has yet to be determined.

The review of literature in the previous chapter demonstrated a lack of academic achievement by students who were experiencing homelessness. Principals and superintendents, regardless of the location of their district (i.e., city, suburban, or rural), must create learning communities that promote achievement for all children and ensure that they graduate career and college ready.

3.4 Research Setting and Participants

The study focused on six school districts from the Western Pennsylvania area. Districts were selected representing suburban and rural locations as well as to provide a variety of districts of different size student populations.

3.5 Data Collection

The study used two datasets. The first dataset to address Research Question 1, “What conditions does an individual have to experience in order to be identified as experiencing homelessness?” included the use of data reports and documents from the Annual Homeless Assessment Report from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2021-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>), the Allegheny County Point-in-Time Homelessness Data (https://www.alleghenycountyanalytics.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/20-ACDHS-13-Homeless_PIT2020_Brief_v3.pdf), the National Center for Homeless Education’s Federal Data Summary School Years 2017-18 to 2019-20 (<https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Student-Homelessness-in-America-2021.pdf>) and Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program 2019-20 State Evaluation Report (<https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Homeless%20Education/Pages/default.aspx>) to identify demographic information about children and youth experiencing homelessness, the services these young people received, and the academic indicators achieved.

The second dataset utilized to address Research Question 2, “How are children experiencing homelessness, represented in the fifth grade adopted reading textbooks in the identified school districts?” included a textbook analysis of what genres are incorporated into the literature textbook depicting youth experiencing homelessness, the textual accuracy of lived experiences in terms of setting, character portrayal, and events and a determination if the text perpetuates or relies on stereotypes, generalizations, or misrepresentation.

3.6 Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study consists of two data collection documents (see Appendix A and Appendix B). These appendices were developed by the researcher as a way to collect and present findings.

Appendix A, Character Representation in Reading Basals, is a tabulation of the number of stories containing children experiencing homelessness by each publisher.

Appendix B, Analysis of Children Experiencing Homeless Literature was developed using criteria adapted from a study performed by Dr. Agnes Tang. Appendix B collected information from each story containing characters experiencing homelessness as well as evidence of authenticity and stereotypes.

3.7 Research Perspective and Professional Knowledge

Currently, I am a consultant providing leadership support to schools and non-profits, including two organizations providing support and emergency shelter to men, women, and families experiencing homelessness. My responsibilities include understanding government regulations and standards, researching best practices, and assisting the Chief Executive Officers and their staff to implement strategic plans and projects. My seven years in this role has broadened and sharpened my knowledge concerning homelessness and the interventions that hold the greatest potential.

The irony is that I was very interested in the work to end homelessness while I was studying at Notre Dame. I chaired a week-long event on campus to raise awareness, worked at the Center for the Homeless in South Bend, and completed a summer internship at the Rescue Mission of

Trenton's Women's Shelter. But the deeper I got into the work, the more I realized I wanted to try to prevent people from having to experience homelessness and poverty, which is what led me to urban education.

For the first seventeen years of my career, I was a high school English teacher and then a principal at several high schools in the greater Pittsburgh area. To this day, I still consider myself a principal. A confounding role that exists somewhere between a parent, CEO, cheerleader, and negotiator, over a twelve-year period I was blessed to serve students in three different districts, and I hope that I taught as much as I learned.

Each of these experiences helped prepare me to understand and analyze the collected data. I was trained in textbook analysis as an English teacher and reviewed and replaced almost every curriculum series and literature selections in each high school I led; and of course the individuals I have met in my consulting business have provided the inspiration for engaging in this important work so that children who are experiencing homelessness can see their lives expressed in the texts they read in school.

3.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the reading textbooks that fifth graders encountered in six districts in the greater Pittsburgh area to determine if children experiencing homelessness had the opportunity to read texts representative of their lived experience. Answering this question is significant to both teachers and district leadership as text selection is significant to literacy instruction and student engagement, and children experiencing homelessness exhibit lower academic achievement markers. In the words of Sonia Nieto (1999):

Once we have seen the look of discovery and learning in students' eyes, we can no longer maintain that some young people – because of their social class, race, ethnicity, gender, native language, or other difference – are simply unmotivated, ignorant, or undeserving. The light in their eyes is eloquent testimony to their capacity and hence right to learn and it equips educators with the evidence and courage they need to defy the claim that some students are more entitled than others to the benefits of education. (p. xix)

The study was situated in the concepts from relevant literature and focused on two major areas: district demographics and a review of the approved fifth grade reading textbook. The study used and analyzed two datasets that included a review of federal, state, and county reports as well as the data collected from the review of the approved fifth grade reading textbooks.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Introduction

One purpose of this study was to identify the number of students experiencing homelessness in each Local Education Associations identified. Each district was selected in order to provide a variety of district size, location, and demographics as well as representation of three national textbook publishers. The study gathered data from the approved reading textbook series regarding the inclusion of text selections that included a character experiencing homelessness.

The findings of this study are presented in the following order: (a) districts listed by textbook series and the urban/rural locale identifier; (b) student demographics and enrollment and financial data; (c) census data for population, median income, and poverty percentages.

Following this section are the findings specific to each research study question for each textbook series reviewed. The primary question is how are children experiencing homelessness represented in fifth grade reading textbooks. In addition, the following sub-questions were also being asked:

- a. What genres are included in the literature depicting youth experiencing homelessness?
- b. Based on insights gleaned during the literature review and professional experience working with the population, does the text accurately reflect lived experiences in terms of setting, character portrayal and events?

- c. Based on insights gleaned during the literature review and professional experience working with the population, does the text perpetuate or rely on stereotypes, generalizations, or misrepresentation?

4.2 Demographic Information

This study identified six school districts within Western Pennsylvania which represented urban, rural, and suburban locale settings as defined by the Pew Center (Weider, 2019). In order to include a comparison of districts serving different tiers and educating differing populations of students, several districts were analyzed that used the same textbook series (see Table 7).

Table 7. Textbook Series Used by District Locales

| Textbook Publisher | District | Locale Setting |
|---------------------------|----------|----------------|
| American Reading Company | A | Suburban |
| Houghton Mifflin Harcourt | B | Suburban |
| Houghton Mifflin Harcourt | C | Urban |
| Houghton Mifflin Harcourt | D | Rural |
| Houghton Mifflin Harcourt | E | Urban |
| McGraw Hill | F | Suburban |

To provide additional context to the sample districts' demographics, Table 8 provides student racial demographics while Table 9 provides total enrollment, number of students experiencing homeless (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020), district budgets, per pupil

expenditures and percentage of students from low-income families (GreatSchools, n.d.). Table 10 includes sample Census data from municipalities in each District comprising of more than 5,000 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2022).

Table 8. Student Demographics

| District | Asian | Black | Hispanic | Two or More Races | White |
|----------|-------|-------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| A | 1% | 0% | 0% | 3% | 92% |
| B | 8% | 3% | 3% | 3% | 81% |
| C | 0% | 56% | 2% | 13% | 28% |
| D | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 96% |
| E | 0% | 32% | 0% | 14% | 49% |
| F | 2% | 8% | 3% | 5% | 82% |

Table 9. Enrollment and Financial Data

| District | Total Enrollment | Students Experiencing Homelessness | District Budget | Per Pupil Expenditure | Percent Low Income |
|----------|------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| A | 5,516 | 32 | 93.9 million | \$16,310 | 29% |
| B | 4,093 | * | 95.7 million | \$23,389 | 21% |
| C | 1,168 | 80 | 26.6 million | \$21,114 | 95% |
| D | 1,829 | * | 30.6 million | \$16,369 | 28% |
| E | 1,878 | 40 | 37.9 million | \$19,279 | 97% |
| F | 2,039 | 12 | 31.2 million | \$15,398 | 38% |

*Counts of less than ten.

Table 10. District Census Population, Income and Poverty Data

| District | Municipality (over 5,000 residents) | Population | Median Household Income | Persons in Poverty Percentage |
|----------|---|------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| A | 1 | 41,664 | \$68,733 | 7.2% |
| | 2 | 14,939 | \$45,065 | 16.4% |
| B | 3 | 5,270 | \$233,776 | 1.3% |
| | 4 | 9,162 | \$92,330 | 5.0% |
| | 5 | 7,267 | \$106,250 | 5.1% |
| C | 6 | 5,832 | \$31,130 | 30.4% |
| | 7 | 6,334 | \$44,858 | 36.4% |
| D | 8 | 7,936 | \$83,882 | 3.0% |
| E | 9 | 12,052 | \$42,368 | 20.9% |
| F | 10 | 16,144 | \$58,209 | 10.8% |

4.3 What Conditions does a Child have to Experience to be Identified as Homeless?

The review of literature identified two overarching categories to identify children as experiencing homelessness. First, a child is classified as homeless in general terms when they lack a fixed, regular nighttime residence. In addition, if the individual is under the age of 25 and not with a parent or guardian, then they are classified as an unaccompanied youth.

Again, as defined in Chapter One, there are many ways to experience homelessness. A family can “double up” with another family in their home or an unaccompanied youth can “couch surf” by sleeping on the couches and floors of friends. Families can sleep in cars or under bridges and can stay in emergency shelters or motels. It is important to note that it is the very complexity

of the situation that makes it important for children experiencing homelessness to see their experience of home represented in the stories they read in school.

4.4 Character Representation in Reading Basals

A total of three publishers were represented in this study, and each fifth grade reading series was examined and analyzed. These publishers are:

- 2014 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt *Journeys*
- 2021 American Reading Company *Core*
- 2023 McGraw Hill *Wonders*

Focusing on the fifth grade text from the literature series, all three publishers had at least 60 selections included in their curriculum materials. The American Reading Company was packaged differently than the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and McGraw Hill series, as it relies on classroom libraries for students to self-select the books that they want to read. Because each teacher can make selections within the approved classroom library lists, it was impossible to determine the exact number of characters experiencing homelessness. However, it is important to note that there were selections available. Table 11 shows the results of the tabulation process for the fifth grade reading basals and Tables 12 and 13 show the data collection for the two stories identified.

Table 11. Stories with Children Experiencing Homelessness

| Fifth Grade / Publisher | Houghton Mifflin-Harcourt | McGraw Hill | American Reading Company |
|--|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Basal | Journeys | Wonder | CORE |
| Total feature selections | 61 | 60 | 62** |
| Selections with human characters | 44 | 34 | 47 |
| Selections with non-human characters | 9 | 6 | 20 |
| Selections including children experiencing homelessness | 2* | 0 | 4*** |
| Selections including a representation of home (i.e., a place where a human would live) | 11 | 14 | 39*** |

*One story included an adult man who was described as homeless.

**The publisher identified 62 'Hook Book Series.' Thus, depending on availability and teacher selection, the total number of books is much greater.

***Data were gathered using web searches and reviewing texts at a local bookstore and library. Again, these numbers may be higher as not all volumes of every series were able to be reviewed.

Table 12. Analysis of Children Experiencing Homelessness Literature: *Darnell Rock Reporting*

| Story Details | |
|--|--|
| Publisher | Houghton Mifflin Harcourt |
| Name of story | <i>Darnell Rock Reporting</i> |
| Grade | 5 |
| Genre | Fiction |
| Story summary | Story Summary: Darnell Rock, a seventh grader, writes a newspaper article about transforming an old basketball court into a garden that would help feed people who are experiencing homelessness. He tries to convince City Council to support his idea. |
| Plot | Plot: This is an excerpt from a novel and the section included in the textbook, the City Council meeting, would be considered the climax. |
| Setting | City council chambers in Oakdale |
| Author | Walter Dean Myers |
| Illustrator | Jerome Lagarrigue |
| Protagonist | Darnell Rock |
| Authenticity and Stereotypes | |
| What words and images are used to portray children experiencing homelessness? | The character Sweeby Jones, is an adult identified as a “homeless man.” His physical appearance was not described. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their appearance • Their emotions | When speaking to the council man, Jones replied, “you don’t have to think about us-what did you call us?-non-school people?” I perceive frustration or perhaps even sarcasm in the response. |
| What identified the character or characters as experiencing homelessness? | It was a declarative sentence: “Nobody wants to be homeless,” Sweeby Jones said. He is a homeless man who lives in Oakdale. |
| Does the content perpetuate or rely on stereotypes, generalizations or misrepresentations? | “bringing people who are . . . nonschool people into that close contact with children might not be that good of an idea – suggests either a fear or lack of awareness of people experiencing homelessness. |

Table 12 (continued)

| Authentic Representation and Realistic Depictions: | |
|---|--|
| Does the story reflect realities and way-of-life of a person experiencing homelessness? | The story was set probably in the late 70s or early 80s and reflects an accurate view of everyday life in a bi-racial city and the language patterns of an African American man: "I was born poor and will probably be poor all my life." |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the story believable? • Does the story reflect everyday life and language? | |
| Can the reader identify and feel affirmed? | The reader can identify with Darnell who was nervous about speaking in front of everyone yet found the courage to do it as well as Sweeby Jones who stood up to reproach the City Council for not listening to Darnell. |
| Authorship: | The author was an African American man, who experienced nervousness when speaking in front of crowds when he was young. Thus, he wrote from the insider perspective for the protagonist, but not the supporting character of Sweeby Jones. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insider/outsider • Their background | |
| Purpose of telling the story | |
| Domains of Anti-bias Education: | |
| Does the text promote one of the domains of anti-bias education? | YES |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity: Promote a healthy self-concept and exploration of identity • Diversity: Foster intergroup understanding • Justice: Raise awareness of prejudice and injustice • Action: Motivate students to act by highlighting individual and collective struggles against injustice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity: Darnell conquered his fear of speaking in public – healthy, self-concept • Action: The basis of the story is a student advocating for an action that will assist members of his community in getting additional food to eat by planting a garden in an abandoned basketball court rather than creating a parking lot for teachers. Seeing a young person take action could motivate young readers to do the same. |

Note. Adapted from Tang, 2013, Teaching Tolerance, 2016 and Banks & Banks, 1995.

Table 13. Analysis of Children Experiencing Homelessness Literature: *Tucket's Travels*

| Story Details | |
|---|---|
| Publisher | Houghton Mifflin Harcourt |
| Name of story | <i>Tucket's Travels</i> |
| Grade | 5 |
| Genre | Historical fiction |
| Story summary | Set in the mid-1800s, the story is about a fifteen-year-old boy and two younger children who are traveling on the Oregon Trail. They are in danger because they are being tracked. |
| Plot | This is an excerpt that includes the building of the plot as the children try to outrun a group of people hunting them to the climax of a tremendous thunderstorm. |
| Setting | Somewhere on the western plains of the US |
| Author | Gary Paulsen |
| Illustrator | Bill Farsworth |
| Protagonist | Francis Tucket |
| Authenticity and Stereotypes | |
| What words and images are used to portray children experiencing homelessness? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their appearance • Their emotions | Lottie: "She was wearing a ragged shift so dirty it seemed to be made of earth. Her yellow hair was full of dust." Francis: "We're a sight . . . a ragtag mob of a sight." |
| What identified the character or characters as experiencing homelessness? | "He had found them sitting in wagon on the prairie all alone. Their father had died of cholera and their wagon train had abandoned the family, afraid of the disease." He had been separated from his own family, "when Pawnees had kidnapped him from the wagon train on the Oregon Trail." |
| Does the content perpetuate or rely on stereotypes, generalizations or misrepresentations? | Based on the researcher's limited historical knowledge about the 1800's and life on the Oregon Trail, the content appeared fairly accurate (although I would want to research more into the historical accuracies of kidnappings of children by the Pawnee). |

Table 13 (continued)

| Authentic Representation and Realistic Depictions | |
|---|---|
| Does the story reflect realities and way-of-life of a person experiencing homelessness? | As this is historical fiction, the descriptions of the activities and the language depict the 1800s, however, the researcher does find it to be believable. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the story believable? • Does the story reflect everyday life and language? • Can the reader identify and feel affirmed? | The story can also be contextualized by relating it to current migrate experiences and as such readers could better identify and feel affirmed. |
| Authorship: | While the author did not live during the Western Expansion, he did recreate scenes, such as digging for water, in order to get a first-hand perspective. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insider/outsider • Their background • Purpose of telling the story | |
| Domains of Anti-Bias Education | |
| Does the text promote one of the domains of anti-bias education? | This text would have to be contextualized into current migration experiences in order to achieve the justice domain of anti-bias education. However, the researcher feels this could be a very strong current event tie-in. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity: Promote a healthy self-concept and exploration of identity • Diversity: Foster intergroup understanding • Justice: Raise awareness of prejudice and injustice • Action: Motivate students to act by highlighting individual and collective struggles against injustice | |

Note. Adapted from Tang, 2013, Teaching Tolerance, 2016 and Banks & Banks, 1995.

The data are clear, children who experience homelessness have few if any examples of representation of their lived experiences in the stories that they read in their reading basals; however, those that are included can be taught in such a way as to achieve the goals of an anti-bias education.

4.5 What Genres were Included in the Literature Depicting Children Experiencing Homelessness?

There were over 180 selections used among the three publishers of fifth grade reading series. Genres included fiction, legends, folktales, fantasy, poetry, non-fiction / informative texts, drama, and historical fiction. Of the two selections included in the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt basal, one selection was fiction, and one was historical fiction.

Options included in the American Reading Company include the *Box Car Children* series which is classified as historical fiction; American Girl Doll series, which has a fiction volume named *Chrissa* in which one of her friends, Gwen, experiences homelessness when she and her mother are forced to live in their car and eventually a shelter for women and children; and the *I Survived* series including two historical volumes *I Survived Hurricane Katrina, 2005* and *I Survived The Nazi Invasion, 1944*. Unfortunately, as there is no guarantee that these particular volumes would be available, that the teacher would choose to include them in the classroom library, or that a student would choose to read them; thus, the researcher did not analyze their content.

4.6 Does the Text Accurately Reflect Lived Experiences in Terms of Setting, Character Portrayal and Events?

The Houghton Mifflin Harcourt text included two fictional pieces of people experiencing homelessness. The first was an excerpt from Walter Dean Myers' *Darnell Rock Reporting* (1996). In the excerpt, Darnell Rock, a seventh grader at South Oakdale Middle School, writes an article

for this school paper about turning an old basketball court into a garden to provide food for the homeless after he interviews a “homeless man” for a human-interest article (p. 576). The City Council hears about the article and invites Darnell to speak prior to the vote.

The excerpt includes a summary of the events that led up to this part of the story as well as the article that Darnell wrote for the local paper and Linda Gold’s, another seventh grader, editorial in response to Darnell’s article. In the newspaper article, Darnell begins by quoting Sweeby Jones, “Nobody wants to be homeless.” He continues by saying, “You see a man or woman that’s hungry and you don’t feed them or help them feed themselves, then you got to say you don’t mind people being hungry.” Sweeby Jones is identified in the story as being homeless. He states, “I was born poor and will probably be poor all my life” (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, p. 570). No physical descriptions are given of his person or where he resides in the excerpted story included in the textbook; however, based on the dialectic used in Sweeby’s speech pattern, a reader could make an educated assumption that he is an African American man. This assumption withstanding is not enough to determine that he is in fact homeless.

The text does not permit an analysis of the authenticity of the description as it is stated in a declarative manner “homeless people,” much in the same way that someone might describe a person by their gender, skin color, or height. No longer is it appropriate to make assumptions about a person purely on their physical appearance, nor is it appropriate to describe someone as homeless as it is not a descriptor of who they are but a living condition that they are experiencing.

The setting of *Darnell Rock Reporting* is a City Council meeting room, and the event is a City Council meeting. While the setting does nothing to enhance the reader’s understanding of the character, the event provides a small glimpse into Mr. Jones’ character. First, his presence at the meeting confronts common misconceptions about civic involvement that some people assume

about individuals that are experiencing homelessness. My own experiences volunteering and providing leadership support to Emergency Shelters is that individuals who are in need of emergency services, including housing, have a wealth of knowledge about local governments and community norms. Often individuals with lived experience either lack the social capital to lobby for change or the bandwidth in their life to devote the time and energy to the process. Having Sweeby Jones, not only show up to the meeting, but to stand up to the Council and state:

“You don’t have to answer my questions . . . you don’t have to have the garden. You don’t have to think about us – what did you call us? – nonschool people? But it is a shame you don’t want to listen to this boy. I wish he had been my friend when I was his age. Maybe I would be sitting in one of your seats instead of being over here.” (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, p. 579)

Jones not only calls out the insulting reference of ‘non-school people,’ he defends Darnell’s actions and subtly alludes to the fragility of the invisible safety net that is wrapped around each of us. For some, that safety net is strengthened through family support, social capital, privilege, education, and good health; and for others it slowly disintegrates through violence, trauma, systemic racism, addiction, and poverty. A person does not experience homelessness because of one action; it is a cumulative condition that requires a networked response to escape.

The second excerpt is historical fiction written by Gary Paulson titled *Tucket’s Travels* (2003). Francis Tucker was a fifteen-year-old heading west on the Oregon Trail. In this section of the story, Francis was trying to escape the Comancheros. With him are two children, Lottie and Billy, who had been abandoned by the wagon train when their father died of cholera. Francis had been separated from his own family a year before when he was kidnapped by a band of Pawnees.

The story is set in the mid-1800s and depicts life on the trail fairly accurately, including the children being unaccompanied by a parent or guardian.

The excerpt opens with a description of “walking across a sunbeaten, airless plain that seemed to be endless” (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, p. 636). As a historical piece, few children experiencing homelessness in America would relate to being alone on the Oregon Trail; but unaccompanied migrant youth traveling from South America might relate to the children trying to escape the Comancheros trying to track them and certainly the inability to stay clean: “She was wearing a ragged shift so dirty it seemed to be made of earth. Her yellow hair was full of dust” (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, p. 643).

The protagonist, Francis Tucket, was separated from his family after being kidnapped and eventually escaping a band of Pawnees, while Lottie and Billy were orphaned when their father died of cholera. The researcher identified these three children as experiencing homelessness as they had no primary nighttime residence designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. Francis is portrayed as insightful and determined – he had the children walk inside each other’s footsteps and then use a mesquite branch to wipe them out. Again, while children experiencing homelessness may not have experienced these exact examples, some probably could relate to hiding from police, social service workers, or even abusive parents.

Overall, the researcher found the two stories included in the basal reader of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt fifth grade textbook, the only textbook series reviewed to guarantee that a child would have access to the story, to accurately reflect lived experiences in terms of setting, character portrayal, and events of the individual’s experiencing homelessness.

4.7 Does the Text Perpetuate or Rely on Stereotypes, Generalizations, or Misrepresentation?

Again, focusing on the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt series, *Darnell Rock Reporting* includes a character that is identified as homeless. Sweeby Jones speaks about being poor and hungry; however, the excerpt included in the text does not include any physical description of the individual or go into detail about where he stays at night. While Jones self discloses that he himself has experienced hunger, not all individuals experiencing homelessness do. A family or individual can lack a regular, nighttime residence and be able to find shelter within an emergency shelter or bridge housing that provides three meals a day. It is important to tease this generalization out for housed students so that they do not make assumptions about people experiencing homelessness and so that children with lived experiences can be validated.

As the protagonist of the story, Darnell makes his case to the City Council about installing a garden to “help the homeless people” (p. 576). He explained, “Sometimes, when people go through their life they don’t do the things that can make them a good life. I don’t know why they don’t do the right thing, or maybe even if they know what the right thing is sometimes” (p. 576). This representation of why people become homeless can be misleading for children if they overgeneralize. For example, people can experience homelessness because they lost a job and did not have a safety net to pay their bills. Families can be trying to escape a violent partner, lose their home due to a fire, or they may have immigration issues. People experience homelessness for a variety of reasons and not just because “they don’t do the things that can make them a good life.”

Finally, a councilman stated, “I think bringing people who are . . . non-school people into that close of contact with children might not be that good an idea” (p. 578). Mr. Jones was offended by the description of “non-school people.” It is ironic that even in fiction there is a struggle to

describe and/or name what a person is experiencing when they do not have a home to go to each night. This comment also perpetuates the stereotype that people experiencing homelessness are dangerous or at the very least not considered appropriate to be around children.

In the excerpt of *Tucket's Travels*, Gary Paulson describes the children as being dirty and with very little belongings, which would seem to be accurate in their situation. Again, as a historical piece, children who are orphaned on the Oregon Trail would not have a lot in common with a child experiencing homelessness today except for the trauma of losing their family or unless the child is an unaccompanied migrant youth.

Families experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied youth become very resourceful in meeting their daily needs and both of these stories, while not current depictions of children experiencing homelessness, gave positive depictions of the characters and their traits and did not overly rely on stereotypes, generalizations, or misrepresentation.

4.8 Summary

Chapter Four reported the data collected for the primary research question and each of the sub-questions in both narrative forms, as well as tables. In short, of the three textbook series reviewed, while the American Reading Company provided an opportunity for children experiencing homelessness to have a realistic window into their own world to see their own lives mirrored back to them (Banks, 2007), it would only happen if the teacher selected those volumes to be included in the classroom library and if a child selected that book. However, the excerpt of *Darnell Rock Reporting* and *Tucket's Travels* included in the *Houghton Mifflin Harcourt* textbook did provide examples of people experiencing homelessness that were relatable and realistic,

demonstrated positive personality traits in the main characters, and provided students with opportunities to experience the domains of anti-bias education by promoting identity (i.e., a healthy self-concept and exploration of identity), diversity (i.e., fostering intergroup understanding), justice (i.e., raising awareness of prejudice and injustice), and action (i.e., motivating students to act by highlighting individual and collective struggles against injustice).

Cultural authenticity in literature focuses on the portrayal of people and aspects of their culture such as values, customs, and relationships, and it is critical to the portrayal of children and families experiencing homelessness. Literature offers insight into the human experience and multicultural literature takes on the additional sociopolitical aims of being a vehicle for socialization and transformation. Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard expressed it this way:

We must aim for that authentic body of literature for children which can lead us toward our goals: self-esteem for those previously not reflected in the mirror, and important enlightenment for those who, for too long, have seen only themselves in that mirror; all leading toward the celebration of living in the multicultural society. (as cited in Harris, 1993, p. 43)

Reading selections matter and have potential consequences for our students. If literature is a mirror that reflects the human experience, all children need to see themselves reflected as part of humanity. If all children are not reflected or if their reflections are distorted or inaccurate, there is a possibility that they will absorb negative messages about themselves. Those who only see images of themselves or who are exposed to distortions can be miseducated into a false sense of superiority and the harm is doubly done (Harris, 1993).

All children need to be seen.

5.0 Discussion

This study was situated in Western Pennsylvania and focused on the textbooks used in six school districts. Locales included both suburban and rural districts and the districts served students ranging from 1,168 to 5,516. Of the six districts sampled, four had more than ten students identified as experiencing homelessness in the 2019-2020 school year.

Each of these districts used one of three main publishers of elementary reading textbooks in their fifth grade curriculum:

- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt *Journeys*
- American Reading Company *CORE*
- McGraw Hill *Wonder*

The primary question asked was how are children who are experiencing homelessness represented in fifth grade reading textbooks. The following sub-questions were also explored in order to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the main question:

- a. What genres are included in the literature depicting youth experiencing homelessness?
- b. Based on insights gleaned during the literature review and professional experience working with the population, does the text accurately reflect lived experiences in terms of setting, character portrayal and events?
- c. Based on insights gleaned during the literature review and professional experience working with the population, does the text perpetuate or rely on stereotypes, generalizations, or misrepresentation?

Results of the research questions were presented in Chapter Four and what follows are the major findings based on the data collected.

Finding #1: Children who are experiencing homelessness have little to no opportunity to see their own lived experience represented in the textbooks that they read in their Language Art/Reading class.

Our homes, whether it be a house with a yard or an apartment in the city, provide stability and ideally safety. Children whose families are experiencing insecure housing lose that mooring. All the day-to-day activities that so many of us take for granted are called into question.

Women who are escaping a violent partner, often leave at night or with very little warning. When children are forced to leave their homes, they often leave with only a few possessions. Having limited financial resources, makes replacing clothes, toys, and schools supplies very difficult.

When living on the street, finding a safe places to sleep becomes a top priority, with finding food and a place to wash secondary. Children who are unsheltered face the possibility of danger daily; keeping up with schoolwork and studying is a luxury.

Even if a family gets into an emergency shelter, daily life is still very challenging. Some shelters will not permit families to remain together; fathers and young men over the age of 18 have to stay in the ‘Men’s Shelter.’ Imagine being a mother with children and your eldest son, who is a senior in high school and just turned eighteen, has to stay in an area with single, adult men who are a chronically homeless, suffering from untreated mental health issues, or in the throes of active addiction. In most shelters, there is no quiet place to work on “homework” and only the most progressive organizations provide students with tutors and computer access. Even in the best situations, when families are provided with individual rooms and are permitted to stay together,

there is still a sense that you are a guest or a client that is being served. Families do not decide what is served for dinner or what time to get up in the morning; these decisions are made by the organization and understandably so, as they are seeking to serve a number of people with a number of different needs. But it can be frustrating for those who are experiencing it as they often feel they lack agency in their own lives.

As educators, we need to provide accurate examples of students living in a variety of situations, including homelessness, and help all students understand that one's home does not define them as a person. Yet, the data reported in Chapter Four clearly shows that children experiencing homelessness have little opportunity to see their lives reflected on the pages of their reading basal. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt included two stories in which individuals were identified as homeless (.03%) and McGraw Hill had none. The American Reading Company provided options for teachers to include in their classroom libraries, but a child would have to self-select those volumes in order to be exposed to the content. This is positioned in an overall experience of having encountered other representations of home 11 times in *Journeys*, 14 times in *Wonder* and at least 39 times in the series included in the *CORE* textbook.

While two of the sample districts have less than ten students experiencing homelessness, District B has 6.8% of their students without a stable residence and in light of the risk factors associated with experiencing homelessness, schools cannot afford to miss opportunities to build resilience in their students.

Finding #2: By not including stories with children experiencing homelessness, we are missing an opportunity to help create better citizens.

When building a curriculum, we not only want the selections to speak to and develop confidence in the students who are experiencing homelessness, we also want to begin to build an

awareness in children who are currently housed that there are a lot of reason why people may lose their homes and there are actions that we can take as a community to prevent that from occurring. Every day we are striving to educate children that the world is broader and deeper than their own little slice of reality. With the algorithms of social media, it is becoming harder and harder to encounter a world view that is different than your own. That should be a fundamental role of education, to broaden children's worldview, to foster intergroup understanding, and to raise awareness of prejudice and injustice.

By incorporating decision making and social action into our students' curriculum (Banks 1999) we empower them to take action after gathering data and analyzing potential outcomes. While Walter Dean Myers' short story highlighted common misperceptions about people's beliefs about people experiencing homelessness, it also highlighted a young person who was willing to take a stand for an issue he felt passionate about and a person experiencing homelessness to stand up for a young person seeking to "do good." Imagine if our response to children was "what will you do about it" every time they encountered a social issue. What if developing that mindset was part of our curriculum? In a country divided along political fault lines, schools can find ways to broaden students' exposure to a wider world view and encourage them to explore differing views and experiences. Literature can be a tool of change.

5.1 Limitations and Strengths

While the findings from this study are potentially informative to the field, it is important to note the following limitations:

1. The study focused only on the selections included in the fifth grade textbook series and therefore did not recognize selections included in other grade levels.
2. Due to a difficulty in obtaining a copy of the Savvas' (formally Pearson) *ReadyGen* textbook, it was not reviewed. Although the data were clear in the texts reviewed, the researcher does not seek to make generalizations based on the data gathered in this study.
3. The study only reviewed Language Arts/Reading basals and did not review other materials that individual teachers might have incorporated into the curriculum that included children experiencing homelessness or included a social justice focus on housing.

5.2 Recommendations and Implications for Future Practice

Women and children are the fastest growing population experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania (National Center for Homeless Education, 2021) and schools are in the unique position to influence that reality. First, district and school leadership can prioritize education about not only what constitutes homelessness but also what characteristics students might exhibit that could indicate that a child may be having housing issues in both their induction and professional development programs. For example, if educators discover that students have attended multiple schools within a short period of time, if children appear hungry or are seen hoarding food, or if they have poor hygiene, these all might be signs that a child has insecure housing. Often students who are experiencing homelessness may wear the same clothes over and over or dress inappropriately for the weather. Staff can be taught about what signs to look for in our students

and schools can devise a coordinated plan of how they will intervene once they suspect that a child might have insecure housing.

Knowledge is power for the classroom teacher. If a child is experiencing homelessness and is new, the teacher can actively make the student feel welcome and assign a peer buddy to help the child get acquainted with the school. Teachers can reach out to parents proactively and let them know that the school wants to be kept informed of the family's living situation so that the school can be responsive to the child's needs. For example, a simple homework assignment of making a collage can be a nightmare for a child staying in an emergency shelter. Not only do shelters sometimes have a lack of a quiet space to complete homework, but also posterboard, magazines, and glue sticks are not always readily available.

While the researcher acknowledges that the funds provided through McKinney-Vento do not scratch the surface of what is needed to provide the appropriate support services for children and youth experiencing homelessness, leaders must get creative and identify funding streams that can provide tutoring and after-school programming as well as supplies that let the child feel like they belong in school. Creative schools have provided dedicated laundry areas for high school students to wash their clothes, backpacks full of food for weekends and holidays, and special funds to purchase school supplies, prom tickets, and graduation outfits.

Finally, it is recommended that district leadership prioritize children seeing themselves authentically reflected in the stories that they read in school. It is important to note that textbook publishers, motivated by the number of students served, create their anthologies in response to a 'proclamation' produced by the Texas State Board of Education. In these proclamations, the State Board of Education lists the Texas State Standards that are to be covered and gives publishers a year to create a textbook. The process also allows for the Board of Education, as well as any Texan,

to submit alleged factual errors to the textbook company for correction (Texas Education Agency, 2022). Thus, textbooks are created to meet the needs of the Texas State Board of Education and not necessarily the needs of all students.

Until the major textbook companies catch up to this important need, schools will have to augment the curriculum by including stories and novels that respectfully represent families and children who experience homelessness. For example, *You and Me and Home Sweet Home* by George Ella Lyon (2009) tells the story of Sharonda who was living doubled up with her mom at her aunt's house when a local church community decides to build her family a new house (inspired by the work done by Habitat for Humanity). *Homecoming* by Cynthia Voigt (1981) is a classic story of the four Tillerman kids whose mother leaves them while traveling to an aunt's house. The children band together to make the trip on their own and find a "new" family to live with. Or the children's book *Still a Family* written by Brenda Reeves Sturgis (2017) which tells of one family's experience living in an emergency shelter that forces the father to live separately in the men's shelter, yet they find ways to continue to be a family by playing hiding go seek in the park and petting puppies. Each of these stories contain resilient characters and a hopeful message that we are not defined by our circumstances but by the actions we take and the mindsets we hold.

It is also important to recognize that Walter Dean Meyer's complete novel *Darnell Rock Reporting* (1994), excerpted in the *Houghton Mifflin Harcourt* textbook, does an incredible job laying out various aspects of homelessness that are not seen in the shortened version as well as mitigating factors that can lead to people experiencing homelessness. For example, in the novel, we learn that Sweeby Jones served in the 24th Transportation Battalion in Vietnam. While homelessness among veterans has decreased dramatically in the past decade, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Point-in-Time Count still estimates that on a single night in

January 2020, 37,252 Veterans were experiencing homelessness (2020). In addition, while Darnell was interviewing Jones, he and Preacher, the barber whose shop the interview took place in, talked about the changing nature of employment. Preacher explained,

When I was a young man you could always get a job if you were willing to work and just about any job would see you through. Didn't mean you were eating high on the hog, but you ate . . . you could be strong then and make a living. (p. 89–90)

Jones also alluded to institutional racism and inferior schooling:

They expected me to sit in the back of the room like a big dummy and that's what I did. Then they expected me to get out of school with nothing but a strong back, and I did that . . . sure I got my diploma. But when you got a piece of paper in your hands it don't mean that you got something between your ears. (p. 88–89)

If a teacher taught the novel, rather than the excerpt in the textbook, they would have rich examples from which to further students' understanding of root causes of homelessness and students would have a richer context in which to understand the support character Sweeby Jones. The novel is a transformational text that would call the students to action (Banks, 1999).

5.3 Implications for Future Study

Because this study focused on a specific grade level, it would be interesting to review a wider band of the curriculum series to see how frequently children experiencing homelessness are incorporated into the texts offered, if they are presented in a way that demonstrates positive character traits or if the focus is one of charity or blame for the individuals' circumstances. The manner in which the situation of homelessness is framed is just as important as if it is included.

Are the characters seen as having assets and talents, or is the focus on their deficits or misfortune? In fact, ideally, an entire scope and sequence would be reviewed Pre-K through 12 to plot the number and type of exposure students have to housing issues and homelessness.

Once a quality scope of sequence was identified and/or created, research could focus on what, if any, effect the literature had on the mindsets of students experiencing homelessness as well as the understanding that housed students developed about the causes of homelessness and what they can do to address housing insecurity.

Again, it is important to state that these curriculum modifications are not only important in districts with higher percentages of students experiencing homelessness, but in all schools. We not only have a responsibility to the students sitting in our classroom experiencing homelessness tonight, but we also have an obligation to the children and families of the future to create a community where it is no longer acceptable for a child to not have a safe, reliable place to sleep at night. In discussing the idea for the garden, Sweeby Jones commented, “You letting people know we exist. People want to forget that poor people exist” (Meyer, 1994, p. 91). Families experiencing homelessness has become a reality within my lifetime and it is up to our schools and communities to find ways to keep families in their homes or rapidly rehouse them, so no child endures the difficulties of living without a home. We need to see our students as whole beings and create a learning system that encourages their growth and supports their success.

When interviewing Sweeby Jones for the second time, Darnell asks him if he is homeless. Sweeby leans back in his chair and responds:

No, I’m not homeless. I sleep in these buildings right here on Jackson Avenue. They’re my home. Or I go over to St. Lucy’s and sleep, and then that’s my home. Homeless don’t mean anything to me. I could sleep on the ground in the park and it wouldn’t mean anything to

me. I ain't homeless, I'm hopeless. I don't see a way to do anything better. (Myers, 1994, p. 91)

By including texts that mirror the experiences of children who are unsheltered, their lives become validated and part of the common experience. When we focus on the domains of anti-bias education – identity, diversity, justice, and action – we create a curriculum where all students see authentic representation of themselves and are empowered to bring their whole selves to the exploration of solving our communities' problems. When we make these choices, are students are seen within the context of their whole selves and we offer our students a curriculum of hope.

Appendix A Character Representation in Reading Basals

| Publisher | Houghton Mifflin Harcourt | American Reading Company | McGraw Hill |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Basal | Journeys | CORE | Wonders |
| Total feature selections | | | |
| Selections with human characters | | | |
| Selections with non- human characters | | | |
| Selections including children experiencing homeless | | | |
| Selections including a representation of a home – i.e., a place where a human would live | | | |

Appendix B Analysis of Children Experiencing Homelessness Literature

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| Publisher: | |
| Name of Story: | Grade: |
| Genre: | |
| Story Summary: | Plot: |
| Setting: | |
| Author: | |
| Illustrator: | |
| Protagonist: | |

Authenticity and Stereotypes:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>What words and images are used to portray children experiencing homelessness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their appearance • Their emotions | |
| What identified the character or characters as experiencing homelessness? | |
| Does the content perpetuate or rely on stereotypes, generalizations or misrepresentations? | |

Authentic Representation and Realistic Depictions:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Does the story reflect realities and way-of-life of a person experiencing homelessness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the story believable?• Does the story reflect everyday life and language?• Can the reader identify and feel affirmed? | |
| <p>Authorship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Insider/outsider• Their background• Purpose of telling the story | |

Domains of Anti-bias Education:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Does the text promote one of the domains of anti-bias education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identity: Promote a healthy self-concept and exploration of identity• Diversity: Foster intergroup understanding• Justice: Raise awareness of prejudice and injustice• Action: Motivate students to act by highlighting individual and collective struggles against injustice | |
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Adapted from Tang, 2013, Teaching Tolerance, 2016 and Banks, 1995.

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