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Educators' Roles in Promoting Foster Care Children's Sense of Well-Being in Early Childhood Settings

Francoise Erlich Snyder
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Francoise E. Snyder

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Mary Trube, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Donald Yarosz, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Matthew Basham, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Educators' Roles in Promoting Foster Care Children's Sense of Well-Being
in Early Childhood Settings

by

Francoise E. Snyder

MBA/IB, Western International University, 2007

BSBA, Western International University, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2021

Abstract

This qualitative study addressed educators' roles in promoting a sense of well-being in prekindergarten and kindergarten students in the foster care system in the southwestern United States. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory framed this exploration of educators' roles in supporting foster children's sense of well-being. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit nine educators from three different school settings with a minimum of 3 years of experience working with students in foster care. Data were collected during digitally audio-recorded interviews that explored how two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers with 3 to 25 years of experience working with students in foster care, promoted foster children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. Data analysis consisted of holistic coding that revealed descriptive phrases, patterns, categories, and themes. Synthesis of data resulted in the following overarching themes: (a) communication when forming relationships, (b) observation when maintaining a safe environment, (c) intervention when providing resources, (d) reflection when advocating for foster children and families, (e) collaboration when recognizing interrelationships among school stakeholders, (f) introspection when being mindful of personal wellness needs, and (g) professional preparation when seeking support for working with students in foster care. Findings contribute to positive social change by revealing educators' roles as communicators, observers, interveners, collaborators, and advocates for students in foster care and their families. Further studies are needed to identify professional development for early childhood educators and family education programs for students' foster and biological families to promote the well-being of early childhood students in the foster care system.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mentor in life Daisaku Ikeda, who has inspired me to become the best version of myself and encouraged me over many years to never give up. To my husband Dave who has supported me in this journey with all his heart, love and might, by sharing life with you, I could not be more fortunate. To my parents, for your love. To our children Erlich, Steven, Sharianna, Corey and Dylan, and grandchildren Alaska, Magda and Melina, who have been watching me patiently to get to the end of my studies, my love goes to you.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	3
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Questions.....	6
Conceptual Framework.....	7
Nature of the Study	8
Definitions.....	9
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations	13
Limitations	13
Significance.....	15
Summary.....	16
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	18
Literature Search Strategy.....	18
Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation	19
Bioecological Systems Theory	20
Properties of Ecological Transition	22
Research Studies Applying Bioecological Systems Theory.....	23
Suitability of Bioecological Systems' Theory for This Study	25

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts.....	25
Foster Care System	26
Children in the Foster Care System	27
Diversity of Children in Foster Care.....	30
Developmental Needs of Children in Foster Care	30
Role of Adults in the Lives of Children in Foster Care	39
Children With Exceptionalities in Foster Care	43
Advocacy for Exceptional Children in Foster Care.....	47
Teacher Perception and Child Outcomes.....	48
Challenges Faced by Educators	49
Teacher Strategies in Child Settings.....	51
Expansion of Teacher Capacities.....	53
Aversive Childhood Events	54
Summary and Conclusions	55
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	56
Research Design and Rationale	56
Role of the Researcher	58
Methodology.....	58
Participant Selection	58
Instrumentation	59
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	61
Data Collection	62
Data Analysis Plan.....	63

Trustworthiness.....	64
Credibility	64
Transferability.....	64
Dependability	65
Confirmability.....	65
Ethical Procedures	66
Summary	67
Chapter 4: Reflections and Results.....	68
Setting	68
Participant Demographics.....	69
Data Collection	70
Data Analysis	72
RQ1: Categories and Themes	74
RQ2: Categories and Themes	78
Results.....	83
RQ1: Educators Experiences	84
RQ2 Educators Promote Well-being	93
Summary of Results.....	101
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	103
Credibility	103
Transferability.....	104
Dependability	104
Confirmability.....	104

Ethical Procedures	105
Summary	106
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	109
Interpretation of the Findings.....	111
Communication When Forming Relationships.....	112
Observation When Maintaining a Safe Environment	114
Intervention When Providing Resources	115
Reflection When Advocating for Children and Families	117
Collaboration When Recognizing Interrelationships.....	119
Introspection When Being Mindful of Their Own Wellness.....	120
Preparation When Seeking Support.....	121
Findings in Relation to the Conceptual Framework	123
Limitations of the Study.....	125
Recommendations.....	127
Implications.....	128
Conclusion	129
References.....	131
Appendix A: (E-mail) Superintendent letter.....	145
Appendix B: Invitation Letter.....	147
Appendix C: Interview Script.....	148
Appendix D: Content Expert Request Letter	150
Appendix E: Interview Protocol & Research Questions.....	151
Appendix F: Initial Codes by Interview Questions and Themes Classification	153

List of Tables

Table 1. Research Questions Aligned With the Qualitative Interview Questions..... 61

Table 2. Demographics of Participants..... 70

Table 3. RQs Categories and Themes and Findings Alignment in Educators' Roles 102

List of Figures

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, RQs and Themes 83

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The focus of this study was understanding educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. Rees et al. (2019) described professionals' roles in promoting foster care children's well-being in the following way:

[Promoting child well-being means] ensuring every child has a trusted adult in their lives, that children's concerns and worries are heard, asking about and supporting friendships and relationships with siblings, and intervening if sibling bullying is an issue or if bullying is making a child fearful of going to school. In addition, professionals must be aware that children and young people do not like to be perceived as different by friends and so must avoid any actions where the young person could feel stigmatized as a child looked after. (p. 24)

The importance of educators working on behalf of their students' sense of well-being while they are in the foster care system has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE, 2016). Close to 6% of the total population of children in the United States enter the foster care system at some time between birth and 18 years of age (Turney & Wildeman, 2016). Researchers with the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (NWGFCE, 2018) found early childhood teachers are challenged to document the ways they support foster care children's sense of well-being in their classrooms. Researchers noted more studies are needed to examine how educators address issues that impact foster care children's sense of well-being in programs and schools that work with diverse children in the foster care system (Athanasios et al., 2018;

Holmes et al., 2018; Piescher et al., 2018). In this basic qualitative study with interviews, I explored educators' roles in early childhood to promote foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. This chapter presents background information about the study's problem, purpose, theoretical framework, and methodological design. The assumptions, scope and limitations, significance of the study, and summary are included in this chapter.

Background

Foster care children become part of a state's educational system at some time in their lives. Before entering the state's public-school system, very young children in foster care, including infants, toddlers, and prekindergarten-level children, are frequently served by federally funded Early Head Start and Head Start programs (Head Start, 2018). Upon entry into public school programs, the USDOE (2016) recognized educators need to work on behalf of students in foster care; however, researchers have reported studies are needed to explore how educators are challenged to promote the well-being of children in foster care (Athanasios et al., 2018; Holmes et al., 2018; Piescher et al., 2018). Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, public and charter school staff are required to collaborate with agencies and other entities to appropriately serve and promote the well-being of young children in the foster care system. When foster care children are enrolled in schools that receive funding through ESSA, educators are charged with documenting ways they promote positive child outcomes for children enrolled in their schools (USDOE & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2016). ESSA included requirements for school staff to provide and receive professional

development covering the topics applicable to children in the foster care system, such as professional development for staff that would lead to the creation of trauma-sensitive schools. Training in aversive childhood events (ACE) gives educators the tools they need to promote foster care children's sense of well-being (see Holmes et al., 2018; Sanders & Munford, 2016; Shonkoff, 2018). Moreover, staff in federal and state early childhood programs and public and charter primary schools were charged by ESSA with "maintaining accurate education records" (Office of the Federal Register, 2016, p. 25) for children in the foster care system who are enrolled in their programs and schools.

Problem Statement

The problem I addressed in this study was understanding educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. Piescher et al. (2018) and Strong (2018) found that early childhood educators are challenged to consistently promote foster care children's sense of well-being in programs and schools. Turney and Wildeman (2016) suggested that little is known about how educators work on behalf of foster care children to promote their well-being in early childhood settings. Mayaux et al. (2016) reported that educators do not understand the impact of relationships between children in foster care and authority figures in schools and programs who have the potential to promote children's well-being.

At the local level, a kindergarten teacher reported, "We did not have any training for educating foster kids in this school district... Most teachers in this state do not get training, and there are so many challenges to helping these children" (personal communication, kindergarten teacher, January 3, 2020). Additionally, early childhood

teachers at the local level are challenged to document that they work effectively with foster care children, how they work to develop relationships with foster care children and their families, and their abilities to follow a trauma-sensitive practice orientation in their classrooms with foster care children (personal communication, elementary principal, August 23, 2019). The early childhood program director for prekindergarten and kindergarten programs in the local district stated the following:

There is room for improvement in a school's involvement [administrators, curriculum specialists, teachers] with foster care children and their collaboration with agencies. When the child's past is unknown, learning trauma or learning exposure, and a child suddenly arrives in the prekindergarten or kindergarten teachers' classrooms, teachers are challenged to plan and accommodate the child, and figure out what works to encourage well-being for a foster care child.

(Personal communication, early childhood programs district administrator, January 2, 2020).

This conversation confirmed the need for trauma-sensitive pedagogy and teachers' deeply understanding of children in foster care as they improvise without consistent guidance or support in hand to fit something that may work.

In the southwestern United States, problems stem from a dramatic increase in young children entering the foster care system due to several factors, such as the opioid epidemic in the state (Children's Bureau Express, 2016), child abuse and neglect, and separation and lack of permanency (FosterEd, 2018). The Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA, 2019) in a southwestern state reported between July 1, 2019, and

December 31, 2019, a total of 14,142 children between the ages of birth and 5 years were in the foster care system. This number represented 40.9% of very young children in this southwestern state at that time. Between 2016 and 2018, 38% of removals of children from their parents in this southwestern state were due to drug use (Children's Bureau Express, 2016; USDHHS, Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 2018). In addition, a child abuse hotline in the southwestern United States that prompted this study documented 23,876 calls that met the statutory basis for abuse and neglect of children (CASA, 2019). This indicates more younger children will potentially be entering foster care.

Growing numbers of very young children in foster care are also recognized at the national level (USDOE, 2016; USDHHS, 2016). Turney and Wildeman (2016) found that close to 6% of the total population of children in the United States entered the foster care system at some time between birth and 18 years of age. Because children in foster care most often enter the educational system at some point in their lives, it is imperative that teachers have the resources to assist these students in reaching their educational potential.

The importance of educators working on behalf of students in foster care has been recognized by the USDOE (2016). Sanders and Munford (2016) found that when caring adults foster a sense of belonging at school, children develop a positive student identity based on factors such as perseverance, adaptability, relationships, time, and honesty. If no predictive intervention is in place whereby early childhood educators promote foster care children's sense of well-being, children do not progress (USDOE, 2016). Without specific professional learning opportunities, early childhood professionals are challenged

to find solutions to promote foster care children's well-being (USDOE, 2016). When educators' roles in promoting well-being of foster care children in early childhood programs are undefined, this poses issues for children's optimum growth and development and overall sense of well-being (USDOE, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings in a school district in the southwestern United States. Turney and Wildeman (2016) suggested that studies are needed to investigate how educators promote foster care children's sense of well-being. Mayaux et al. (2016) proposed more studies are needed to understand the relationships between a child in foster care and authority figures such as educators. Researchers noted more studies are needed to examine how educators address issues that impact foster care children's sense of well-being in programs and schools that work with diverse children in the foster care system (Athanasas et al., 2018; Holmes et al., 2018; Piescher et al., 2018).

Research Questions

In this qualitative study, I sought to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are educators' experiences working with foster care children in early childhood settings?

RQ2: How do early childhood educators promote foster care children's sense of well-being?

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) bioecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory provides a theory to understand the significance of supporting a foster care child's development as they are influenced by the components within each bioecological system. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory places the child at the center of systems that have an impact on the child's development. Early childhood educators operate in the child's microsystem (parental), mesosystem (persons of interest), and macrosystem (institutional entities), and as a result, have an impact on the growth and development of the foster care child. As educators operate in the child's microsystem, those educators interact with the child, foster parents, potentially the child's birth parents, and social workers. As educators operate in the child's mesosystem, the educators engage with the program/school administrators, teachers, curriculum specialists, and social workers who work with the child. As educators operate in the child's macrosystem, the educators potentially engage with agencies that may have guidelines and policies that influence the child's environment at school. The framework guided the study's research questions, data collection, analysis of data, and the recruitment and selection of participants. Both research questions are framed by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory in that the educator operates in the child's microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem and, as such, influences foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings.

Nature of the Study

This basic qualitative study with interviews design supported my exploration of educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the best approach to follow in qualitative research is semistructured interviews as study participants can answer the research questions by responding to interview questions and probes. Interviews work better than the qualitative method using focus groups. Semistructured interview questions with one participant at a time offer the opportunity to obtain more data by probing and using follow-up questions as needed at the time of the interview (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016); whereas, in focus groups, there is the potential that all participants will not share their perspectives (Ravitch & Carl). Interviews also work better than the qualitative method of observations because by observing, I may not have been able to have insights into the participants' perspectives. For this study, the basic qualitative design with interviews was most suitable to answer the research questions. As educators revealed the challenges in their roles, findings from this exploratory research brought clarity about their issues and potentially have a positive impact on policies benefiting children in the foster care system by supporting teachers' practices (see Butin, 2010).

I proposed to interview nine educators (two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers) who work with foster care children enrolled in PK-K classrooms in rural school settings located in the southwestern United States. Data from these interviews were provided by educators from three settings. Due to pandemic restrictions, I conducted semistructured interviews via video conferences with each

participant. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed by me. Data analysis consisted of holistic coding, as it can show self-standing units of information, such as participants' responses that address the research questions. I followed coding protocols established by Saldaña (2016) to reveal descriptive data, which identified educators' perspectives of how they promoted well-being in young children in foster care. I used descriptive phrases to code participants' responses (see Saldaña, 2016). I recorded details during the process of thematic analysis and wrote summaries with extended sentences (see Saldaña, 2016). This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): ACEs are identified by numerous factors that include such things as how many types of abuse, dysfunction, and neglect a child or a person has experienced in life. Early childhood educators have a supportive role in providing interventional measures that can reduce poor social behaviors and health during the stages of childhood through adulthood. In certain instances, toxic stress, often a part of ACEs, can modify a child's brain, nervous system, and hormones. Toxic stress can affect a child's self-regulation and executive function, which is shown later in life to manifest as many psychological disorders (Bateson et al., 2020).

Child maltreatment: Violent, inconsistent, and ineffective parenting skills constitute a consequence of child maltreatment. Subsequent negative issues that impact and pose risks to the child can take many forms in health behavior and learning capacities (Klika & Conte, 2018). According to Bella et al. (2018), child maltreatment and low

school readiness are related; children reported to have experienced maltreatment experienced poor development in all domain skills and capabilities.

Ecology of human development: Understanding human development in the context of children changing immediate environments. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979), early childhood education has a direct impact on the growth and development of foster care children as educators interact within a child's microsystem (child's home environment), mesosystems (child's surrounding environments), and macrosystems (children's larger environments shaped by society and institutions).

Foster care: When children enter state custody (foster care), they have the constitutional right to be protected and granted proper care (Klika & Conte, 2018). The U.S. foster care system is intended to give safety to children where their families are not able to keep them safe and provide them with well-being and permanency (Thomas & Scharp, 2020).

Hybrid families: Family compositions, such as blended, biracial, gay/lesbian, and homeless families and children living in joint custody families or with grandparents or other family members. Hybrid families include adopted children or children living in foster homes (Aldridge et.al, 2016).

Intercultural teacherhood: Denotes an educator who embraces and has an awareness of intercultural learning. According to Layne and Lipponen (2016), teacherhood goes beyond the diversity classification of a child's background to further develop a sociohistorical conceptualization of the child within the educator's mindset. If teachers revise their cultural and linguistic innate assumptions and try to connect

interculturally with children, the teachers are able to discard assumed cultural classifications (Layne & Lipponen, 2016).

Permanency: Under the foster care services, the U.S. federal government defines *permanency* as a “24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and whom the title IV-E agency has placement and care responsibility” (Klika & Conte, 2018, p. 323). Permanency arrangements and planning need to be court-approved with alternatives as concurrent options and are given to each child entering the system.

Linguistic resources: Composed of cultural hybridity, intersectionality, linguisticism, and ideologies (Athanasios et al., 2018). Researchers suggest that teachers should be mindful of language dimensions, shape classroom environments, and climates around cultures of children in their classrooms, and communicate repertoires that empower students in language and learning (Athanasios et al.).

Socioemotional functioning: Denotes children’s capacities to respond correctly to circumstances and effectively control their feelings concerning others in their environments in effective ways (Arnot, 2018). A child’s socioemotional functioning is referring to the competence, externalization, internalization, and dysregulation of emotional investment in toddlers from influencers (teachers, parents, or caregivers) on the child’s development (Jacobsen et al., 2018).

Well-being: Denotes caring adults fostering a sense of belonging at school; children develop a positive student identity based on factors such as perseverance, adaptability, relationships, time, and honesty (Sanders & Munford, 2016). Foster care

children benefit from nurturing that promotes children's well-being in school environments (Aldridge et al., 2016; Holmes et al., 2018). Education can provide and promote well-being at critical developmental stages (NWGFCE, 2018). Klika and Conte (2018) suggested that in meeting foster care children's developmental needs, adults promote children's sense of well-being in all domains of learning: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. Buffering effects of neglect, abuse, lack of permanency, and separation is possible when appropriate education experiences are in place for the care, nurture, and education of foster care children (Klika & Conte).

Assumptions

This study was based on several assumptions. As I conducted interviews, I assumed that responses from nine educators (two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers) who work with foster care children in preschool and kindergarten (PK-K) settings were honest and revealed their true perspectives. Participants' experiences with children in foster care was predetermined by screening the interested volunteers for the study. I discussed my study with the superintendent of schools' and early childhood director's. I took their suggestions based on their knowledge of current or past teachers who worked with children in foster care, as they were knowledgeable about children's attendance in the district with experienced educators. I assumed that the early childhood educational facilities where educators work were located in a rural area in the southwestern region of the United States. I assumed that educators rendered accurate responses relevant to their contexts. I also assumed that participants possessed sufficient knowledge and experiences to share meaningful

perspectives and examples related to teaching and learning that may or may not promote foster care children's sense of well-being in their classrooms or programs. Per personal communication with educators at the local level about training, I did not assume participants had ACE training and instead elicited a sharing of resources they could use in practice. Consequently, I assumed that my interview questions, in conjunction with the analysis of the interview responses and data collected, addressed the research questions.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was comprised of exploring educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. My study included data gathered from interviews with nine educators (two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers) who work with foster care children enrolled in PK-K classrooms in rural school settings located in the southwestern United States. This basic qualitative study involved purposeful sampling in recruiting individuals who understand the phenomenon being explored and have had experiences with it (see Yeong et al., 2018). I delimited my study by excluding educators who do not work with PK-K students, as well as not including suburban or urban schools or programs.

Limitations

This study is limited to early childhood educators of prekindergarten and kindergarten children who have been in the foster care system from three settings in one rural school district located in the southwestern United States. This is a limit because the educators' perspectives of their roles and their experiences may differ by location and may not be transferable. The potential findings of the study represented a slight number

of teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists compared to the numbers of educators who work with children who are part of the foster care system. Another limitation may be due to all participants being females (no male participants volunteered for the study); therefore, a female “voice” may dominate the responses, which could be considered a limitation. Participants’ knowledge may not be generalized to the entire field of early childhood educators who work with children in the foster care system. Although I did my utmost to ensure the confidentiality of participants and organizations, some organizations may have been reluctant to grant permission for this study out of concerns that the research may expose educators’ lack of knowledge or skills for working to promote the well-being of foster care children, which could reflect negatively on the early childhood program. My pledge of maintaining confidentiality reassured confidence in the potential participants; however, the study’s nature limited my pool of potential volunteers. According to Thomas (2013), a sample could be perceived as carrying the weight of representing the whole, while a purposive sample (that a researcher might be specifically looking for) does not represent the whole. The small number of participants may encumber the transferability of the findings obtained (see Thomas, 2013).

Regarding researcher bias, because I have been a teacher and former child safety case manager in a state in the southwestern region of the United States, I have witnessed gaps in continuity of care and education and a lack of well-being in foster care children. I have worked as an international language teacher with PK, K, and first-grade students, many of whom were in the foster care system. Likewise, I have been an advocate for foster care children. To counteract my bias, I kept a reflective journal and practiced

mindfulness (nonjudgment) while recording notes in my journal. I referred to this journal often as an ongoing check to reduce possible limitations of this study. Vicary et al. (2017) indicated that “maintaining a journal is shown to enact some potential validity criteria (e.g., in producing an audit trail) whilst also recording and reflectively prompting the process of learning, interpretation, and bracketing, thus evidencing transparency” (p. 550). In addition, I relied on my committee’s support and checking for signs of bias. I recruited educators from early childhood programs where I have not worked or had contact as a teacher or a child safety case manager, and all interviews were conducted with persons who were unknown to me prior to the interview.

Significance

Researchers have found foster care children benefit from nurturing that promotes children’s well-being in school environments (Aldridge et al., 2016; Holmes et al., 2018). However, a lack of nurture of foster care children results in children’s inability to form secure attachments (Piescher et al., 2018; Strong, 2018) and overcome traumatic events or ACEs (Holmes et al., 2018; Sanders & Munford, 2016; Shonkoff, 2018). According to Mayaux et al. (2016) and Children Now (n.d.), foster care children experience trauma twice: first due to their traumatic home environments and second when they are removed from their home environments and placed in the foster care system. Additionally, Holmes et al. (2018) suggested when a child experiences trauma during the early childhood years, a secure attachment with a caregiver or education professional is critical to a child’s healthy development. Therefore, in this study I explored challenges that educators face in

promoting well-being in children in foster care (see Piecher et al., 2018; Strong, 2018; Turney & Wildeman, 2016).

Based on a report from the USDOE (n.d.) regarding students in foster care, “positive PK-12 education experiences have the potential to be a powerful counterweight to the abuse, neglect, separation, impermanence and other barriers these vulnerable students experience” (para. 1). The transformation of children’s confidence and self-reliance on their strengths may benefit children who enter the foster care system (Parker & Folkman, 2015). This study has the potential to contribute to positive social change by discovering early childhood educators’ roles in promoting children’s sense of well-being and addressing challenges, which could help professionals promote foster care children’s sense of well-being in early childhood settings. Findings could potentially increase opportunities for professional learning to equip early childhood educators with the knowledge, tools, resources, and mentoring to effectively promote foster care children’s sense of well-being in early childhood programs.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore educators’ roles in promoting foster care children’s sense of well-being in their settings. The problem addressed by this study was understanding educators’ roles in promoting foster care children’s sense of well-being in early childhood settings. The local problem stems from a dramatic increase in young children entering the foster care system due to several factors and the lack of professional learning opportunities provided for early childhood educators. The first chapter of this study included the definition of the

anticipated environment and its elements. I described the study's purpose, nature, research questions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and conceptual framework of the study. Chapter 2 included a literature review associated with the fundamental concepts of this study. The literature review elucidates the local problem and a wider gap in the literature on practice. Literature correlates with educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being, which addressed issues influencing programs and schools that worked with diverse young children in the foster care system.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Chapter 2, I address the problem of this study, which involves educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. This qualitative study with interviews was conducted to examine both the local problem and wider problem demonstrated by the gap in the literature on practice about how educators are challenged to promote foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings (see Turney & Wideman, 2016). Researchers have suggested the need for additional studies exploring how the well-being of foster care children from diverse populations is being supported in a variety of early childhood settings (Athanasos et al., 2018; Holmes et al., 2018; Piescher et al., 2018). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. In Chapter 2, I present my literature search strategies, an in-depth review of the study's conceptual framework, and relevant research to my study that was published within the past 5 years.

Literature Search Strategy

While searching for research-based information as a basis to elaborate on the conceptual framework and to explore phenomena of this study, I searched Walden library databases, Education Source, Eric, Sage Journals, ScienceDirect, Taylor and Francis online, Google Scholar, and ProQuest with occasional assistance from Walden librarians. The literature search terms I used while compiling information regarding this study included the following: *children in foster care, teacher-child interactions, teacher-child relationships, externalizing behaviors, preschool emotion talk, early literature*

development, hybrid families and early childhood educators, early head start, migrant and homeless children, cultural belongingness, child maltreatment, learning/achievement gap, intercultural learning, diversity, school mobility, foster care children with disabilities. Search terms used while building the conceptual framework for this study included *socioemotional development; self-regulation and brain development, adverse childhood experiences, resilience, vulnerability and trauma behavioral outcomes, teacher impact on foster care children, teacher socioemotional competence, and reciprocal relationships.*

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

The phenomenon of this study was early childhood educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. The conceptual framework was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) bioecological systems theory that demonstrates the significance of supporting a foster care child's development. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory places the child at the center of systems that impact their development.

The theoretical basis of Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) was influenced by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the role of culture is part of children's developmental processes as it is an embedded part of children's proximal–developmental processes that occur in the mesosystem (p. 262). Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) challenged Bronfenbrenner's placement of culture in the mesosystem and advocated for moving cultural aspects from the mesosystem to the microsystem. Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) argued that culture's role is operational in the microsystems because

it becomes part of the child's learning, sense of identity, and overall development. Vélez-Agosto et al. also highlighted the importance of diverse cultures on daily human social events within Bronfenbrenner's microsystem. The interrelationship between Bronfenbrenner's and Vygotsky's theories, as highlighted by Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017), applies to this study. The work of Vélez-Agosto et al. supports the importance of culture in the child's microsystem. The conceptual framework supports the importance of educators' influence on the development and well-being of foster care children.

Bioecological Systems Theory

Bioecological systems theory evolved from realizing current practices of determining behaviors on the developing child and predicting development based on one or two observable factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). At the time of its introduction, Bronfenbrenner's (1977) new perspective expanded basic notions of naturalistic and experimental scientific research by adding environmental theoretical concepts that reside underneath the natural and experimental realms. Bronfenbrenner first called his theory "the ecology of human development." By definition, Bronfenbrenner suggested the following explanation:

The progressive mutual accommodation, throughout the lifespan, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded. (p. 514)

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the theory's conceptualization (ecology of human development) rests at the intersection of the individual's biology, social science, and psychology as it lays on society and affects the growth and development of the child. Bronfenbrenner (1977) defined the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem as the environment elements.

Microsystem

A microsystem is a setting in which relationships between the developing child and their direct links with others (e.g., parent, teacher, sibling) take place. According to Bronfenbrenner, the microsystem is composed of several attributes. These settings include physical attributes (places where they reside), activities (related to behavioral aspects), timing, roles, and participants.

Mesosystem

A mesosystem is composed of the relationships between significant sets (two or more) of connections inside the developing child at a specific time and place in their life. According to Bronfenbrenner, the mesosystem specifically includes the interactivity among family members and individuals who are a part of the child's school, social, spiritual, and/or extracurricular activities. Therefore, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems that can change or move with the developing child. A child's learning within the mesosystem involves communication among individuals within the system and includes values, attitudes, and ways of knowing of individuals relative to others within the system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Exosystem

Beyond the mesosystem, the exosystem is comprised of other formal and informal social structural settings. According to Bronfenbrenner, the exosystem includes agencies or institutions that influence the child's environment (e.g., government, media, neighborhoods, parents' friendships, school-based events). The child may not be part of these institutions, but they are subject to the effects of the exosystem as part of their everyday life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Macrosystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), macrosystem is where the steady patterns of a culture or subculture that are part of the influences on the child in the micro-, meso-, and exo- systems find expression. These include the beliefs, customs, and traditions that are set in politics, education, and economic forms. Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggested decision makers in the macrosystem should consider the effects of their influence on children.

Properties of Ecological Transition

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological systems (micro-, meso- exo-, and macro-systems) have antecedents called "properties of ecological transition" (p. 6). These are diverse types of life events represented in ecological transitions, where the systems and settings differ according to a defined place in real-life terms. These properties are components that can change over time based on role, activity, and location. Also, the microsystem degree grows or decreases with life event changes, such as divorces, births, or deaths. The change interactivity involves effects in higher systems on a child (brain)

that are invariably connected and reflected in the environment of development, such as how children behave in a classroom (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Research Studies Applying Bioecological Systems Theory

Blewitt et al. (2020) found child development and teacher–child interaction play a critical component in foreseeing prekindergarten readiness, academically and socioemotional skills. Bronfenbrenner’s theory was applied in the study because it supported the theory that exchanges between a child and their teacher strengthened their relationship based on sensitive environments (Blewitt et al., 2020). Researchers found understanding aspects that may facilitate a strong teacher–child relationship can influence positive educational outcomes, which is important information for nonparent adults who work with children in school settings (Blewitt et al., 2020).

Holmes et al. (2018) applied Bronfenbrenner’s theory in their research about children’s protective and risk factors. Researchers found protective and risk factors are in continual change, as supported by the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979). Early intervention for children between the ages of 1 and 3 is recommended so that caregivers can use three protective factors: warmth, cognitive responsiveness, and social skills (Holmes et al., 2018). When caregivers use these three protective factors, children develop socioemotional skills that help them interact appropriately with peers and adapt to school life (Holmes et al., 2018).

Tirrell-Corbin (2019) applied Bronfenbrenner’s theory by investigating caregivers, parents, teachers, and decision makers in the macro and microsystems, as they worked to promote trauma-sensitive pedagogical practices in schools. Based on statistical

relationships between childhood trauma and children's poor behaviors and lack of academic progress, Tirrell-Corbin recommended school system administrators need to elevate resources, tools, and provisions for teachers. Further, Tirrell-Corbin found academic and social influences of teachers need reinforcement to be successful, especially with children who have experienced historical trauma.

Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) challenged Bronfenbrenner's role of culture and how it affects children in the microsystem. Researchers proposed legacies in policy (cultural) should be considered part of the microsystems because culture is part of children's daily lives and experiences (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) argued for the inclusion of culture in the microsystem because it could prioritize the central processes of the developing child and can be meaningful.

Halpern et al. (2019) found common ground with Bronfenbrenner's development ecological model, in which a child's formation is embedded when educators employ supportive practices for new immigrating families of Latin origin. Many of these children find themselves in detention centers and foster care. Census projections estimate by 2044, children minorities in school will increase in the United States by 95%. When systems consider child and family stressors (sense of belonging, coping with legal status, lack of trust in government, and urge to keep heritage) and include family community-related involvement, children's development improves socially and academically (Halpern et al., 2019).

Suitability of Bioecological Systems' Theory for This Study

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory is suitable for this study. Early childhood educators operate in the child's microsystem (parental), mesosystem (persons of interest), and macrosystem (institutional entities). Through educators' interactions, they have an impact on the growth and development, and thus well-being, of foster care children. As educators operate in the child's microsystem, the educators interact with the child, foster parents, social workers, and perhaps the child's birth parents.

In this section, I focused on the conceptual framework aligned with the purpose of this study to explore challenges that early childhood educators face to support foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. Systems within Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory were presented. This section concluded by highlighting relevant studies by researchers who applied bioecological systems theory to their work.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

In the literature review section, I cover relevant research found in the current literature. I elucidate the impact of early childhood educators on foster care children's sense of well-being. Topics addressed in this review of the literature related to key concepts and variables include foster care system and children in foster care with data, diversity of children in foster care, developmental needs of children in foster care, safety from harm, concepts of secure attachment, sense of identity, cultural belongingness, school success, documented educational outcomes, school mobility, role of adults in the lives of children in foster care, foster care parents and families, educators, children with exceptionalities in foster care, autism, language impairments, socioemotional

impairments, advocacy for exceptional children in foster care, teacher perceptions and child outcomes, teacher self-reflective language, teacher ethnocentrism, challenges faced by educators, teacher strategies in child settings, expansion of teacher capacities, and ACEs.

Foster Care System

Thomas and Scharp (2020) define *foster care* as a setting for children that gives them safety and provides for their permanency and sense of well-being. Klika and Conte (2018) suggested under constitutional rights, children should be given proper care and protected from harm. Many children entering into the foster care system at the state where they reside, take custody of these children for protection and care. Children entering into a state's custody (foster care) have constitutional rights to be protected and granted proper care in situations where their families are not able to keep them safe, provide for their well-being, and offer them permanency (Thomas & Scharp, 2020).

Child well-being is affected when there is a lack of permanency due to time consuming court proceedings and time frame to set permanency for the child and changes by state. Short permanency plans can mitigate adverse effects on well-being as their complications go further than physical placement and legalities; they affect the child's sense of belonging and their relationships. The Fostering Connections Act (2008) provides funding for school stability for foster children as part of permanency efforts and well-being (Klika & Conte, 2018, p. 323).

Children in the Foster Care System

By 2018, more than 400,000 U.S. children were in foster care, and among these children just under 4 years of age totaled 155,362 (NWGFCE, 2018). The ESSA was enacted on December 10, 2015 as an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). One aim of the ESSA was to have states account for inequities, fairness, and high-quality education to reduce education gaps and provide stability in children's education (NWGFCE, 2018). Before this incorporation of ESSA in 2015, foster care children's records were available in many of the education report cards in the United States. This resulted in a loss of records for children who were in foster care, among the homeless, or had parents in the U.S. Armed Forces. The NWGFCE (2018) stressed that foster care children in early childhood settings in the nation deserve attention.

On a national scale, during the year 2015, close to 700,000 children had actual grounds for child maltreatment determined by child protective services (CPS). From this data, 525,000 or 75% of the children were subject to neglect, 17.2% physically, 8.4% sexually, and 6.2% psychological abused (Holmes et al., 2018). Counteracting negative effects of adversity and lack of normalcy is what education can provide and promote well-being at critical developmental stages; data can help reveal trends to improve school practices. Sadly, there are no specific full education performance resources for foster care children at the national level today that track progress or milestone achievement (NWGFCE, 2018). An update from the USDHHS (2019) shows the number of children in foster care by September of 2018 was 437,283, and children under 5 years represented

42% of this number. Younger children (under 1) subject to neglect, and abuse present to be the most vulnerable as 22.7 per 100,000 (vs. same age nonmaltreated children) deaths in 2018. From all child fatalities, children under 3 represented 70.6% (USDHHS, 2020).

The USDOE (n.d.) implemented 2016 new guidelines in the ESSA supporting foster care children. The provisions for States, school districts, and agencies bring clarity and understanding with interagency collaboration throughout the country, supporting foster children's educational well-being. This reduces gaps in graduation rates, academic progress, and grade retention on children due to mobility and the adversity they face. Consequently, the USDOE (n.d.) and the USDHHS (2016) issued non-regulatory guidance to affirm the stability of foster care children. Some states implemented local educational agencies (LEAs) appointing foster care liaisons. These laws look into the child's best interest to remain at origin schools and reduce delays on transfers and enrollment when necessary.

According to the Head Start Association (2018) data in a southwestern state, 626 in foster care, 1,118 homeless, and 933 migrant/seasonal children from pre-k to third grade. Based upon this data, Head Start programs support professionals in the organization in their efforts toward the goal of closing learning gaps between typically developing children and those with special learning needs.

Many children in the foster care system have suffered maltreatment (Klika & Conte, 2018). Researchers reported findings from studies with teachers and caregivers reporting their observations of foster care children who suffered maltreatment, as follows:

(a) When children suffered from physical neglect at age one the child showed decreased

levels of enthusiasm, lack of tolerance for frustration, and a lack of persistence with anxious attachment; (b) by four and a half years, these same children had low control over impulses, poor classroom regulation, and increased dependence on teachers. Further, Klika and Conte (2018) documented the following perception that maltreated children had for themselves, as follows:

Maltreated children often believe others cannot be counted on for support, love, and guidance. In this context, it is not surprising that many maltreated children view themselves as unworthy of nurturance or incapable of solving problems on their own. These beliefs discourage maltreated children from reaching out to relatives, teachers, or other adults for assistance in times of adversity and make it more likely that they will give up on school, relationships, and themselves. (p. 200)

Furthermore, teachers reported and scored physically neglected children as the weakest of all maltreated groups of children based on their test performance and intellectual skills (Klika & Conte, 2018).

Circumstances of removing a child vary; by the end of 2015, neglect increased from previous years from 56.4% to 60.7% as well as prenatal substance use, as methamphetamine and opioids use in parents increased across the nation (Children Bureau express, 2016). When children first enter care, they change schools between 31%-75%, and one-third of them are under 5 years of age. Hispanic and Black foster care children change schools at a higher rate than their White peers, affecting their academic progress.

Diversity of Children in Foster Care

This section presents demographics for children who entered foster care in a southwestern state during FY 2018 by diversity based on a total population of 15,446 (Kids Count Data Center, 2018). This data, reported from one state in the southwestern region of the U.S., documents that the state held the twelfth highest place for foster care entrance of children in the United States. (Children's action alliance, 2019, p. 44). The representing percentages are for race/ethnicity, as follows: American Indian 5%, Black 5%, Hispanic 44%, White 39%, Asian 3%, two or more races 4% (CASA, 2019; Kids Count Data Center, 2018). There are 15 counties in this southwestern state, and in 12 of the counties, half of the children live in low-income families, below 200% of the poverty level (Kids Count Databook, 2018, p. 47).

Developmental Needs of Children in Foster Care

Klika and Conte (2018) suggested that in meeting foster care children's developmental needs that adults promote children's sense of well-being in all domains of learning: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. Buffering effects of neglect, abuse, lack of permanency, and separation, is possible when strong policies, intense practices, and appropriate educational experiences are in place for the care, nurture, and education of foster care children (Klika & Conte). Factors that support the developmental needs of foster care children and promote their sense of well-being include safety from harm, secure attachments, a sense of belongingness, and culturally and linguistically appropriate child identity formation.

Safety From Harm

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC, 2011) code of ethics for educators presents principles that educators should follow to support children's optimal growth and development. Under principles, section I, P-1.1 through P-1.11 risk factors, suspicion, and signs of child neglect and abuse are addressed. The code of ethics calls for individuals to take action and protect children from harm. The following NAEYC (2011) code applies when working with children in foster care:

P.1.8: We shall be familiar with the risk factors for and symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and physical emotional, educational and medical neglect. We shall know and follow state laws and community procedures to protect children against abuse and neglect. (p. 3)

Montgomery et al. (2018) stressed the importance of keeping children safe from harm in families where there has been a history of family trauma that involved children.

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2020) presented research-based evidence from studies that linked the physical effects of trauma on the developing brain of a child who has experienced significant trauma, noting that these effects become real health illnesses for children as they grow up. Montgomery et al. (2018) revised patterns on intergenerational trauma that show an increase in child abuse perpetrated by parents (or caregivers) who had themselves experienced trauma (e.g., natural disasters, sexual abuse, political abuse). Researchers called for educational initiatives that should be considered when there has been a history of family trauma that

involves children and their families as associations are prevalent today (Montgomery et al., 2018).

Expanding on the long-term health impact that adversity has on a child, the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2020) presented research-based evidence from studies that linked the physical effects of trauma on the developing brain of a child who has experienced significant trauma and noted that these effects become real health illnesses for children as they grow up. Current evidence supports medical conditions of obesity, diabetes, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, connected to the effect of inequities. The interrupting health threats in developing child metabolism and immune systems and inflammatory issues drive health conditions in adulthood (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020).

Secure Attachment

Based on the findings of Kerpelman and Pittman (2018), attachment theory applies to the life inside of an individual as it arises from the individual experiences in an active relating context; it is developmental, and results are affective and cognitive models mirroring the self and another, and together drive to a sense of security. The security, psycho-relational experience of being securely attached as a young child is carried on across the person's lifespan as an internal operating model (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2018). Kerpelman and Pittman (2018) suggested that attachment is born from interactions with an attachment figure; and has an emotional impact on how the individual connects with the world.

Infants form attachments (strong affection ties) shown by behaviors to sustain physical proximity with their caregivers (Granqvist, 2020). Consequently, children with attachments also have the capacity to mourn losses, dislike separations, and seek to be close to their attachment figures (Granqvist, 2020). Attachment behaviors are positive (e.g., vocal tones, smiles) or negative (e.g., screams or cry), signaling movement by the child to gain proximity to the attachment figure (Granqvist, 2020). Granqvist found that the closeness of attachment gives a child natural transmitting learning clues about dangerous or safe situations in the environment and secure attachment contributes to a child's sense of being safe. Further, attachment is found to grant intergenerational continuation of cultural traits and behavior (Granqvist, 2020).

The age that a child enters the foster care system results in significant implications for the child's development due to vulnerability of the young child (Williams & Sepulveda, 2019). In building on the seminal work on attachment by Ainsworth (1978), Granqvist (2020) found that young children survey their attachment figures as a reference or secure point from which to venture out and explore the environment, as young children assume that their attachment figures are stronger and wiser than themselves. According to Children Now (n.d.), infants and toddlers in foster care have a higher risk of mental and health problems due to lack of attachment figures by caring adults being present for them early in their lives. Granqvist (2020) suggested that children in foster care seeing the world as an unsafe place is a result of children experiencing trauma early in life.

Reoccurring entrances (children who exited the foster care system at some point) into the foster care system (reentry), and child maltreatment are found to be more significant during children's early years due to their vulnerability (Williams & Sepulveda, 2019). When young foster care children are entrusted to educators and caregivers, children's developmental delays are found to have less impact due to interventions by these professionals. With interventions (Children now, n.d.; Tordön et al., 2020), foster care children are better able to relate with others, self-regulate their emotions, and manifest adverse health outcomes later in their lives.

Sense of Identity

Researchers suggested that a child's identity is impacted by systems in the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as he or she interacts with others in the environment (Schachter, 2018; Syed & Fish, 2018). Syed and Fish (2018) proposed that a child's identity is influenced by ethnicity, culture, and race. According to Schachter (2018), a child forms an identity as he or she interacts with educators, parents, adults, and others. During interactions with others over time, children attempt to discern what identities are valuable and available to understand social meaning and coherence in their interactions. Elaborating on Erickson's seminal work, Schachter shared the following:

The socio part of identity, then, must be accounted for in that communality within which an individual finds himself...ideological coherence of the world is meant to take over.... aware of whether the system is strong in its traditional form to confirm or to be confirmed by the identity process or so rigid or brittle as to suggest renovation, reformation or revolution. (p. 318)

Children learn how they are received by others, and the exchanges with others confirm or disconfirm a positive sense of identity through reciprocity with the other.

Cultural Belongingness

Dalziel et al. (2019) suggested that cultural identity matters as an individual influence in order for an individual to have a strong sense of belonging and increased self-worth. Well-being and belongingness grant a child an understanding of what it means to be in a secure environment, which is also associated with positive educational and health outcomes (Dalziel et al. 2019).

The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Human Rights office of the High Commissioner [UN], 1989) highlighted the child's cultural heritage and development by proposing the following:

Education of the child shall be directed to... the development and respect for the child's parents, his her own cultural identity, language values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own. (Article 29, clause 1, item C).

Klika and Conte suggested that foster care children's culture influences the types of maltreatment they may face in subtle or bold forms with an emphasis on minority or majority racial, cultural, or religious groups of people. When professionals fail to focus on the culture of children, researchers suggest the results could be detrimental to a child (Klika & Conte). For instance, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) (1978) was established to provide basic federal standards for foster tribal children and consider their

heritage, race, culture, and respect for traditions. Through ICWA, it was initiated that all dependencies, adoptions, and placements, were coordinated for tribal foster children to assure cultural belongingness was considered (Atkinson, 2019).

Haynes and Engelsmeier (2020) proposed that the cultural belongingness of all children should receive the attention of individuals in positions of leadership and power who are working with children. Because adults are seen by children as powerful individuals who impact a child's life, researchers have identified a model based on cultural humility for educators to adopt (Haynes & Engelsmeier, 2020). Jokikokko and Karioski (2016) propose a change in current classroom intercultural settings to balance the power of inequalities and move beyond the good intentions of favoring a child's cultural diversity. Layne and Lipponen (2016), suggested that kindergarten teachers take a hard look into their cultural lens, approaches as to how they position themselves toward a child's identity, and the established power comparisons. Researchers have suggested that educators should open their dispositions by engaging and opening to others' cultural backgrounds to create accountability in their relationships with the communities they are serving (Haynes & Engelsmeier, 2020; Jokikokko & Karioski, 2016), especially as these concepts apply to children in foster care (Layne & Lipponen, 2016). Undoing power imbalances that feed injustice and inequalities is the approach of the model that proposes the following:

- (a) challenging the power imbalance between the student and teacher,
- (b) participating in community partnerships on behalf of students being served,

(c) commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique (Haynes & Engelsmeier, 2020, p. 25).

According to Sanders and Munford (2016), educators can encourage young children's sense of cultural identities by context and relevant responses that connect with influences in a child's life outside school. Teachers creating spaces that cultivate positive relations promote development in vulnerable children; resilience cannot be assumed to exist in all students and can buffer developmental risks if school educators can nurture resilience (Sanders & Munford, 2016).

Every day, educators play a vital role that regulates how child diversity is accepted and valued in programs and schools serving young children (Gutentag et al., 2018). Researchers have suggested that teachers look into their views of culture as they may work with students (Gutentag et al., 2018; Haynes & Engelsmeier, 2020; Jokikokko & Karioski, 2016). Many demographical changes are happening today at a higher pace than any other time before. Schools are at the center of development, adapting the children and their acculturation. If a teacher sees a child's culture, language, and social traits differently, it imposes a challenge to typical teaching practices. When there is not enough knowledge and drive to cope with the diverse child, the classroom becomes culturally embracing. When children from different races, cultures, languages, and statuses acquire a sense of belongingness from the adults and environments, children's sense of well-being is enhanced (Gutentag et al., 2018). This sense of belongingness that contributes to each child's well-being occurs when teachers see a child, regardless of his or her diversities, as an asset, the child becomes self-sufficient (Gutentag et al., 2018).

According to Emelianova (2019), children feel isolation or exclusion, and the rejection stays in their memory, leaving lifelong consequences; school belongingness correlates with learning outcomes.

School Success

This section includes school-related aspects that include factors that support the foster child in the classroom. Based on a report from the USDOE (n.d.) regarding students in foster care, “positive PK-12 education experiences have the potential to be a powerful counterweight to the abuse, neglect, separation, impermanence and other barriers these vulnerable students experience” (para. 1). The transformation of children’s confidence and self-reliance on their strengths may benefit children who enter the foster care system (Parker & Folkman, 2015).

Tordön et al. (2020) proposed that schools should consider the school success of children in foster care and offer preventive care to minimize the risks of negative educational outcomes. Most schools have prerequisites based on age, which should be according to child circumstances. Some measure findings show that foster children, socioemotional skills, literacy, and intelligence, are deficient, and boys are lower scoring than girls. Individualized tests and specific curriculum design should focus on an intervention that benefits school performance. Attention to migrant children with a non-native language and in foster care should primarily be considered in policy, systems, and schools when assessing a child’s grade requisites and performance upon entering school.

Documented educational outcomes. The USDOE (n.d.) reports there are lower rates of achievement for children in foster care across the United States. Data published

by the USDOE (n.d.) is used to impact change in foster care children's educational systems. Irish (2016) stressed that foster children's traumatic experiences and low education proficiency are interlinked and need to become an area of focus that forces change in current educational systems.

School mobility. Pears et al. (2016) found that 69% of foster care children changed schools, and 51% of those children changed more than once during the same school year, the majority changing with new placements. Children between preschool and third grade, who moved often, had a hard time creating and maintaining close relationships with teachers (McKinnon et al., 2018; Pears et al., 2016). McKinnon et al. (2018) found that there is an increased risk of poor teacher-child relationships formed in the early years for children with a low-socioeconomic status (SES) and homelessness, including children in the foster care system. Conversely, high-quality schools that offered resources, transition methods for teachers with new students to develop teacher-child relationships, and practices to integrate children regardless of the timing of their entry or reentry into the school, were beneficial for foster care children (McKinnon et al., 2018).

Role of Adults in the Lives of Children in Foster Care

Adults with agencies that provide services for foster care children have responsibilities to execute and foresee children's rights as part of their duty (Klika & Conte, 2018). FosterEd (2018) pointed out the importance of supportive adults for children who significantly impact children's lives, especially when they have experienced abuse and neglect, and are in need of critical intervention.

Foster Care Parents and Families

Turney and Wildeman (2016) conclude that according to the child's home environment, foster care children's physical and mental health changes in direct relation. Vulnerability and early life experiences affect a foster child's psychological and physical well-being significantly, vs. non-foster children; mental conditions are shown as behavior, depression, ADD/ADHD, anxiety is what is statistically different reflected as wellness.

Aldridge et al. (2016) bring a significant fact on family structure's evolution history from the 1960s to 2010 faster than any other time. Today, hybrid families include foster care children and highlighted challenges that evolve within hybrid families and the need for early childhood professionals to embrace diverse hybrid families they are serving. Teachers and other professionals can appropriately, realistically, and successfully work with children of hybrid families, as education policy and practices had not changed with the current times (Aldridge et al., 2016).

Educators

Teachers offer an alternative attachment relationship to a foster child. As such, careful consideration about the extent of the attachment should be considered (Mayaux et al., 2016). Foster care children attach to educators as model figures, and the amount of emotional security the attachment relationship gives to a child depends on how the teacher-child relationship forms and builds or develops over time (Mayaux et al., 2016). Researchers found significant positive and or negative effects that impact foster care

children's sense of well-being from interactions with competent teachers and caregivers in programs and schools (Aldridge et al., 2016; Holmes et al., 2018).

NWGFCE (2018), found the negative effects of adversity and lack of normalcy experienced by foster care children can be addressed by educators who provide care and promote children's well-being at critical developmental stages. Further, researchers found that foster care children benefit from nurturing that promotes children's well-being in school environments (Aldridge et al., 2016; Holmes et al., 2018). However, a lack of nurture of foster care children results in children's inability to form secure attachments (Piescher et al., 2018; Strong, 2018), and overcome traumatic events or ACEs (Holmes et al., 2018; Sanders & Munford, 2016; Shonkoff, 2018). According to Mayaux et al. (2016), and Children Now (n.d.), foster care children experience trauma twice, first due to their traumatic home environments and second when they are removed from their home environments and placed in the foster care system. Additionally, Holmes et al. (2018) suggested that when a child experiences trauma during the early childhood years, a secure attachment with a caregiver or education professional is critical to a child's healthy development.

Schmitt et al. (2018) linked teacher-child relationship closeness (as a protective factor) at pre-kindergarten with the mediation of externalizing behavioral incidents at kindergarten. Also, the intervention reduced mobility induced external behaviors on children living out-of-home. Cadima et al. (2020) suggested that teacher-child closeness in preschool creates a dependency on the teacher. Researchers found that when a close

relationship is developed between a vulnerable preschool child and their teacher, the child is likely to develop positive self-regulation skills (Cadima et al., 2020).

Vera et al. (2015) contrasted the externalizing behaviors as bidirectional between the teacher-child relations. As a reflection of the teacher-child conflicting relationship, it was the external show of behaviors and lack of social skills in the child. In turn, the child-teacher relationship projected social skills and external behaviors, concluding that externalizing behaviors can form poor social skills and lead to poor teacher and child relationships.

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2020) proposed three evidence-based interventions that educators can adopt to intervene and potentially prevent mental health and behavioral issues for children in the foster care system. These included the following: support responsive relationships, reduce sources of stress, strengthen core life skills (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020). First, in supporting responsive relationships, teachers can develop trust when they “serve and return interactions” that protect the biological development of the child (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020, p. 15).

Teachers and caregivers can help minimize the physiological waves of excessive stress responses felt by children in foster care during their early years. Second, teachers and caregivers can reduce sources of stress by supporting families with economic and social burdens. When educators work to reduce sources of stress, they expand adults’ abilities for responsive parenting that enables healthy development in the child. Third, educators can provide support for families to strengthen their core life skills. Educators

can promote having consistently regulated behaviors and having set daily routines for the family. Having consistent and predictable relationships among educators, families, and the community can promote social-emotional development in children (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020).

Cornell (2020) suggested that a safe and predictable environment and strong student and teacher relationships are what an education facilitating process should be.

Cornell describes education today as:

Our current system of public education approaches academic standards as objects of study with restrictions for developing curriculum as opposed to considering them as subjects of intention, in which they are defined by our purpose in relation to them. Curriculum is viewed as a course of specific content to be learned, as opposed to an area of human inquiry in which agency and meaning can be made in relation to the subject matter and each other. This is bureaucratic dehumanization and emphasizes that educators' roles have become purely functional and impersonal, indicating limited time for educators to actually think about their instruction and relationship to students (p. 66).

Cornell proposed that teachers could become agents of the curriculum by inspiring others to foster in their students the capacity to be fully human.

Children With Exceptionalities in Foster Care

In 2015, Parker and Folkman estimated between 30 to 50% of the children entering foster care systems are enrolled in special education programs at schools, versus 13.1% of the typical student population. Abuse and neglect are the main reasons why

manifestations of emotional and behavioral disorders are in place as part of the child's history. If the schools underidentify a condition or disability, the child runs the risk of not receiving special education that he/she is entitled to obtain. Due to the lack of supportive education services in foster care children, academic achievement consequences obstruct their educational continuity. FosterEd (2018) suggested that many foster care children do not receive early education services or developmental assistance because they are not living at home.

Autism

Caplan et al. (2016) examined children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to understand the teacher-child relationship and the developmental protective and risk factors. Results from the sample revealed that teacher-student close relations are possible between the teacher and ASD children. Behavioral problems reflected a teacher-child conflictive relationship, whereas social, cognitive, and language skills related to a teacher-child close relationship.

Rigles (2017) proposes that having autism or disability could be considered as experiencing prevalent ACEs. Children experience exclusion, isolation, and stigma; however, when a child has autism, this becomes a protective factor towards low resilience. Today 1 in 54 children in the United States are diagnosed with autism, and 1 in 6 (17.8%) with some other type of development disability (3-17 years) (Centers for disease control and prevention [CDC], n.d.).

Language Impairments

Teachers rate progress in development, children with specific language impairments (SLI) are subject to teacher assessments. Careful consideration to scores based on children's socio-emotional functioning with SLI should include social cognition of how they demonstrate prosocial skills, how they code, reason, and interpret interaction with peers. Children with SLI have more significant chances of not getting along well with peers and being accepted. Therefore, scores on socio-emotional skills should connect to the child's ability to process interrelation with peers (Bakopoulou, & Dockrell, 2016).

Social-Emotional Impairments

Broekhuizen et al. (2017) found that children with poor self-regulation skills can thrive. However, they need to be part of a social and positive integrating environment available at high-quality ECE schools; (as found in this study) compared to medium quality ECE centers, the child's temperament characteristics changed with high teacher interaction. Also, teachers that understand contextual, cultural traits in children can avoid misunderstanding of behaviors or classification of disabilities mistakenly (Brown, 2016).

Cadima et al. (2016) describe a significant self-regulation development growth found in children between 3-5 years and linked to increased neural connections in the prefrontal cortex during this period. Children that are in insufficient socioeconomic levels may be at risk and are found with low self-regulation. Cadima et al. & Coelho et al. found that teachers who focus on promoting self-regulation in children increased their

developmental skills, reasoning, and ability to respond to learning by modifying and making changes according to meaningful interactivity.

Mirzee and Maftoon (2016), found that children with English as a second language can improve their self-regulation skills and quality of reason (critical thinking) when a teacher uses a private speech technique as they learn a second language. Private speech during activities that require reasoning reduces the gap in understanding, teaching critical thinking skills early on, will stay with the child for life, and can impact their future achievements in academia and life.

Sette et al. (2016) indicated that teachers sense that shy preschooler's as withdrawn or anxious; however, researchers discovered that shy children have an expanded capacity to read facial signs that the child might perceive as negative. When teachers facilitated interaction and instilled emotion knowledge in children with classmates, it was evident, they changed their behavior and became socially accepted (Sette et al., 2016).

Implicating developmental consequences can be reduced by encouraging emotional regulation, especially with children with early disabilities or at risk of development delays (Coelho et al., 2019). Preschool teachers who facilitate self-regulation interventions through high engaging interaction do see favorable results as they increase their attention and engagement in the classroom, thus minimizing further delays and behavioral episodes. Shanker (2016) suggests that by learning to read signs and behaviors (in self-regulation), a teacher can help the child understand what it means "calm" (p. 27). Following the five-step self-reg points can assist in changing behaviors

such as: “1) Read the signs and reframe behavior, 2) identify the stressors, 3) reduce stress, 4) reflect, become aware of when you’re overstressed, 5) respond, figure out what helps you calm, rest and recover” (p. 27).

Advocacy for Exceptional Children in Foster Care

Foster care children with disabilities should have an education representative; however, studies have shown that representatives are not present at individual education meetings (FosterEd, 2018). Advocacy and mentorship have been backed by research to support special education academic advancement and have an essential key component for development (FosterEd, 2018). Under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), federal provisions ask states to report eligible victim children under the age of 3 years who qualify for early intervention services. In 2018, thirty-seven states reported 104,347 foster care children qualified for referral for services. However, data suggested that only 33,476 were referred (USDHHS, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau, 2020, p. 72).

According to Clarke et al. (2017), it is of particular significance for educators’ communication to portray, speak, or write about a person with disabilities in the people-first language and eliminate disparaging or pitiful terms. Educators should strive to use strength-based terms that sharpen up students’ abilities rather than students’ limitations or disabilities. Positive language is a piece of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework. Some communities have unique disability cultures, such as people with blindness, autism, or deafness, and educators should honor these individuals’ values and self-perceptions by using people-first language (Clarke et al., 2017). Based on IDEA

2004, the inclusiveness of children with disabilities with same-age peers' classrooms was integrated. Clarke et al. (2017) also advocate for educators to use the term general education (vs. regular education) and provide content without limitations in learning.

Teacher Perception and Child Outcomes

Layne and Lipponen (2016) found that teachers of young children are challenged to analyze their assumptions and biases in reference to race, religion, language, and social class. Alamos and Williford (2020) analyzed emotion between child and teacher, as it has consequences of either negative or positive class engagement. As teachers provide regular chances to talk about their emotions concerning subtle and responsive interactivities (from the beginning to the end of the preschool year), had positive changes in engagement resulting from an affective quality relationship.

Conversely, teachers that perceive a child's externalizing behaviors as a sign of a conflict miss the chance to promote social and learning in the classroom. Pessanha et al. (2017) suggested another important aspect is the child/teacher ratio; it delivers quality interactions and improves regulation, stability, and naturally, the classroom's characteristics and quality, impacting more infants positively (Pessanha et al. 2017).

Teacher Self-Reflective Language

Teachers' self-reflective language takes various forms. A teacher who seeks to be aware and understand critical language cues in both the self and their student's lives supports diverse linguistic children (Athanasas et al., 2018). Teacher self-inquiry takes into consideration its own history, beliefs, history, and language, and cross-reference of identities to benefit from analysis.

When teachers have a metalinguistic stance, it impacts interaction with students of different levels of language proficiency, and these teachers are able to scaffold students' language (Athanases et al., 2018). Classroom culture is formed by a teacher's perception of language, race, or linguistic ideologies. By looking at language, not through language, teachers can discover context, purpose, problematic categorizations, and differentiation. These observations can empower learning, culture and broaden the classroom outline (Athanases et al., 2018).

Teacher Ethnocentrism

According to Brown et al. (2016), teaching behind a lens of student (child) contextuality, rather than the teacher's cultural background, can eradicate racism in education. Teachers acquire cultural humility when they recognize that their background dictates their practice when working with children from other cultures. Cultural competency, will, and capability are crucial to understanding the cultures of children within the classroom as well as cultures in society at a grander scale (Brown et al., 2016).

Challenges Faced by Educators

A few studies looked at educators' challenges when working with diverse populations of students. For instance, Layne and Lipponen (2016) investigated challenges teachers faced in working with diverse children and families. According to researchers, challenges arose because teachers were not sufficiently prepared for working with children from a wide range of diversities (Gutentag et al., 2018; Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016; Layne & Lipponen, 2016). Gutentag et al. (2018) found that diversity in schools' workplaces (perceptions; approaches) is either a challenge, an issue, or an asset.

Jokikokko and Karikoski (2016) studied the intercultural learning process and development of educators and found social emotions and relationships between professionals and diverse families can be challenging. Although educators experienced challenges working with diverse children and families, when successfully negotiated, these relationships give educators the confidence to relate to children and families from diverse populations (Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016).

Parker and Folkman (2015) reflected on current worries in educator's awareness and responsiveness towards children in foster care. When a child is removed from family, a concentration from courts and immediate care, professionals often oversee educational aspects that come with the child. Locating a safe physical and school placement for the child could take four to six months, bringing a gap and education loss. Another aspect of consideration with these disruptions is that they can often be absent, face expulsion or suspension, test results are lower, and face grade retention. Risks of overidentifying a disability, when it is not, happens due to the lack of proper tools to assess the child's behavior, gaps in learning and qualifying them as disabilities, and are sent to special education, impacting their educational continuity (Parker & Folkman, 2015).

Teachers are challenged to understand these externalized behaviors as they are prompted by the internal processing and can be interpreted as the child themselves do not fully understand (Statman-Weil, 2015). On the contrary, if a child lives in fear and lacks emotion regulation, the amygdala (the emotional part of the brain that regulates behavior) becomes overused and overgrows. The results are a child who reacts higher, has impulsivity, and has difficulty processing higher-order thinking activities.

Simultaneously, the hippocampus (the contextual part of the brain that decides a threat level) is typically undergrown in traumatized children as it is hardly used (Statman-Weil, 2015).

Teacher Strategies in Child Settings

The learning interrelation of socioemotional development, children's autonomy, and play-centered activities are tight in practice. When children experience and maneuver rules, hierarchies, power, and agency in preschool, it models control over their self-regulation. They gain the confidence to distinguish injustice that aligns with the rules and creates a setting in behavior towards well-being (Arnot, 2019).

Children in foster have frequent changes in caregivers and disruptive environments and are in dire need of consistent teachers with available mental-health resources to lower adversity effects they experience (Kanine et al., 2018).

The teacher-child relationship closeness (as an intervention) appears to benefit children in non-parental care in kindergarten, according to Schmitt et al. (2018). The study considered residential mobility and pre-K and Kindergarten children. During Pre-K, teacher-child closeness was not linked to behavioral problems in kindergarten; however, in kindergarten the teacher-child close relationship seemed to assist the child's external emotional state on the change and mobility by not internalizing troubles (Schmitt et al., 2018).

Coulombe and Yates (2018) found that when there are interventions to enhance closeness between teacher-child, the results are more positive relationships and, as a result, foster children are shown to have favorable prosocial and adaptation behaviors.

Adults as mentors (in non-parental roles) are critical in encouraging children's positive social-emotional development, particularly noticeable for children with aversive upbringing.

Pyramid Model

Hemmeter et al. (2016) investigated the effective use of the Pyramid Model in public schools to promote socio-emotional skills in preschool children. The outcome was positive as those educators using the model connected it to classroom interactions and instruction quality. Teachers' responses to children's academic progress, emotional worries, and interests, and promoting positive environments resulted in behavior and social development skills. Blewitt et al. (2020) supported the use of the Pyramid model as researchers found that it builds competence in children's socio-emotional skills and strengthens children's readiness for school in entering kindergarten.

Libre Process

Rautela and Singh (2019) presented the Libre Process, an intervention tool that develops children's awareness of their identities. Researchers suggested the Libre Process empowers critical thinking and inquiry about systemic displays of exclusion, disregard towards culture, and physical signs that may affect children's reality. Rautela and Singh suggested that when children develop an analytical consciousness, they use their lives and existence as facts and make them competent to connect with others. The pedagogical practice of the Libre Process has as its goal to teach the dignity of all life, interconnections with others, promote compassion and recognition of human dignity, and inspire an appreciation for diversity (Rautela & Singh, 2019).

Expansion of Teacher Capacities

Shonkoff (2018) urges educators to connect disciplinary practices with child development and collectively change effective practices. Existent education methods do not meet all children's styles and developmental needs and are inconsistent across the board. Shonkoff proposed the science of learning and development project (SoLD) for teachers. According to Shonkoff, the SoLD approach points are as follows:

- Recognizing toxic stress and its degree of severity is critical for child protection from harm and creating skills to cope with dangers to their well-being.
- Awareness that some children are highly reactive and sensitive is basic to assess risks and possible solutions with support. They are more susceptible to stressful environmental situations where they may live.
- Perceiving that bureaucratic limitations exist between early childhood (zero to five) and K-12 is critical for the design and execution of educational programs and current or efficient policies.
- Acknowledge the significance of ongoing capacity building for teachers and parents or caregivers, which is essential for encouraging children's development and learning to confront maltreatment or hardships.

Schonert-Reichl (2017) proposed that teachers should understand their own socio-emotional state of mind, as it is this lens that influences their behaviors with children in terms of children's healthy socio-emotional development or socio-emotional learning (SEL). Schonert-Reichl (2017), analyzed 78 teacher education programs seeking examples of preparation programs that require courses in children's SEL, abuse and

neglect, and behavior management. Schonert-Reichl (2017) reported a lack of evidence that these courses were part of teacher preparation, with the exception of content covering the topic of child abuse and neglect. Because teachers' job tensions were on the rise and their stress levels are high, Schonert-Reichl (2017) suggested courses in stress management and socio-emotional competency for teachers can bring academic success for children and promoting SEL intervention in classrooms.

Aversive Childhood Events

Shonkoff (2018) explored steps in helping children get back on track when they have experienced adversity. Strong (2018) recommended supportive practices for educators to handle the complexity of developing resilience and growth in a child after exposure to ACEs. Bateson et al. (2020) found that using children's ACEs scores to create supportive services should include the child's age and type of experience. Schools can create policies to address children's ACEs scores. To understand a child with a high ACE score, professionals should consider the type of maltreatment experienced by the child because some events have more significant consequences than others (i.e., educational, future employment, quality of life). Statman-Weil (2015) found that teachers can support students in developing coping skills and resilience when schools support the creation of trauma-sensitive classrooms and offer teachers professional development to effectively work with children who have experienced ACEs. Tirrell-Corbin (2019) confirmed the need to respond to childhood trauma at the macro- and microsystem levels by adopting trauma-sensitive pedagogy in schools.

Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter 2, I addressed the conceptual framework as the foundation for this study and the relevant literature as the basis to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. I provided current literature about critical concepts and variables that relate to children in foster care. Among topics are the following: foster care system and children in foster care with data; diversity of children in foster care, developmental needs of children in foster care, safety from harm, concepts of secure attachment, sense of identity, cultural belongingness, school success, documented educational outcomes, school mobility, the role of adults in the lives of children in foster care, foster care parents and families, educators, children with exceptionalities in foster care, autism, language impairments, socioemotional impairments, advocacy for exceptional children in foster care, teacher perceptions and child outcomes, teacher self-reflective language, teacher ethnocentrism, challenges faced by educators, teacher strategies in child settings, expansion of teacher capacities, aversive childhood events. This approach was proper as each of these sections relates to learning in a developing child within school settings early in life. Educator competency and awareness matter to children in foster care.

In Chapter 3, the research method is illustrated to include the research design and rationale, as well I define my role as a researcher. The methodology addresses the participant selection, instrumentation, the procedures for recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis approach. Lastly, I describe trustworthiness in detail and ethical procedures or considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This study's research problem involved educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. The purpose of this study was to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. To collect data, I sought to interview two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers in early childhood settings about their challenges in promoting well-being of children in foster care in early childhood settings. By analyzing the data collected in this study, I sought to answer research questions about educators' roles in supporting the well-being of children in foster care.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the research questions, the main focus of the study, the research process, my role as a researcher, and a review of the methodology. The methodology section contains the participant selection criteria, instrumentation, participation procedures, recruitment, and data gathering. The plan for data analysis is defined in detail. The definition of strategies to determine credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability for trustworthiness are provided. Furthermore, I refer to the ethical procedures required by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before the beginning of data collection.

Research Design and Rationale

The central phenomenon of this qualitative study with interviews is the well-being of foster care children in early childhood programs and understanding the educators' roles in promoting foster care children's well-being. The research tradition selected for this study was a basic qualitative study approach, which was deemed more appropriate

than a mixed or quantitative method. I sought to explore challenges that early childhood educators experience in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings using semistructured interviews (see Creswell, 2008). In this qualitative research, I aimed to collect interview data to understand the challenges within and coming from the microsystem to the macrosystem. Semistructured interviews were appropriate for collecting data from educators; participants were able to respond to research questions by giving their responses freely, which results in rich, thick data (see Creswell, 2008; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The two guiding research questions of this study are as follows:

RQ1: What are educators' experiences working with foster care children in early childhood settings?

RQ2: How do early childhood educators promote foster care children's sense of well-being?

I recruited prekindergarten and kindergarten administrators, curriculum directors, and teachers from two programs who have worked with children in the foster care system for a minimum of 3 years. Because qualitative researchers focus on the opinions and ideas of people to identify their points of view about topics, I collected data using interviews (see Creswell, 2008). Findings from this exploratory research could give educators an opportunity to clarify the challenges they face (see Creswell, 2008). The data may reveal information that can potentially positively impact policies benefiting children in the foster care system by supporting teachers' practices (see Butin, 2010).

Role of the Researcher

As a single researcher, my role in the study was realized by interviews, recording, coding, and analyzing the data. During this process, I initiated scheduling and interviewing. At the schools where this study was conducted, I had not been employed and did not have professional or personal ties with the participants. I reflected on my personal bias as a former agent of a southwestern state department of child safety case manager, certified substitute teacher, and international language teacher. I believe that educators may not have consistent practice guidance that promotes well-being in foster care children. To counteract my bias, I kept a reflective journal. Vicary et al. (2017) indicated that recording a journal allows a researcher to trace the process while recording, learning, interpreting, and organizing, as evidence of quality and a transparent process. Annink (2017) explained that qualitative research should be identified by sincerity, self-reflected biases, honesty, and transparency, a challenge that comes with values, ideas, and context. This exercise may help a researcher ask if the reflection affects the transferability of the resulting data (see Annink, 2017). In addition, I relied on my committee's support and checking for signs of bias.

Methodology

Participant Selection

My initial goal was to conduct interviews with 12 participants. However, I was only able to conduct interviews with nine educators (two administrators, two curriculum specialists, five teachers) who work with foster care children enrolled in PK-K classrooms in rural school settings in the southwestern United States. Educators

providing data through interviews were from three separate rural locations in the southwestern United States. Due to pandemic restrictions, I conducted virtual interviews and audiotaped semistructured interviews with each participant. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed by me. Data analysis consisted of holistic coding, which can show self-standing units of information such as participants' responses that address the research questions. I also followed coding protocols established by Saldaña (2016), which reveals descriptive data that identify educators' perspectives of challenges in promoting well-being in young children in foster care. Phenomenology is an approach that concentrates on the participants' experiences, examining shared knowledge (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My attention was on challenges educators face to promote foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings (the real experience and interpretation that supports well-being in foster children in school) in contextual terms. The phenomena explored within the data in relation to the study's questions help determination of emerging themes and preliminary results and discard repetitive testimonies that are irrelevant to the main point of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Instrumentation

This basic qualitative research data collection instrument was an interview protocol document (Appendix E) that listed the interview platform, date, time, and the study topic. The document included an alpha-numeric code for the interviewee's name and their role or title, and my name as the interviewer. A list of interview questions based on the volunteer's role, was also included. Due to COVID-19 pandemic precautions,

interviews were conducted over videoconference and telephone, based on the request of the volunteers being interviewed. The interview questions were open-ended, semistructured, and probing (Appendix C); they were drafted and prewritten with input from an expert in the field in early childhood education and intervention (Appendix D). Interview questions were guided by the research questions that were based on the conceptual framework of this study, which was Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory.

Semistructured interview questions offered an opportunity to obtain more data by probing and using follow-up questions as needed at the time of the interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interviews' primary outcomes were to obtain insight into the study's problems, processes, experiences, and reflections on these by participants using the protocol (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The open-ended questions were explicitly created for this study and formed to maintain the participants' focus and give them room for expression. This layout elicits the participants' dialog and responses to the questions without limitations. These questions allowed participants to volunteer perspectives on potential improvements for challenges educators have on promoting foster children's well-being in their care. The interview questions were also configured to seek the interviewees' suggestions for improving current inconsistencies in education, encouraging well-being sustainably in children in foster care. All participants had experiences in teaching or caring for foster care children in a classroom setting. Table 1 shows the interview questions as they relate answering RQ1 and RQ2 for this study.

Table 1*The Research Questions Aligned With the Qualitative Interview Questions*

Research questions	Interview questions/prompts
RQ1. What are educators' experiences working with foster care children in early childhood settings?	1. Please tell me about your experiences in working with children in the foster care system. Prompt: I heard you say...Please elaborate about... 2. Please discuss your successes in working with children in foster care in your early childhood setting. Prompt: I heard you say...Please give me an example. 3. Please discuss challenges you have faced in working with children in foster care in your early childhood setting. Prompt: I heard you say...Please give an example.
RQ2. How do early childhood educators promote foster care children's sense of well-being?	4. What is your perspective regarding barriers that prevent foster care children from developing a sense of well-being in early childhood programs? Prompt: I heard you say...Please give an example. 5. In your own words, what is meant by the term well-being? Prompt: I heard you say...Please elaborate on... 6. What types of resources and supports have you received to promote well-being in children in foster care in your classroom? Prompt: Please give an example. 7. What types of additional resources and/or supports would you like to receive to promote a sense of well-being in children in foster care in your classroom? Prompt: Please give an example. 8. Please talk about your curriculum and pedagogy in the context of promoting well-being in children in foster care. Prompt: Please share examples.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment of the participants commenced once IRB approval was granted (#01-14-21-0151757). Following this approval, I created a recruitment email posting invitation (approved by IRB) and sent it to school personnel after obtaining the superintendent's and/or principal's permission. The information sources consisted of educators (administrators, curriculum specialists, teachers) who work or have worked in PK-K

settings with children in the foster care system. Potential participants were contacted via telephone or email to verify meeting the set criteria to be part of the study. Participants who qualified (3 years of experience and work or worked with foster care children) were sent the consent form via email, and I offered to schedule our interview via phone, Zoom, Skype, or FaceTime. Volunteers responded and seven were conducted via video conferencing and two were conducted over the telephone.

Data Collection

The interview and transcripts served as the primary data source for this study. The participants were recruited from a school district in a rural area in a southwestern state. The invitation included the study description and my contact information. The digitally audio-recorded semistructured interviews are stored on my password-protected computer in a location where participants' confidentiality is protected. Interviews addressed questions designed to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. At each interview, I took notes for context and observations on participants' responses. Participants were reminded they were free to stop participating in the study at any time with no consequences for doing so. After completing the interviews, a summary of the interview transcripts was created for each participant. I encouraged each participant to verify the accuracy of the content of the summary by sending the transcript as an email attachment. I presented a \$5 gift card presented to participants as a token of appreciation.

Data Analysis Plan

A thematic analysis was appropriate for this study. This type of analysis allowed for great information coming from the participant actions and quotes used as part of the evidence of themes or statements that sustain validity from the data corpus (Saldaña, 2016). Data analysis consisted of holistic coding, which can show self-standing units of information such as participants' responses that address the research questions. I used descriptive phrases to code participants' responses or statements that could potentially be used directly when synthesizing a crucial concept (see Saldaña, 2016). I recorded details during the thematic analysis process and wrote summaries with extended sentences (see Saldaña, 2016). I examined and analyzed the data, and my committee reviewed my analysis. The use of software was not necessary for the transcript analysis.

Data collected from the interviews were linked to the research questions. I closely examined and reflected on interview responses of the nine participants in exploring their perspectives on their roles in promoting a sense of well-being in children in the foster care system. Bioecological systems theory framed the research questions and interview questions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). Using theoretical clusters, I mapped recurring concepts, words, and quotes that fit the bioecological systems theory. Themes emerged from participants' repetition of perspectives, indigenous terms, metaphorical expressions, analogy, linguistic links, shifts in theme, and different or similar views (see Saldaña, 2016). The code approach was holistic and descriptive to give a general idea of emergent themes. Coding was based on the emergent themes about foster child well-being

according to the environmental influences as suggested by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility is part of a study's internal validity, which is a critical component; trustworthiness is needed to validate the research design, instruments, and data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For example, the interviewees' credentials and expertise and the methods in use and standards were part of internal validity. As I conducted the interviews, I used the same questions and language with all participants following an interview protocol to ensure credibility. After the interviews, the audio and videos were kept on record to ensure credibility. To ensure participants' identity was protected and confidentiality was kept, I redacted their names from the transcripts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability

External validity or transferability covers "the extent to which findings hold true across contexts—and its threats are also major considerations in research design quality" (Burkholder et al., 2016, p. 116). To make my study's transferability more substantial, I conducted a literature review, examining and forming ideas from previous related studies. The literature review results show the gap in practice and endorse my topic on educators' roles in promoting well-being in early childhood education within the conceptual framework that fits Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems. Another consideration to

transferability was examining if my findings linked with other general settings that may be applicable.

Dependability

Reliability or dependability includes replicability of the collected data, analysis, and coding. I kept in mind as a researcher to remain subjective and reflexive (Burkholder et al., 2016). This is important due to my experience, which could affect my interpretation of the results; however, by being transparent with organized notes on my journal and checking with my committee, I reflected on my position as a researcher, considering my background and other facts. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described dependability as the ability to be consistent and have a sound argument over the study's course. A constant review of my method and approaches was considered.

Confirmability

In this basic qualitative research study findings' intent and goal was to recognize my biases and judgment, find ways to map them into my interpretation of the data, and balance them extensively via methodical, organized reflection. I encouraged participants to verify the accuracy of the content of the summary after our interviews as part of member checking or confirmability. Ravitch and Carl (2016) refer to findings with confirmability, as they are a "relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher biases—at the minimum, explicitness about the inevitable biases that exist" (p. 189). Presenting the information for the reader to confirm is of most significance; as a sole researcher, I challenged myself sincerely on an ongoing basis through all the steps of my research and welcomed feedback from my committee.

Ethical Procedures

Careful consideration of ethics in qualitative research needs is critical to the transactions and procedures and the sociopolitical and relational understanding; this is my duty as a researcher (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My approach goal is to be humble in collaboration and relational matters, and to successfully realize ethical research. The first ethical procedure is to complete the IRB application to be permitted to acquire data collection. Upon approval, I commenced the research by contacting one school district superintendent to request their permission to proceed with the study. Once the participants were screened and chosen, an “Informed Consent” form was emailed to the participant, and I requested a reply to this email with “I consent” as an agreement to be part of the study interviews. I assured each participant of confidentiality within the limits of the law, the process of early withdrawal, voluntary participation, and the adequate elimination of the data once the study is being completed successfully.

While recruiting participants, I emphasized that participation was voluntary and encouraged them by explaining the potential benefits of social change, which could positively impact educational well-being in children in foster care. It also disclosed no harm and no risk involved in the study, and participation cancelation was permissible if needed. I disclosed that the information shared was confidential, secured, and was not be of use for any other purpose besides this study. I coded any identifying information related to the sources such as location, schools’ district, school, or participant names and shall remain anonymous. Walden’s code of ethics establishes that the data obtained should be digitally secured along with transcripts in my home office for 5 years after

Walden University officially accepts my dissertation. Following the 5 years, the deletion of the collected data from my personal computer will be executed, along with any consent forms and protocol documents.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings from the perspectives of two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers. The data collection method was conducting one-on-one semistructured interviews with nine early childhood educators. Walden University's IRB, and the selected district-level school educators approval statuses were updated as they were granted. Ethical considerations prescribed by Walden University IRB were applicable for each participant selected. Data shall remain confidential, and adherence to keep the data secure was and will be strictly followed for five years. In Chapter 4, I present data collection, procedures, and analysis processes; and results of the study.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Results

The purpose of this study was to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings in a school district in the southwestern United States. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory framed this study and provided a theory to understand the various levels of influences on a foster care child's development by each bioecological system. Early childhood educators operate in the child's microsystem (parental), mesosystem (persons of interest), and macrosystem (institutional entities) and, as a result, have an impact on the growth and development of each foster care child. The two research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: What are educators' experiences working with foster care children in early childhood settings?

RQ2: How do early childhood educators promote foster care children's sense of well-being?

Chapter 4 focused on this study's findings. In the following section, I describe the setting where data collection took place, the demographics of the participants, the professional roles of the participants, and data collection and analysis techniques. Chapter 4 is summarized, and Chapter 5 is introduced.

Setting

Upon receiving IRB approval to conduct my study, I proceeded to request permission to conduct this study from the superintendent of a school district that has several early childhood programs under their supervision. The setting for this study was in one county located in a rural area in the southwestern United States. The district that

was the setting for this study employs educators who often work with foster care children. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I had plans to conduct face-to-face interviews at a mutually agreed upon location. However, due to the prevailing conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, I requested to conduct all interviews virtually, and IRB approved my request to conduct interviews via email, Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, or telephone. Consequently, all interviews with the nine participants (two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers) were conducted virtually through Zoom and over the phone with follow-up emails for the member-checking process.

Participant Demographics

Subgroups of educators were needed for this study, and purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants. Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this basic qualitative study with interviews (see Lodico et al., 2010). Nine early childhood educators (two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers) who work with foster care children enrolled in PK-K classrooms in rural early childhood program settings located in the southwestern United States volunteered for the study. Educators providing data from interviews were from three separate locations within one district. The educator participants worked in two elementary schools that have kindergarten inclusion and one prekindergarten-kindergarten school. All participants were current with all the required state teacher licensing and certification requirements. Table 2 depicts the teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5), curriculum teacher specialists (C1 and C2), administrators (A1 and A2), along with participants' alphanumeric codes, years of experience working in early childhood education, and their gender. Years of experience ranged from 3-25 years, and

all females, potential male participants were not available in the study area to be possibly recruited.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

Participant	Years of experience	Gender
T1	15	Female
T2	25	Female
T3	10	Female
T4	3	Female
T5	20	Female
C1	20	Female
C2	25	Female
A1	15	Female
A2	7	Female

Data Collection

Following Walden University's approval (01-14-21-0151757), subsequent participant recruitment and data collection began. The participants were recruited from a school district located in a rural area in the southwestern United States. My initial contact with the district was by sending both an email and a letter via regular U.S. Postal Service mail to the superintendent of the district to request permission to conduct my study in the school district. The superintendent granted permission for me to contact educators directly. The electronic post invitation included the study description, consent form, and my contact information was sent to 28 potential participants. I received responses from a total of 15 individuals. Six of the 15 did not have experience working with children in the foster care system. Therefore, they did not meet the criteria. Nine volunteers consented to be part of the study. Then I sent the informed consent form to each volunteer to provide

them with additional information and sample interview questions, and I proceeded to schedule a time and date for the interview. I requested that volunteers reply to my email with the words “I consent” in lieu of signatures because interviews would be virtual. Volunteers were also requested to provide dates and times that were convenient for them to participate in interviews.

The interviews were conducted between January 21, 2021, and March 14, 2021. Each interview lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded with my computer. Interviews were transcribed using Otter software and revised Zoom recording to verify context and other important notations during our interviews. Two interviews were conducted over the phone at the request of the participants. After completing the interviews, a summary of each interview transcript was created for each participant. The summaries were sent to participants for member checking to verify the accuracy of the transcripts in reflecting the content they provided during the interviews. A copy of the interview summary was sent to each participant over email for review of content accuracy to strengthen the validity of the data.

The digitally audio-recorded semistructured interview transcripts and summaries are stored on my password-protected computer to ensure participants’ confidentiality is protected; further, their names have been redacted (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), the correlation of data of methodological triangulation can be achieved by multiple data collections. There is a link between data triangulation and data saturation: one guarantees the other (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation for this study was achieved because participants repeatedly provided the same keywords and phrases

when responding to interview questions. I was unable to obtain additional information, and no further coding was needed (Fusch & Ness, 2015). During each interview, I took notes for context and observations on participants' responses, generating data that became part of this study. Any hard copies of data are locked in a file cabinet at my home office; all data will remain for 5 years and will be deleted and shredded in accordance with Walden University protocol.

Data Analysis

After collecting data from the nine participants, I carefully reviewed and reread interview transcripts several times. Data coding consisted of holistic coding, as it can show self-standing units of information such as participants' responses that addressed each of the research questions. I also used descriptive phrases to code participants' responses or statements for synthesizing crucial concepts (see Saldaña, 2016).

As the researcher in this study, I engaged in close examination and comparable reflection of nine participants' perspectives on promoting a sense of well-being in foster care children in their settings. Data coming from interview questions and prompts allowed my identification of codes, categories, patterns, and themes that were linked to the research questions. This process was achieved by using alphanumeric coding to organize interview data for each educator as they responded to the interview questions. Responses were organized by alphanumeric codes according to the participants' roles to remain meaningful in the context of their narratives. At this step, I noted differences between educators' responses based on their experiences and interpretations of questions. I compared 72 responses line by line to identify 157 codes, then proceeded to summarize

the codes and put them into 14 categories to identify patterns (see Appendix F); this allowed me to reflect to find meaningful themes (see Williams & Monser, 2019).

Themes emerged from participants' repetition of words, terms, phrases, metaphorical expressions, analogy, linguistic links, shifts, and different or similar views (see Saldaña, 2016). Also, I reflected on how each theme related to each component of the bioecological system's framework. The analysis was performed after the careful organization of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) bioecological systems theory components (micro-, macro-, meso-, and exo- systems) in relation to each of the thematic data parts to fit and connect properly. By using graphical theoretical clusters, I mapped research questions, categories, patterns, themes, and quotes onto two large cardboard pieces so I could have a visual map to assist me during the analysis process. Emergent themes were based on the influences of educators on the developing child and on the foster child's well-being as part of the environmental influences affecting the child. Environmental influences, such as those from biological parents, foster parents, foster care system caseworkers from community agencies, and other individuals in the community, were considered along with their impact according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework. I examined and analyzed the data, and my work was reviewed by my committee. The use of software was not necessary for coding the transcripts or analysis of the data. In the following section, I expand on the themes found and results answering each of the research questions.

RQ1: Categories and Themes

Participants of this study addressed RQ1 (What are educators' experiences working with foster care children in early childhood settings?) by responding to IQ1 through IQ3 (Please tell me about your experiences in working with children in the foster care system. Please discuss your successes in working with children in foster care in your early childhood setting. Please discuss challenges you have faced in working with children in foster care in your early childhood setting.)

I have synthesized data from two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers that revealed their experiences working with foster care children based on their roles as early childhood educators in early childhood settings. The following clusters and themes based on interview data about participants' experiences working with foster care children were found in interview data: (a) communicating or not communicating with foster families, other educators, foster care children, and agencies; (b) observing behaviors of foster care children that are typical or maladaptive for the age and stage of each child, behaviors of families that are functional or dysfunctional; (c) intervening to promote foster care children's well-being through intervention in all domains of learning; (d) reflecting on foster care children's backgrounds, living arrangements, and current needs in all domains of learning; (e) collaborating with school specialists and community agencies on behalf of foster care children and their families; (f) engaging in introspection about their own capacities, curriculum, and resources to meet the needs of foster care children and their families or foster families, and other educators; and (g) preparing themselves through professional learning opportunities that

strategically address educators' roles in providing interventions to support foster care children's well-being and address their challenging behaviors.

Communication

Data revealed that educators engage in communicating or not communicating with foster families, other educators, foster care children, and agencies. While teacher participants' experiences communicating with guardians were not optimal, collaboration with the teacher is needed for consistency on behavior modification. Two teachers revealed their biggest challenge was communication with non-English-speaking guardians to promote foster child well-being.

Observation

Findings showed that educators observing behaviors of foster care children are either typical or maladaptive for each child's age and stage, behaviors of functional or dysfunctional families. A teacher shared that she understands a foster child needs trust, comfort, and security. Another educator reflected on attachment disorders, foster child steal, and had no proper age-upbringing and had not been shown boundaries. One teacher witnessed severe trauma in a child and realized that guardians had no medical awareness/resources for parents to address psychological disorder needs for diagnosis and treatment.

Intervention

The data revealed that educators are intervening to promote foster care children's well-being through intermediation in all learning domains. All the study participants expressed what they had witnessed over time in a foster child's demeanor and behavior

and the lack of human needs affecting the child. Participants also noted in the foster child that trauma set certain behaviors; they are emotionally tough, lack trust, are insecure, have attachment disorders; show the lack of proper age upbringing and boundaries; have separation anxiety; are aggressive; are noncompliant; do not know how to communicate their feelings; have deep sadness; and show nervousness and fearfulness.

Reflection

Findings demonstrate educators are reflecting on foster care children's backgrounds, living arrangements, and current needs in all domains of learning. Because foster care children have unstable living circumstances, they experience school mobility, which hinders success and affects behavior, and the lack of love prevents development and well-being. Educators' data show they are aware that not all foster parents protect, love, care, and meet the students' needs, and hunger prevents learning and increases negative behavior. Also, educators have witnessed foster parents giving up on a child, and some teachers have been asked to foster them.

Collaboration

These data show the educators can appreciate collaborating with school specialists and community agencies on behalf of foster care children and their families. One administrator acknowledged the importance of supporting the foster child to have a dedicated and qualified counselor to manage a crisis (to include suicide threats) with a building in her school (that she does not have currently). A curriculum specialist internalized agency disconnects regarding information existing today outside the school

district systems, which is filtered and missing to assist educators on preparedness to instill well-being in foster care children.

Introspection

Educators' responses demonstrate they are introspective by inquiring about their own capacities, curriculum, and resources to meet the needs of foster care children and their families or foster families and other educators. One administrator shared that she lacks consistency on how to form attachments with foster children. Two teacher participants shared that not understanding or speaking a language other than English represents a barrier to promoting children's well-being. One educator showed concern about the effect of COVID-19 on foster children's well-being. An administrator expressed concern about staff well-being and encouraged teachers to check on each other's well-being and emotional exhaustion as the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted stress on the school team.

Preparation

Data collected showed that all nine educators recognize the need for specific professional learning opportunities that strategically address educators' roles in providing interventions to support foster care children's well-being and address their challenging behaviors. One administrator revealed that foster children enrolled on her campus are emotionally and academically behind 90% of the time. While another administrator shared that school staff, wait until a child's behavior is disruptive or the child has low academic progress, no assessments are made.

RQ2: Categories and Themes

Participants addressed RQ2 (How do early childhood educators promote foster care children's sense of well-being?) by responding to IQ 4 through 8 (In your own words, what is meant by the term well-being? What is your perspective regarding barriers that prevent foster care children from developing a sense of well-being in early childhood programs? What types of resources and supports have you received to promote well-being in children in foster care in your classroom? What types of additional resources and/or supports would you like to receive to promote a sense of well-being in children in foster care in your classroom? Please talk about your curriculum and pedagogy in the context of promoting well-being in children in foster care.).

I synthesized data from two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers that revealed their experiences in promoting foster care children's well-being based on their roles as early childhood educators in early childhood settings. Participants expressed their perspectives of both benefits and barriers. Participants revealed the following categories and patterns as they addressed RQ2: (a) forming relationships with foster care children and their families; (b) maintaining a physically, socially, and emotionally safe and predictable environment; (c) providing culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate resources and curriculum; (d) advocating for the education of foster children, their families, and those who work with them; (e) recognizing multiple interrelated influences on the child, family, educators, and community members; (f) being mindful of own wellness needs as an educator working with children in foster care; and

(g) seeking professional learning opportunities and educational support for foster care children and families.

Forming Relationships

Data from IQs depicted the importance of forming relationships with foster care children and their families. One teacher's concern is that the foster child's sense of identity and belongingness has been tempered upon entering the system; therefore, connecting with the families is essential. Another teacher noted that it is challenging to see growth in a child and set relationships with a transitional child. An educator shared that with today's virtual settings made necessary due to the pandemic (Covid-19), it is challenging to maintain healthy communication and relationships without guardian support.

Maintaining a Safe Environment

Findings revealed educators' focus on maintaining a physically, socially, and emotionally safe and predictable environment for foster children. A teacher shared her goal of providing a consistent, safe school environment that was free of fear, which enabled children to be themselves without negative consequences. Two educators strive for the children to trust them to enable children to be themselves and feel confident. An administrator consciously worked to find a teacher who was a good fit for the child (upon school arrival) based on her belief that a child's long-term retention in the same school ensured successful outcomes and well-being for the child.

Providing Resources

Educators' data revealed, they provided children with cultural, linguistical, and developmentally appropriate resources and curriculum. Educators give the child validation as a human being. They create flexible lessons to adjust to the foster child's developmental level to cope emotionally with the class content. Have in classrooms didactic material for socio-emotional issues and self-regulation only and character-building techniques for self-sufficiency to make a difference in the child's future. Stigma avoidance at the school, for success in promoting well-being. Another consideration stressed by educators was the observation of thoughtfulness (constant) on what a child could have gone through to see the underlying root cause of a child's emotion.

Advocating for Children and Families

The data findings demonstrated that educators are eager to advocate for the education of foster children, their families, and those who work with them. Care and consistency at school, for the child, to open up regardless of lack of normalcy and transitional settings at home. Talks to children about safety or basic needs worries (or abnormal situations) at home reporting. Empowers self-sufficiency within the child's reach (teacher or any other agencies close to them to disclose abuse or neglect).

Recognizing Interrelationships

The data collected shows that educators recognize multiple interrelated influences on the child, family, educators, and community members are affecting the foster child. One teacher shared that her main concern is to learn the child's interests from guardians

to have room to negotiate behavior in the classroom. Agency supports missing, and they stressed teacher/child ratio matters; aides are not present in kindergarten public schools.

Being Mindful of Their Own Wellness

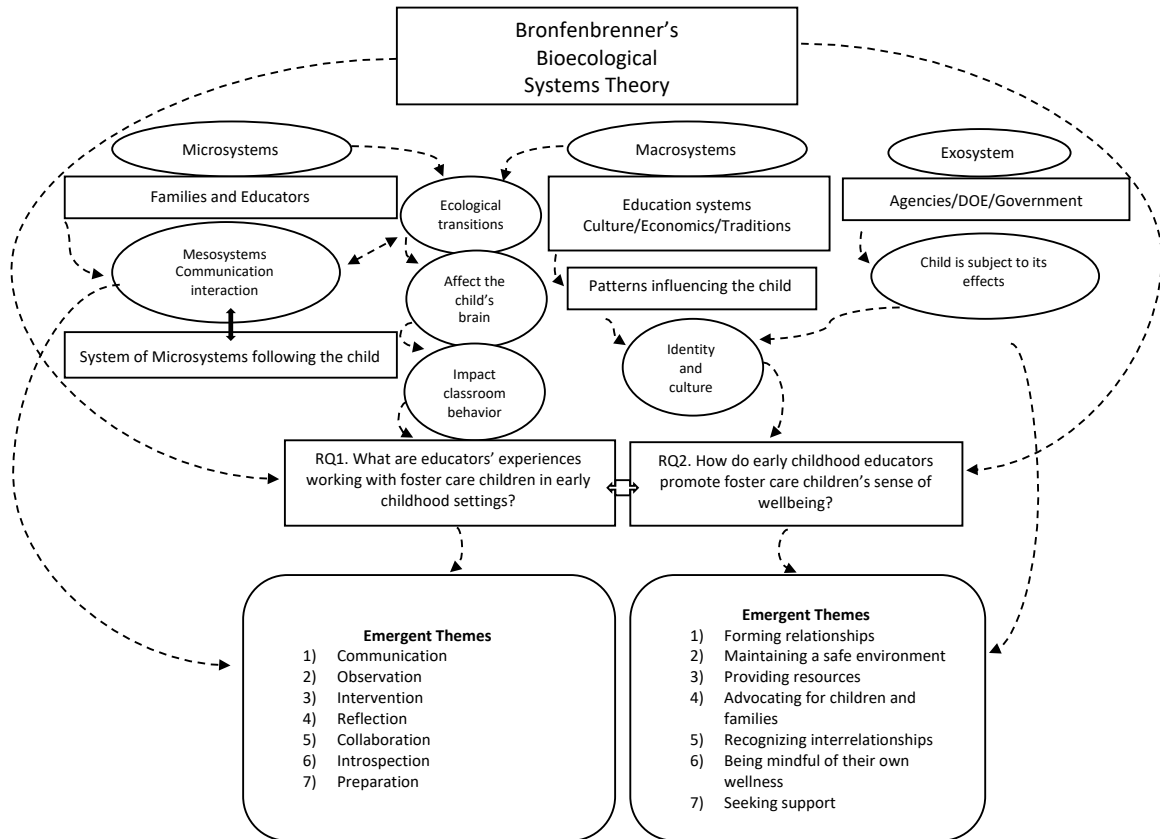
The educators' data revealed that being mindful of their wellness needs as an educator working with foster care children, matters. An emergent subtheme regarding teachers in early childhood education was shared by two experienced educators who noted that teachers need to work with their trauma and their socio-emotional state of mind before addressing a child with trauma. A teacher realized that she could be the only caring person in the child's life; children need love and hugs. Child stigma can be present, in the classroom, as for the child being different (foster child) and is consistently vigilant to protect the foster child.

Seeking Support

Data collected demonstrates that educators seek professional learning opportunities and educational support for foster care children and their families. All educators shared that they do not currently have any training on foster care children's well-being or mandatory classes on trauma. Teachers rely on self-knowledge, experience on well-being, and self-initiative on matters that benefit children. Two teachers expressed a wish on schools that could provide workshops on what trauma does to a child's brain development. Also, knowledge extension on the variety of adverse events and the effects on the child shown on behaviors to identify traumatic trends. One curriculum specialist wondered why the content is not available, as potential foster parents have, to be licensed as training for teachers. An administrator recognized that the Department of Education

agency in the state lacks funding for high-quality early education and well-being intervention in the area. Teachers do not have enough ACEs knowledge and how to work with trauma in children, which developmental skills work is needed and must be learned by educators. Educators shared that trauma effects without support can have long-lasting consequences for the child. Additionally, educators suggested that a foster child's basic and emotional needs are crucial for their sense of well-being, and expressed their views that educators are sometimes the only ones noticing.

Figure 1 depicts the relationships of all the elements from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (micro-, macro-, meso- and exo- systems), how they relate with the child environment and the participants influencing the child, the RQs driving this research, and the themes found as a result.

Figure 1*Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, Research Questions, and Themes*

Note. Adapted from *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiment by Nature and Design*, U. Bronfenbrenner, 1978, Harvard University Press.

Results

In this section, I present the study results answering the research questions in alignment with the conceptual framework and examples. Participants of this study were interviewed to explore their perspectives and experiences in the field regarding educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. Participants were identified with the use of alphanumeric codes in

both the research study and the interview transcripts. This section presents the results derived from the participant responses to the interview questions directly connected to each research question and the conceptual framework.

RQ1: Educators Experiences

The following section presents findings on RQ1: What are educators' experiences working with foster care children in early childhood settings? Seven themes emerged from the data connecting with RQ1, as follows: communication, observation, intervention, reflection, collaboration, introspection, and preparation. All seven themes are "what" educators experienced in their roles as administrators, curriculum specialists, and classroom teachers. Their responses were related and answered the question. Responses from educators are aligned with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological systems conceptual framework (micro-, macro-, meso-, exo- systems). Next, factors, details, and direct quotes from participants are given.

Theme 1: Communication

Data revealed that educators engaged in communicating or not communicating with foster families, other educators, foster care children, and agencies. Participant C2 shared, on trying to change negative behaviors in communication with guardians:

The thing is, you have to educate the parent, the foster parent, the grandparent, whoever is the legal custodian of this child, the legal guardian if they are continuing to allow the children to have these disruptive, non-boundary type behaviors. It is difficult in the school system, to change it when only, you are only have them six, seven hours a day, they are with the other people the other two-

thirds of the time, if there is no consistency, I think, really the open communication with those legal guardians. As to, here is what are the problems we see at school, here is how we are handling it. And what are you doing at home? And how can we help you? Or cannot tell them how we teach them. But some legal guardians really do want to know how to help these children, whether it be the foster care system, or the grandma, or aunt or somebody else that has them, basically, not with their parents. It is a challenge.

Two teacher participants (T1 and T2) had positive communication with guardians that were ongoing and contributing to more than one family when connecting the same struggling issues between parents, creating a sense of community. Teachers shared, an awareness of making connections with a child to create trust, show care and emotional sharing is important. T2 shared her struggle on communication, “I think the hardest are my monolingual families, or my monolingual children, and primarily, Spanish.” T4 described, “A lot of my kids that are in the foster care system are Spanish speaking and so are their parents. That’s a major language barrier for me.” Teachers were supportive of needs and requests from guardians and positive 2-way communication with foster parents, while some had negative experiences. Educator A1 shared,

We would not do a full evaluation. It is more at a surface level. It seems they are crying every day at lunch. I suggest, ‘Let them talk to our counselor for a minute and see if we can help them and that kind of thing. So, it is not super in-depth, but we do address it once if we see it.

Theme 2: Observation

Findings revealed all educators observed that behaviors of foster care children are either typical or maladaptive for the age and stage of each child, behaviors of families that are functional or dysfunctional. Participants in this study shared a wide array of experiences within their settings, contexts, and role.

All nine educators participating shared different behavioral trends shown in the classroom that need further attention. T2 reflected on her experiences with foster care children and shared her observations:

They can be aggressive; they could be someone who cannot separate well, and have very long fits of emotional pain, when they have to separate from their person or, you know, to come to school a lot of different flags, I guess they are going up to show that the trauma came in a lot of different forms and different ways.

From the point of view of participant A2, an increase in the volume of foster children entering her school, “If the economy’s rough, we get a lot more, if things are, you know, like in this Covid-19 pandemic situation, happening.” This information correlates with Bronfenbrenner’s definition of the exosystem as it affects a child indirectly, although the child might not be part of the economy and pandemic aftermath.

All participants shared that foster children require more attention and support in the classroom than their counterparts. T2 observed the need to address this by stressing the following, “And they are absolutely just flailing to find someone that gives them the security and the comfort and the trust that was stolen from them time after time after

time.” C1 stated, “And they are very sad inside... they don’t want to talk about it, or even, say how they are feeling. But it will come out and maybe by hitting another child or through aggressive behavior, or defiant or avoidance behavior.” Educator participant C1 mentioned, “It is hard to share they get very possessive because they think they do not have that security in their lives. They are constantly moving. They do not have a stable home, they are not able to identify who they are.” T2 described her perspectives, “children with trauma, a lot of times, unfortunately, are in our foster care system.”

Theme 3: Intervention

Data revealed that educators are intervening to promote foster care children’s well-being through intervention in all domains of learning. Foster child well-being implementation in the classroom; was reported by teacher intervention practices during classroom lessons. She focused on having predictable and stable routines. T2 shared her routine in the classroom in the following way:

They are validated as human beings as an important part of our community. They can contribute every day. They can have a job, so they have a responsibility. And they are so important here in the school -- and they know that, and they feel it because we foster that love and sense of community in the classroom.

C1 expressed the following:

The main thing for me is helping them to see that they are cared for and that we really care unconditionally.... just getting them to feel secure and safe and trusted and have them trust you. Then they are more open in the classroom, wanting to

learn. I think many of them because they have gone from home to home and never felt that security, their main concern is having their basic needs met.

C2's perspective was as follows:

Just being aware of being different, not allowing children to create issues, because they only have a mom, or they have two mommies, or they are not with their mommy and daddy, or they are living with grandma and grandpa, we had many children, not in the foster care system, but they were also struggling with just not having their mom and dad in their home. And I think that all plays a part in a child's self-esteem, abandonment issues.

A1 shared, her school strived for predictable settings to promote well-being by stating, "When a kid comes in and in their situation is transitional, we know that they are going to need a lot of extra TLC." A1 added, "We start to see that kid turn around so even if they are rebelling at the beginning, emotional at the beginning, they start to really calm down a little bit." C1, C2, and A1 expressed perspectives; if school is consistent and their teacher loves them, then you can see that child start to fit in.

Theme 4: Reflection

Findings demonstrate that educators are reflecting on foster care children's backgrounds, living arrangements, and current needs in all domains of learning. Practices shared by educators were: Inclusive practices based on equality and access; acceptance practices based on appreciation for children's unique characteristics; positive environmental practices to create an emotionally and physically safe classroom environment based on respect and child safety. Teacher T5 recognized that

compassionate and humanistic teaching are not skills acquired when preparing to become an educator; however, it is a method she uses to gain a child's trust (on her initiative). T2 reflected on her impact on well-being by keeping her promises in the classroom. She shared the following:

If I say, I am going to do this; I do it. If I say you are going to earn this, you get it. If I say it is your job today, I better follow through. That is the lifeline of a foster child -- Can I trust you? I mean, that is all they are asking. That is what they are looking for. Because the answer has been no, everywhere they turn for these people who were supposed to do that.”

C1 reflected on foster family's mobility and the feelings of insecurity for the children, as follows:

Because they have had to move around so much. They really cling to what is theirs, you know, like, and they might get very attached to a toy or something. So, it is hard to share, they get very possessive. Because they think they do not have that security in their life. They are constantly moving. They are not able to identify who they are. So, they are always looking for something like that. And then makes it a little bit harder, learning to share in the classroom. Separation anxiety and it is hard for them.

Educator A1 shared:

They're coming into a new school, they have got a new family setting, even if it's only going to last for a month, and then academically, they know that they are behind their peers, you know, not always, but I would say easily 90% of the kids

that come in, that have been moved out of a situation or into another one they are behind academically. So that adds to that social-emotional piece.

Theme 5: Collaboration

Data shows the educators can appreciate collaborating with school specialists and community agencies on behalf of foster care children and their families. Educator T5 revealed her experience with school specialists:

They knew (school staff) that some of those kids struggled; it is like one of the kids that had a stepdad. And so, the stepdad did not treat her as his own kid's. And the staff knew they were more compassionate as it was a very small place. So, the kids had staff who could give them that attention.

Administrator A1 had several resources that collaborate with her school supporting well-being in foster children; she stated, "Daily relationship building for kids to connect to other kids, for teachers to connect to kids, for teachers to connect to other teachers, it's a huge piece adopted district policy or program." Also added, "We utilize our district volunteers for all kinds of different things, you know, this town gets a wonderful place for volunteers." Current research findings training on today's issues of foster care children matters, on how they learn and process life events in educational environments. One administrator sadly commented that the district inhibited available training and staff support (based on experience in her school) regarding foster children's well-being, self-regulation, and emotional support and how trauma is complex and requires competency. A2 revealed, "About 25% of our kids have the capability of having

a school psychologist, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists on site.”

Educator C1 shared uncertainty on basic needs by stating:

Under the foster care system because many people are supplemented within the foster care system to provide food and clothes. Whether they do that or not is another issue, but generally, they have the funding to provide for the foster care children where sometimes, struggling parents or single home one parent families....and most teachers that I know of at my school, always had cookies and you know, peanut butter and bread and things like that.

Theme 6: Introspection

Educators’ perspectives demonstrate that they are inquiring about their own capacities, curriculum, and resources to meet the needs of foster care children and their families or foster families and other educators. A teacher (T2) was conscious that trauma creates no trust, separation anxiety; therefore, a foster child has many loss conditions that have experienced and makes them cling to things and lack identity. And that as trust has been broken by adults, there is where the challenge lays. As the child inquires trust, an adult must follow through to develop well-being. On teacher emotional awareness, when she observes an adult talking to a child refusing to listen, T2 noted:

You need to stop! Or no more of this! which really, when an adult says that to a child, which has been through everything in childhood trauma that could have been through, it really just shows that they are uncomfortable with the child’s emotions.

As a special education teacher, (however the community resources available have non-current information), C1 wished she could support families and shared:

I would like to get them associated with DDD, the Department of Developmental Disabilities, so that the parents might have respite, maybe on the weekends, they have someone that can take the kids and do things with them. And, so those supports, like the county which the state supports.

On resources needed A1 self-inquired:

It's more the qualified people that are available at school, when kids are in crisis, that and that person does not have three other jobs, that person has one job and that children need behavior support and emotional regulation, support and those things, all those things are, they are very complex...and counselors should be trained in how to do it exactly right.

Theme 7: Preparation

Findings revealed that educators recognize their need for specific professional learning opportunities that strategically address educators' roles in providing interventions to support foster care children's well-being and address their challenging behaviors. T2 describes her reflection preparedness:

I have more children with special needs than children with emotional needs. Now I have noticed this particular year, then in the past, sometimes more than half of my class have various traumas that we are trying to deal with...something that I want to be trained in Conscious Discipline... are you consciously in the right

place to be able to give out discipline? Again, putting it on you? Are you solid, centered, secure with who you are as a human being to be able to help this child? T4 explained, “district-level training is on the social-emotional parts. However, those types of training are not as focused on foster care children’s issues.” Educator C1 described, “I would say just that continued professional growth classes and stuff; I would not mind. Foster parents, I know they are required to take some classes having us having those resources where we could have access to those classes.” And A2 explained, “if there was some kind of constant development, to keep us up to date, on the stages... just professional development is lacking in that area, to be updated.”

RQ2 Educators Promote Well-being

RQ2 How do early childhood educators promote foster care children’s sense of well-being?

Seven themes emerged from the data connecting with RQ2 (forming relationships, maintaining a safe environment, providing resources, advocating for children and families, recognizing interrelationships, being mindful of own wellness, and seeking support). All seven themes are perspectives through actions on “how”, relate and align with the Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bioecological systems conceptual framework (micro-, macro-, meso-, exo- systems). Next, factors details and participant’s direct quotes examples which answer RQ2 are explained in detail.

Theme 1: Forming Relationships

The importance of forming relationships with foster care children and their families was reflected in the data. Educators shared different ways they implement well-

being. T2 shared, “Well-being comes from a place of knowing you are valued, you are important, you are part of this family, whether it’s the classroom family, the new foster family, giving them their space to be who they are.” The majority believed that the socio-emotional lessons piece was their most-used strategy in the classroom throughout to support children’s well-being (current state and school’s mandatory guide on training).

While the majority of the teacher’s agreed that communication with the guardians was important, T2 pointed:

Learning what the child’s currency is like, what are they madly in love with?

What is the thing that we can use in hopes of getting better behavior so that they can achieve that and get whatever that thing is and having the family on board is so wonderful!

A1 noted:

At a basic level, the idea is you establish a relationship and safety for that kid at school first, and then you focus on learning, but first, you establish a good safe connection with that child to the adults in the building.

Educator C1 explained:

I think the biggest challenge is making that connection. Because it’s really important that you make a connection very early with a student, to begin helping them understand that you’re there for them, you care for them, gaining their trust, then they’re able to talk about how they’re feeling. You know, quite a few of them, if they’ve been through trauma, they tend to just shut down.

Theme 2: Maintaining a Safe Environment

Educators' responses focused on maintaining a physically, socially, and emotionally safe and predictable environment for foster children. C2 shared her experience promoting a safe environment:

I think the well-being of a child is giving the child the tools to make sure that they could reach out to someone when they are not safe. I had one experience (talking in general), a child that was being sexually abused by a stepfather. And because of my talk, because of what I was explaining to children, not specifically about sexual abuse, but the safety of going to a teacher, or a church person, or some adult that you trust, that will help you in that situation. And they did. And, and, you know, to me, that was empowering.

C1 works with special needs children in her classroom that include foster care children, and to encourage well-being, she models, scaffolds, and uses character traits to teach independence by "Letting them do that problem solving on their own. It is important. It is just becoming productive members of society. And if you can start early with that, in these kids, it makes a world of difference. It really does."

A1 shared:

So, the child feels secure and safe in their physical being, and then safe emotionally, to be at school. And that is, I guess, mostly, what I am thinking of it probably doesn't matter what the setting is, school or home or whatever. That they do have or start to form a very secure attachment to one adult, more than one adult.

Also, educator T4 reflected, “the term well-being means that they have a full belly, that they feel safe. They feel cared for. That they have somewhere safe to sleep at night.”

Theme 3: Providing Resources

Data revealed that educators strive to provide culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate resources and curriculum. For educator T1, it is been flexible, describing her curriculum:

I always have to adjust. And I think that’s maybe the saving grace too for a foster child. If they’ve had such traumatic experiences, developmentally, they are not there quite yet academically, where kindergarten kids are supposed to be; they do not really stand out that much.

Educator T2 shared:

Our special needs program, and I was lucky enough to get the entire program (emojis program). There is a teacher’s manual book that goes with it, and it teaches social-emotional lessons to the kids through various characters. The dolls are really sweet and cute.

T3, on the contrary, said, “I do not have a curriculum promoting the well-being of children in foster care specifically. Our curriculum changes each year. We learn about different kinds of families”; as well C1 concluded, “We don’t have a particular curriculum that we use, but the social-emotional curriculum, what that is, is part, I guess, each month, we have a theme.”

All educators had a different perspective on curriculum and how they promote well-being via culturally, linguistically, and developmentally practices in the classroom;

however, not a specific curriculum to foster children's well-being. A2 said, "The last 2 years social-emotional has been our decision to reupload it to a system" (on training).

Theme 4: Advocating for Children and Families

The findings demonstrated that educators are eager to advocate for the education of foster children, their families, and those who work with them. While two teachers expressed the need for aides in the classroom to be able to assist better problematic children, other needs were shared. T1 experience on learning at a conference deemed to be valuable as she shared:

Understanding developmentally early trauma and what that does to your brain.

And kids who have experienced early trauma, they cannot help themselves. What they do is not to make me angry, or to make the other kids angry, they are so traumatized. They sometimes act a certain way, because they cannot act differently. And to understand that was very, was very helpful.

T3, T5, C1 and A2 had specific worries in training that do not exist today, in their available school training, to be able to assist the foster child and their families effectively.

T4 concern was basic needs (on supplies) to be able to help children, while C2 was food and healthy choices as she said, "because when kids are hungry, they cannot function. They're just thinking of food. That is all they are thinking of. They are in survival mode."

Theme 5: Recognizing Interrelationships

The data collected shows that educators are recognizing multiple interrelated influences on the child, family, educators, and community members affecting the foster

child. Educator T3 shared how she wants to learn, “Training about behaviors that foster children specifically could exhibit, what to look out for. Also, ways to support their well-being and emotional support would be helpful”. And C1, concerned about families, knows that information is out there, said: “someone in the community can come to tell us, hey, we are this organization, and this is how we can help kids, this is how we can help. So that we know and be able to tell parents”. Educator A1 shared her appreciation for the community, “after school care, you know, the Boys and Girls Club to therapy dogs to grandparent volunteers to you name it. So, the community for us here, that community piece is huge. They help provide a lot of things that we need to help ensure well-being.” C1 mentioned how her school supports hunger, “We provide lunches for the kids, and we provide snacks. And that includes milk and juice. We provide the food bags from the church that bring them over.”

Theme 6: Being Mindful of Their Own Wellness

The educators’ data revealed that being mindful of their own wellness needs as an educator working with children in foster care is crucial. A noted piece of information from two educators on teacher self-care that work with foster care children in their class follows, T2 shared:

You strive to work into your own social-emotional well-being before trying to strategize; how are you going to handle a child. Children are going to trigger us no matter what; it is their job, they are supposed to push on every level, and test the world and make sure that you are the ones setting the boundary, and you are the one keeping them safe in that way. So, they are going to do it anyway. But a

child that comes with trauma will trigger so much within you if you have not healed.... And children with trauma, a lot of times, unfortunately, are in our foster care system.

And T1:

To really develop and heal that attachment, I think, it is the teacher. And you see in that, yeah, it is the teacher and well-being for me is to be so secure with yourself, in particular, in a classroom setting, that you are willing to take risks.

C2 reflected:

If you have a really negative kindergarten teacher, preschool teacher, it just sets that child up for failure for the rest of his life. Or you take a really excellent kindergarten teacher, first grade teacher, I mean, to this day, my kindergarten teacher, I know what she looked like. I remember doing all kinds of things with me you know, building things, using 16 nails pounding nails to make a boat. I mean, I was 5 years old, but it was just, she was warm. She was not like my home.

A2 shared about staff harmony and awareness, “Where they are working together and figuring out what works best for them (teachers), their partners, their kids... it helps us to better place students to students as well.” And C1 noted, “We kind of have a lot of drive for that social-emotional growth in ourselves, too, as far as like a professional development goal.”

Theme 7: Seeking Support

Data collected demonstrates that educators are seeking professional learning opportunities and educational support for foster care children and their families. All educators shared that they do not currently have any training on foster care children well-being or mandatory classes on trauma. All participants (T's, C's, and A's) shared that there is no training specific in their district to all the learning and well-being traits that a foster child requires. T1 described, "I think the school should provide that professional development" and T5 reflected, "Training in trauma would help, definitely." Participant A2 paused in deep reflection on knowledge and shared:

When it comes to our kids that have been in abusive homes or born drug-addicted, there's just not enough information as to how these kids are learning and processing. Many of them are in foster care because they were born drug-addicted to something, and we don't know how to work with that. It's such a varying range of what can happen as they develop later.

A1 shared about support resources being limited:

If a child needs immediate intervention, it is only once a week a counselor will come to the school and perhaps need to see 60 kids... We're noticing a lot more; they need a lot more than just a quick chat... I would love for it to be that person's dedicated job, they have a dedicated building, and they can really, really do that work on an ongoing basis.

Summary of Results

The following table (Table 3) presents a summary of data by RQ1 and RQ2. The table lists themes that emerged from the analysis of data from two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five teachers. Synthesis of data collected from interviews guided by RQ1 and RQ2 revealed the following overarching themes: communication when forming relationships, observation when maintaining a safe environment, intervention when providing resources, reflection when advocating for children and families, collaboration when recognizing interrelationships, introspection when being mindful of their own wellness, and preparation when seeking support.

Table 3*RQs Categories and Themes and Findings Alignment in Educators' Roles*

RQ1 What are educators' experiences working with foster care children in early childhood settings?	RQ2 How do early childhood educators promote foster care children's sense of well-being?
Communication (1) Communicating or not communicating with foster families, other educators, foster care children, and agencies	Forming relationships (1) Forming relationships with foster care children and their families
Observation (2) Observing behaviors of foster care children that are typical or maladaptive for the age and stage of each child, behaviors of families that are functional or dysfunctional	Maintaining a safe environment (2) Maintaining a physically, socially, and emotionally safe and predictable environment
Intervention (3) Intervening to promote foster care children's well-being through intermediation in all domains of learning	Providing resources (3) Providing culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate resources and curriculum
Reflection (4) Reflecting on foster care children's backgrounds, living arrangements, and current needs in all domains of learning	Advocating for children and families (4) Advocating for the education of foster children, their families, and those who work with them
Collaboration (5) Collaborating with school specialists and community agencies on behalf of foster care children and their families	Recognizing interrelationships (5) Recognizing multiple interrelated influences on the child, the family, educators, and community members.
Introspection (6) Inquiring about their own capacities, curriculum, and resources to meet the needs of foster care children and their families or foster families, and other educators	Being mindful of their own wellness (6) Being mindful of own wellness needs as an educator working with children in foster care
Preparation (7) Recognizing the need for professional learning opportunities that strategically address educators' roles in providing interventions to support foster care children's well-being and address their challenging behaviors.	Seeking support (7) Seeking professional learning opportunities and educational support for foster care children and families.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In this qualitative study, trustworthiness was included as all the principal parts found on qualitative studies such as credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. I demonstrated trustworthiness and authenticity to participants by clear communication of the intent of the study in a simple language and giving them assurance on confidentiality and credibility. Proper strategies were followed during the process of recruiting volunteers, obtaining participants, conducting the interviews, collecting and managing the data, member checks, analyzing the data, and interpreting the results.

Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility is part of the study's internal validity, which is a critical component, as it is the trustworthiness needed to validate the research design, instruments, and data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As I conducted the interviews, I used the same questions and language with all participants following an interview protocol to ensure credibility. Virtual general observations of the participants' reactions were part of my journal notes as a researcher during the interviews. After the interviews, the audio and videos were kept in record to ensure credibility. Also, ensuring my participants' identity protection and confidentiality were kept, I redacted their real names in the transcripts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In addition, credibility was attained by saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) describe that by gathering quality data and quantity (rich and thick), one can achieve saturation, as descriptions gotten through valid collecting methods can be meaningful to aid the process of answering the research question. When the lack of new information from the participants was not realized, internal validity was accomplished.

Transferability

Transferability can be determined by a reader of this study based on the provision of the detailed description of the data collection process, including the general location for the study, and participants' demographic (see Lodico et al., 2010). According to Lodico et al., these factors all needed to be present in the study for the reader to examine and determine the potential for possible replicability of the study. External validity or transferability covers "the extent to which findings hold true across contexts- and its threats are also major considerations in research design quality" (Burkholder et al., 2016, p. 116). Another consideration for determining the transferability of data is the presence of thick and rich descriptions of findings and settings. The presence of those factors would help the reader determine the applicability of this study's findings to other general settings (see Burkholder et al., 2016).

Dependability

Dependability was confirmed by the use of a member checking process in which each participant received an email with an interview transcript for accuracy of the content of the interview data. I kept in mind as a researcher to remain subjective and reflexive (Burkholder et al., 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) described dependability as the ability to be consistent and have a sound argument over the study's course. A constant review of my method and approaches were considered.

Confirmability

In the same way, that dependability is secured, confirmability is through methodical, organized reflection. I encouraged participants to verify the accuracy of the

content of the summary after our interviews as part of member checking or confirmability. Ravitch and Carl (2016) refer to findings with confirmability, as they are a “relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher biases -- at the minimum, explicitness about the inevitable biases that exist” (p. 189). Presenting the information for the reader to confirm is of most significance; as a sole researcher, I challenged myself sincerely on an ongoing basis through all the steps of my research and welcomed feedback from my committee. Any discrepancies in responses were as well-considered and part of the results section of this study.

Ethical Procedures

Careful consideration of ethics in qualitative research needs is critical to the transactions and procedures and the socio-political and relational understanding; this is my duty as a researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My approach goal was to be humble in collaboration and relational matters, and to successfully realize ethical research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The first ethical procedure was to complete the IRB application to be permitted to acquire data collection. Upon approval (#01-14-21-0151757), I commenced the research by contacting one school district superintendent to request their permission to proceed with the study. Once the participants were screened and chosen, an “Informed Consent” form was emailed to the participant, and I requested a reply to this email with “I consent” as an agreement to be part of the study interviews. I assured each participant of confidentiality within the limits of the law, the process of early withdrawal, voluntary participation, and the adequate elimination of the data once the study has been completed successfully. While recruiting participants, I emphasized that participation was voluntary

and encouraged them by explaining the potential benefits of social change, which could positively impact educational well-being in children in foster care. It also disclosed no harm and no risk involved in the study, and participation cancelation was permissible if needed. I disclosed that the information shared was confidential, secured, and was not to be used for any other purpose, besides this study. I coded any identifying information related to the sources such as location, schools' district, school, or participant names and shall remain anonymous. Walden's code of ethics establishes that the data obtained should be digitally secured along with transcripts in my home office for 5 years after Walden University officially accepts my dissertation. Following the 5 years, the deletion of the collected data from my personal computer will be executed, along with any consent forms and protocol documents.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I provided detailed information on the research setting for this study as it was conducted, participants' demographics, data collection and analysis, results of the study, and components of trustworthiness. Also, I described the data collection finding's emergent themes and presented the study results, as collected from individual interviews with open-ended questions, allowing the participants to freely express themselves. Analysis of the data was performed via descriptive and holistic coding and categorized thematically, considering Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1979) conceptual framework on bioecological systems theory.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings.

The problem addressed by this study was educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. Nine educators, including five teachers, two curriculum teacher specialists, and two administrators, were interviewed.

Data was coded using a descriptive and holistic method and analyzed on a thematic stance, redeeming 14 emerging themes. Emergent themes for RQ1 were: Communication, observation, intervention, reflection, collaboration, introspection, and preparation. Emergent themes for RQ2 were: (a) forming relationships, (b) maintaining a safe environment, (c) providing resources, (d) advocating for all, (f) recognizing interrelationships, (g) being mindful of own wellness, and (h) seeking support. Alignment between emerging themes from RQ1 and RQ2 is presented in the findings section. A synthesis of data from RQ1 and RQ2 reveal overarching themes, as follows: (a) communication when forming relationships, (b) observation when maintaining a safe environment, (c) intervention when providing resources, (d) reflection when advocating for children and families, (e) collaboration when recognizing interrelationships, (f) introspection when being mindful of their own wellness, and (g) preparation when seeking support.

Study findings align with research questions and the study's conceptual framework, the bioecological systems theory. The exosystem represents formal and informal settings (from upper levels of educational training and resources set for states, regions, school districts) structuring what needs to be implemented and distributed. The exosystem decision-makers affect the foster child's well-being through teacher training, on how the child relates with others presently or in the future (as it includes values,

attitudes, and ways-of-knowing of individuals, relative to others) and its part of the child's environment. The macrosystem plays a role in supporting the foster child in different ways. The microsystem is a setting between the developing child and his or her direct links with others (e.g., families, educators, siblings, and each within its own microsystem). One microsystem (a teacher at school) influences the child by exerting themselves to buffer the effects of trauma in the foster child, making a positive or negative difference. The mesosystem is made of relationships between two essential sets of connection settings (two or more microsystems interacting) in the developing child environment. The microsystem degree changes grow or decrease, with life-event changes such as divorces, births, deaths, or family separation. The exchange interactivity involves consequences in higher systems on a child (brain) that are invariably connected and reflected in the development environment, such as how children behave in a classroom (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). All these components are fundamental to the reflection and conclusive parts in the upcoming section. In Chapter 5, I present a discussion of the findings and conclusion, and make recommendations for further study based on my findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. This qualitative study with interviews was conducted to examine both the local problem and wider problem demonstrated by a gap in practice in the field of early childhood education about educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. In this study, I addressed both research questions:

RQ1: What are educators' experiences working with foster care children in early childhood settings?

RQ2: How do early childhood educators promote foster care children's sense of well-being?

Data were collected through one-on-one digitally recorded interviews with nine educators that included five teachers, two curriculum specialists, and two school administrators. Each participant responded to eight questions about their role in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, IRB granted me permission to conduct the interviews via Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, or telephone call. This basic qualitative study with interviews design supported my exploration of educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. My focus was on the perspectives of the participants about promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their classrooms and other school settings.

The data analysis process that resulted from this study was based on the nine educators' working experiences in a rural southwest region of the United States. Chapter 2 included the conceptual framework that provided the foundation of this study. I researched peer-reviewed journal articles for relevant research-based findings regarding concepts on foster care children's sense of well-being in education. My goal in the exhaustive review of the literature was to understand teacher-child interactions, teacher-child relationships, externalizing behaviors, preschool emotion talk, early literature development, hybrid families and early childhood educators, Early Head Start programs, programs for migrant and homeless children, cultural belongingness, child maltreatment, learning/achievement gaps, intercultural learning, diversity, school mobility, children enrolled in the foster care system, and foster care children with disabilities. In Chapter 3, I reflected on the study methodology, participant selection, instrumentation, the procedures for recruitment of participants, data collection and data analysis approach, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. In Chapter 4, I described the setting where the research was conducted and participant details relevant to the study. I included the processes of data collection and data analysis methods to reveal emergent themes. Results of this qualitative study with interviews were presented in Chapter 4. Evidence of trustworthiness was depicted by describing steps used to ensure credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the study. In Chapter 5, I present key findings of the study, limitations, recommendations, implications on social change and conclusive remarks to the study.

In this study, I found that educators' roles in promoting a sense of well-being in students who are in the foster care system needs careful consideration by teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, and school district leaders. All participants reported that currently there is no mandatory training targeting foster care children's specific needs of well-being. I found that educators' implementation and experiences on promoting well-being in foster children is subject to their best practices and self-motivation. Educators reported various views on well-being and what they wish was different in their own settings to serve children in the foster care system. In addition to supporting experiences in the classroom, participants shared factors that they perceived caused stress and concern, which brought to light the need for better practices in education.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I reflect on my key findings in relation to the literature from Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework that guided my study. Findings from this research extend knowledge in the field and add to the body of literature that highlights educators' roles in promoting foster children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. This is supported in the literature by Aldridge et al. (2016) and Holmes et al. (2018), who suggested that foster children benefited from nurturing from educators who promote children's well-being in school environments.

The following section will focus on findings from this study based on educators' perspectives. Data analysis revealed themes, and from subthemes gathered from RQs 1 and 2, I identified overarching themes, which were revealed in data from interviews

about educators' roles to promote foster child well-being: (a) communication when forming relationships; (b) observation when maintaining a safe environment; (c) intervention when providing resources; (d) reflection when advocating for children and families; (e) collaboration when recognizing interrelationships among school stakeholders; (f) introspection when being mindful of personal wellness; and (g) professional preparation when seeking support. Compilation of these overarching themes aided me in answering the two research questions and assisted me in filling a gap in practice regarding educators' roles in promoting foster children's sense of well-being in early childhood school settings. Based on these findings and support of my findings from the existing literature, I was able to formulate recommendations for further study, which I present later in this chapter.

Communication When Forming Relationships

All participants stressed that communicating to connect with foster children and to form relationships with foster families or children's guardian families, matters. Building relationships with families was viewed by administrators, curriculum specialists, and teachers as essential to establish partnerships that promote foster children's learning and well-being. Participants recognized that communication with family's needs to be reciprocated, as some had successes and others had challenges in cooperation due to the transient lifestyle educators perceived that some foster families lived. This finding was supported by the research of McKinnon et al. (2018) and Pears et al. (2016), who also found that young foster children and their families in the early grades

had challenges in creating and maintaining close relationships with teachers because of frequent school mobility.

Participants T1 and T2 had ongoing communication with guardians that they perceived contributed to positive outcomes for foster children and their ongoing relationships with foster families. T1 and T2 worked to connect families with similar issues to create a sense of community. These findings were supported in the literature on teacher-child relationship closeness (as an intervention), which benefits children in kindergarten (Schmitt et al., 2018). Coulombe and Yates (2018) found interventions on the closeness between the teacher-child positive relationships resulted in children's favorable pro-social and adaptation behaviors. According to Halpern et al., (2019), when systems consider child and family stressors (sense of belonging, coping with legal status, lack of trust in government, and urge to keep heritage) and include family community-related involvement, children's development improves socially and academically.

Other educators found that communication in another language was something more daunting. T2 and T4 explained that not speaking Spanish is a barrier in communication with some children and their families. These teachers shared their perspectives that the school district should provide interpreters and suggested not having provisions for non-native-speaking children and families demonstrated a lack of consideration by the school system to provide resources. Data collected from teachers aligned with findings from Tordön et al. (2020), which suggested that attention to children with non-native language who are also in foster care should be given primary consideration in school policies and systems. Further, Dalziel et al. (2019) suggested that

cultural identity matters as an individual influence. Being able to speak and be understood is essential for a child to have a strong sense of belonging, increased self-worth, and a sense of well-being.

Observation When Maintaining a Safe Environment

Participants T1, T2, T3, T5, and C1 observed behaviors of foster care children are either typical or maladaptive for each child's age and stage; educators perceived that children's behaviors reflected the functional or dysfunctional abilities of the families. Educators' perspectives are confirmed in the research by Kanine et al. (2018), suggesting that children in foster care have frequent changes in caregivers and disruptive environments. Further, researchers found that children in foster care are in dire need of consistent teachers with available mental-health resources to lower the adverse effects they experience (Kanine et al., 2018).

A1 reviewed her commitment to offering foster care children long-term retention in the same school. She believed retaining students ensured successful outcomes and well-being for the children. The administrator's recognition of the transient nature of foster families is consistent, as suggested by Pears et al. (2016), where 69% of foster care children changed schools. Also, 51% of those foster care children who changed schools changed more than once during the same school year; and a majority of foster care children change schools due to their changes in foster care placements (Pears et al., 2016). Conversely, high-quality schools that offer resources, transition methods for teachers with new students to develop teacher-child relationships, and practices to integrate children regardless of the timing of their entry or reentry into the school were

beneficial for foster care children (McKinnon et al., 2018). Consequently, T1, T2, T4, C1, A1 and A2 were focused on maintaining a physically, socially, and emotionally safe and predictable environment for foster children. Also, all participant educators showed that they strive for the children to trust them to enable children to be themselves and feel confident. Rees et al. (2019) described professionals' roles in promoting foster care children's well-being were to make sure each child has in their lives a trusted adult who hears their concerns and worries and is listening. Also, the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2020) stated, in supporting responsive relationships, that teachers can develop trust when they "serve and return interactions" that protect the biological development of the child (p. 15).

Intervention When Providing Resources

In their work, participant's (T1, T2, T4, C1, C2) perspectives show they are intervening in their different roles and strive to promote validation in the child. This is supported in the research by Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017), who found that each child's validation as a human being with unique qualities is part of promoting well-being. Participant educators shared notions of giving children a sense of community and belongingness; this aligns with Haynes and Engelsmeier (2020), Jokikokko and Karioski (2016), which suggested that educators should open their dispositions by engaging and opening to others' cultural backgrounds to create accountability in their relationships with the communities they are serving. Layne and Lipponen (2016) also suggested these concepts apply to children in foster care.

Also, participants (T2, T3, T4, T5, C1, & C2) findings noted that they offer security by meeting their immediate needs (as readily available), consistency, and respect for their family composition. Shoknoff (2018) called for awareness that some children are highly reactive and sensitive, and it is basic to assess risks and possible solutions with support; and to acknowledge the significance...which is essential for encouraging children's development and learning to confront maltreatment.

All participants could not confirm a curriculum on promoting well-being of children in foster care; however, participants suggested that their need for preparation based on training and professional learning was a need. While the majority adapted their curriculum to the needs of their student populations, one teacher shared that she purposely adjusts to the foster child, as she takes into consideration the child's exposure to trauma. This participant teacher's statements were supported by findings by Klika and Conte (2018), who suggested in meeting foster care children's developmental needs, adults promote children's sense of well-being in all domains of learning: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional.

A special needs teacher participant did not mention a curriculum for foster children with disabilities and stressed that the curriculum in her classroom is focused on socio-emotional lessons. This is notable as Parker & Folkman (2015) suggested that abuse and neglect are the main reasons why manifestations of emotional and behavioral disorders are in place as part of the child's history. Furthermore, Rigles (2017) proposed that having autism or disability could be considered similar to experiencing prevalent ACEs.

One administrator confirmed that it is an independent decision in her school to focus on one learning domain for the year (as an interpretation of curriculum well-being implementation). These findings align with educators being challenged to promote the well-being of children in foster care (Athanasas et al., 2018; Holmes et al., 2018; Piescher et al., 2018). One participant teacher had knowledge of trauma from previous work experience to teaching, while eight participant educators felt they were short on the requirement or current resources available on training in ACEs. This is consistent with Holmes et al. (2018), Sanders and Munford (2016), and Shonkoff (2018) who all indicated trauma-sensitive training gives educators tools they need to promote foster care children's sense of well-being.

Regarding resources needed, and administrator realized her frustration about not having a dedicated counselor with high qualifications for her school to create relationships with children with trauma and the capability to recognize the complexity of the different types of trauma or toxic trends in children. This finding contradicts the ESSA (2015) requirements for school staff to provide and receive professional development covering the topics applicable to children in the foster care system, such as professional development for staff that would lead to the creation of trauma-sensitive schools.

Reflection When Advocating for Children and Families

Participant educators reflected on foster care children's backgrounds, living arrangements, and current needs in all domains of learning, in different ways. This is part of promoting well-being as proposed by Cornell (2020), as teachers could become agents

of the curriculum by inspiring others to foster the capacity to be fully human in their students. Additionally, participants stated they create positive environments. Participants shared how they cope with the wide array of factors affecting foster children. One teacher participant shared that she shows compassion to foster children to gain trust, while another teacher mentioned she strived to keep her promises to children. These experiences align with the pedagogical practices from the Libre Process Goal -- teach dignity of all life, interconnect with others, show compassion, and inspire an appreciation for diversity (Rautela & Singh, 2019).

Curriculum specialists reflected on mobility and insecurity affecting the foster child, this relates to Mayaux et al. (2016), and Children Now (n.d.), regarding foster care children experiencing trauma twice, first due to their traumatic home environments and second when they are removed from their home environments and placed in the foster care system. An administrator perspective is the witnessing of overall academic achievement and the emotional toll on the foster child as a whole (she stated 90% of foster children are academically behind); this is dependent on the historical experiences of foster children in her specific school. This is suggested by Irish (2016), foster children's traumatic experiences and low education proficiency are interlinked and need to become an area of focus that forces a change in current educational systems.

FosterEd (2018) suggested that many foster care children do not receive early education services or developmental assistance because they are not living at home. All participant educators expressed a desire to advocate for families and foster children as revealed in the findings, it varied from the need of aides in the classroom, for individual

attention, to healthy food and supplies readily available, and the availability of proper training to respond adequately to the child or family needs.

Collaboration When Recognizing Interrelationships

Participant educators shared the importance of collaboration with school specialists and community agencies on behalf of foster care children and their families. All nine participants' perspectives recognize multiple interrelated influences on the child, family, educators, and community members affecting the foster child. Two teacher educators appreciated having staff available to respond to a child on demand; however, the rest of the participant educators rely on their own abilities to resolve issues (during a classroom, child crisis).

Klika and Conte (2018) suggested meeting foster care children's developmental needs, buffer the effects of neglect, abuse, lack of permanency, and separation. As well, a curriculum specialist showed concern to assist families on how the system is lacking a current community resources school coordinator sharing all current matters regarding foster children, so she could help her foster children and families. A teacher participant expressed eagerness to learn more about foster children trauma-behavior to be able to support them properly.

The USDOE (n.d.) and the USDHHS (2016) issued non-regulatory guidance to affirm the stability of foster care children. Some States implemented local educational agencies (LEAs) appointing foster care liaisons. One administrator shared that only 25% of the children at her school are able to use school resources composed of psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists. While another

administrator view relied on school-external after-school programs and volunteers, linked to the school and school district for foster children support on well-being. This resonates with Sanders and Munford (2016), about school educators nurturing resilience by creating spaces that cultivate positive relations; it promotes development in vulnerable children, as resilience cannot be assumed to exist in all students and can buffer developmental risks.

Introspection When Being Mindful of Their Own Wellness

Educators introspective; regarding their own capacities, curriculum, and resources to meet the needs of foster care children and their families or foster families, and other educators. A teacher shared the observed effects of trauma in a child, where adults had broken trust, that child needs to trust the most the teacher, and the teacher needs to keep true what is said in the classroom; to develop well-being. This resonates with Montgomery et al. (2018) on educational initiatives that should be considered when there has been a history of family trauma involving children.

Two participants shared the significance of the teacher's own socio-emotional competence to effectively set boundaries in problematic children and to remain collected, while being able to heal and develop attachment issues in a child. Schonert-Reichl (2017) proposed that teachers should understand their own socio-emotional state of mind, as it is this lens this influences their behaviors with children in terms of children's healthy socio-emotional development or socio-emotional learning. Further, Granqvist (2020) found that young children assume that their attachment figures are stronger and wiser than themselves; in contrast, according to Children Now (n.d.), infants and toddlers in foster

care have a higher risk of mental and health problems due to lack of attachment figures by caring adults being present for them early in their lives.

A curriculum teacher specialist stressed the essentiality of warmness in a teacher as it could set in a child further trauma for life. One educator kindly shared the emotional stress sometimes she takes home. This perspective resonates with Schonert-Reichl (2017), teachers' job tensions are on the rise and their stress levels are high, it is suggested courses in stress management and socio-emotional competency for teachers, as it can bring academic success for children and promoting SEL intervention in classrooms.

Participant educators revealed that being mindful of their own wellness needs as an educator working with children in foster care, is crucial. An administrator described care between staff members in her team to encourage each other in well-being. This is supported by Strong (2018) regarding supportive practices for educators to handle the complexity of developing resilience and growth in a child after exposure to ACEs.

Preparation When Seeking Support

The nine educator participants shared a need for specific professional learning opportunities providing interventions to support foster care children's well-being. This is supported by Gutentag et al. (2018), Jokikokko & Karikoski (2016), Layne & Lipponen (2016), findings regarding teachers not being sufficiently prepared for working with children from a wide range of diversities.

A special needs teacher noted that this year has more children with special needs. This experience shared brings the need for educators' preparation; as Parker and Folkman (2015) noted, the risks of over-identifying a disability, when it is not, often happens due

to the lack of proper tools to assess the child's behavior, gaps in learning and qualifying them as disabilities, and are sent to special education, impacting their educational continuity. In addition, one administrator revealed the need for preparedness on consequences of drug exposure in a child's learning journey, and how it can be worked, as it could help a teacher encourage well-being and development in the foster child. All educators revealed that the training they receive does not have elements that focus on foster care children's matters. This finding is supported by Tirrell-Corbin (2019) in regard to school systems needing to elevate resources, tools, and provisions for teachers. Further, Tirrell-Corbin found academic and social influences of teachers need to have reinforcement to be successful, especially with children who have experienced historical trauma.

One curriculum educator noted, educational training available for teachers today coming from their own system is monitored and controlled, lacking updated and current research and information integration that could benefit foster children well-being. This is of critical attention by Shonkoff (2018), suggesting the need for educators to learn and recognize toxic stress and its degree of severity, as it is critical for child protection from harm and creating skills to cope with dangers to their well-being. Also, awareness that some children are highly reactive and sensitive is basic, to assess risks and possible solutions with support; and to acknowledge the significance of ongoing capacity building for teachers, which is essential for encouraging children's development and learning to confront maltreatment or hardships.

Findings in Relation to the Conceptual Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) conceptual framework was chosen for my research and supported the findings of this basic qualitative study. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory places the child at the center of systems that have an impact on the child's development. Early childhood educators operate in the child's microsystem (parental), mesosystem (persons of interest), and macrosystem (institutional entities); and as a result, have an impact on the growth and development of the foster care child.

Data collected in this study demonstrated that participants believe in communication with the child and between the educator and foster child families are important for development and learning achievement. Blewitt et al. (2020) supported Bronfenbrenner's theory that exchanges between a child and his or her teacher strengthened their relationship based on sensitive environments. Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) argued that culture's role is operational in the microsystems, because it becomes part of the child's learning, sense of identity, and overall development. Participants in this study recognized the child's validation as a human being and unique qualities as part of promoting well-being in the foster child.

Holmes et al. (2018) stated children's protective and risk factors are in continual change as supported by the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979). Early intervention for children between the ages of 1 and 3 is recommended, and the use of three protective factors: warmth, cognitive responsiveness, and social skills. When educators use these three protective factors, children develop socio-emotional skills, which help them interact appropriately with peers and adapt to school life (Holmes et al.). Participants shared the

importance of warmth, the socio-emotional curriculum in their daily lesson activities, and techniques to model social skills, including special education classes.

Tirrell-Corbin (2019) was guided by Bronfenbrenner's theory by investigating caregivers, parents, teachers, and decision-makers in the macro and microsystems as they worked to promote trauma-sensitive pedagogical practices in schools. As educators operate in the child's microsystem, they potentially engage with agencies that may have guidelines and policies that influence the child's environment at school. The nine participants' introspective and perspectives on preparation training regarding foster care children's well-being methods and trauma-sensitive material revealed that in this state, it is not mandatory. Also, information on promoting well-being, child trauma affecting learning, and other relevant issues to foster care children are dated or unavailable as part of professional development for educators or under the district's current mandatory regulatory professional development. Additionally, it was shared that there are no counselors available on campus and insufficient resources to refer children when concerns are identified or to perform preventive intervention when a child's history is unknown.

Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) proposed that (cultural) legacies should be considered as part of the microsystems because culture is part of children's daily lives and experiences. Participants in this study noted that Spanish-speaking children and families are falling short on communication between the educator and them. These southwestern state participants (where a high percentage of the population is Hispanic and in foster care), the inclusion of culture in the microsystem is not fully supported in certain areas,

and it matters because it could prioritize the central processes of the developing child and can be meaningful (see Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017).

Furthermore, Halpern et al. (2019) found common ground with Bronfenbrenner's development ecological model, in which a child's formation is embedded when educators employ supportive practices for new immigrating families from Latin origin. Census projections estimate that by 2044, children minorities in school will increase in the United States by 95%. Educator participants' perspectives in this study form a sense of community in the foster child, by classroom practices or by connecting families with similar struggles. These findings are supported by with Halpern et al. (2019), regarding Bronfenbrenner's microsystems, need considering a child and family stressors (sense of belonging, coping with legal status, lack of trust in government, and urge to keep heritage), and include family community-related involvement, as it improves children's development, socially and academically. The reported literature findings illustrate the importance of educators promoting well-being in the foster child along with the perspectives (of educators T1...T5, C1, C2, A1 and A2) found in the results of the study, encountering positive attitudes towards well-being of the foster child, along with suppressing support from the agencies educational systems in training, impacting children.

Limitations of the Study

The number of educators interviewed was limited to nine participants from one school district in a rural location in the Southwestern United States and limited to the geographical area where the study was conducted. School start was delayed after the

holidays along with the Covid-19 pandemic precautions; therefore, a response from more potential participants was limited. Also, the research was limited to the educators who volunteered to be part of the study interviews and qualified to be part of the study. The educator's experience needed was of 3 or more years in early childhood education and work experience with foster care children, was part of the criteria requirement to be a participant in this study. Another possible limitation is that the nine participants in the study were female due to a lack of potential male participants in the area.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Walden's IRB granted me approval to conduct the interviews virtually or over the phone. The data collection was challenging as I contacted over email the 28-potential participants. As a result, I received responses from a total of 15 individuals. I received six declining responses as not meeting the criteria (due to no experience with foster children) and nine responses agreeing to be part of the study. Many of them responded right away, while others did not turn back calls or emails in a timely manner. The ending nine qualifying participants successfully answered the interview questions of the study. A potential limitation of the study is that all participants were female; however, females dominate the field of early childhood education, so this population was representative. As a former international language teacher and case manager for the Department of child safety, the potential for opinion bias on my part could have presented a limitation. However, I carefully conducted my interviews over Zoom and telephone calls, not incurring my opinion and perspective to manipulate the shared information given by the participants. I kept a journal of my observations, and for

accuracy, I transcribed all the interviews and sent them over email to each participant for member checking as part of the credibility of the study information.

Recommendations

Results of this study denoted the perspectives of nine educators, comprised of five teachers, two curriculum specialists, and two school administrators, regarding educators' roles in promoting a sense of well-being in foster children. Participants suggested use of elements promoting well-being in the classroom to encourage foster children's development cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally. Results alluded to specific approaches used by educators to promote well-being in foster children and families they served in their early childhood settings. Participants revealed there is more to learn about foster children than what they were afforded in professional development they had received to properly address complexities of trauma many foster children experienced. Based on the findings of this current study, I recommend further research on extended populations such as Native American reservations and other rural areas to understand educators' perspectives on working with foster care children in promoting a sense of well-being. I propose that individuals in leadership positions in school districts consider changes in policies to initiate transparent methods of communication and transfer of information about foster child children, especially documents that contain academic and counseling notes to inform the receiving school and assigned teacher to promote academic achievement, positive child development, and a sense of child well-being. I recommend the school districts in rural areas of the southwestern United States, consider staffing policies to include appointing a coordinator to provide training on

trauma-sensitive curriculum that revolutionize current concepts regarding promoting well-being in foster children. As a result of this study, I recommend coordinating sharing of resources between schools on well-being and socio-emotional methods and well-being on behavioral new research articles for intervention. Additionally, I suggest future research exploring foster care youth experiences, including Native American children with educators promoting a sense of well-being in the foster child and protective factors. Furthermore, studies are needed to identify the benefits of professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators and foster families to promote foster child well-being.

Implications

Findings from this study contribute to positive social change by addressing a gap in practice based on educators' roles in promoting a sense of well-being in foster care children in early childhood settings. Understanding facts and factors that may nurture or inhibit the sense of well-being are needed. Well-being impacts foster children's ability to learn and grow in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical domains. Participants shared the state's Department of Education mandated training and guidance for educators continuous learning; however, current training does not address foster children's educational well-being at their schools. As a result of this study staff development in trauma-informed curriculum may be offered by school districts in rural areas of southwestern United States and may influence the creation of state-wide policies for professional development. Schools could work together to create venues by sharing diverse trauma experiences and methods addressing behavioral and learning development

concerns focused on students in foster care. Positive social change as well can be achieved if districts and schools work together to increase professional learning opportunities in educator's emotional exhaustion and well-being. Proper assessment of trauma-sensitive integration practices, which could equip early childhood educators with the knowledge, tools, resources, and mentoring to effectively promote foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood programs.

Conclusion

In Chapter 5, I presented findings, implications, and recommendations based on the purpose of this study, which was to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. This qualitative study with interviews was conducted to examine both the local problem and wider problem demonstrated by a gap in practice in the field of early childhood education about educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings. Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) bioecological systems theory guided the study as the conceptual framework: the child is placed at the center of systems (micro-, macro-, meso- and exo- systems), and early childhood educators influence growth and development in the foster child. Educators, who were participants in this study, strived to promote a sense of well-being in their students by attending to foster children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development, including individual needs based on children's home languages and cultures. Findings of this study revealed seven overarching themes that emerged from subthemes revealed by data collected during semistructured digitally audio-recorded interviews, which focused on two RQs exploring educators' roles in promoting foster

care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. Recommendations for positive social change were made based on findings educators suggested would lead to a sense of well-being in PK and K children in foster care while attending schools located in rural areas of the southwestern United States. Theme 1 addresses the participants' perspectives on communication when forming relationships with foster children, families, community agency service providers, and other educators; Theme 2 addresses observation of foster students when maintaining a physically and emotionally safe environment; Theme 3 addresses intervention when providing resources that promote well-being in foster children in school and at home; Theme 4 addresses reflection when advocating for children and families; Theme 5 addresses collaboration when recognizing interrelationships among stakeholders in schools and the community; Theme 6 addresses introspection when being mindful of personal wellness needs; and Theme 7 addresses professional preparation when seeking support for foster children, foster families, and the school community members. Findings contribute to positive social change by revealing educators' roles as communicators, observers, interveners, collaborators, and advocates for students in foster care and their families. Further studies are needed to identify professional development for early childhood educators and family education programs for students' foster and biological families to promote the well-being of early childhood students in the foster care system. A recommendation for future study is identifying ways that lawmakers and educators can improve curriculum and practices through professional learning opportunities to promote well-being in foster children with humanistic and compassionate resources.

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Appendix A: (E-mail) Superintendent letter

Date

Dear Superintendent:

My name is Francoise Snyder. I am enrolled at Walden University in the Richard W. Riley College of Education to pursue a doctoral degree (Ed.D.) in Early Childhood Education and Leadership. As a requirement of degree completion, I will be conducting a basic qualitative study with interviews on educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being. The working title of my dissertation is "Educators' Roles in Promoting Foster Care Children's Sense of Well-being in Early Childhood Settings."

I would value your school district's support to complete this research with early childhood education, pre-K, and Kindergarten from your program's district. I plan to interview 9 educators (two administrators, two curriculum specialists, five teachers). I consider children in foster care early childhood education well-being is necessary, which is sometimes overlooked by education stakeholders. This is why I am interested in focusing on children in foster care education and bringing attention to the importance on the foster child well-being in education. To conduct the study, I need to individually interview early childhood educators with 3 years or more years of experience pre-kindergarten and kindergarten education, who had worked or work with children in foster care. A mutually agreed upon location (via virtual settings) will protect their identity, health, and maintain confidentiality. I would like for educators in your program to have the opportunity to volunteer to participate in interviews after school hours. Therefore, I am asking for your permission to contact principals to conduct the study with their

faculty. With your permission, I will obtain e-mails of educators from the school website. The length of the interviews will be approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The results of the study will be sent to the program directly in the care of the director or principal. Volunteer participation is confidential, and early childhood programs, program locations, and the names of all participants in the study will be de-identified in the dissertation. The study is voluntary, there is a \$5 gift card compensation for participation, and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to ask questions or raise your concerns about the research. I can be reached by e-mail or by phone at (redacted). I will follow up with a telephone call to answer any questions or to meet any district requirements.

I really appreciate any help you can provide.

Francoise E Snyder

Education Doctoral Candidate in Early Childhood Education

Email: Redacted

Appendix B: Invitation Letter

Date:

Dear Early Childhood Educator:

My name is Francoise Snyder. I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I have been given permission by Superintendent Howard of the Prescott School District to contact you directly to ask you to consider volunteering to participate in my study. Therefore, the purpose of this letter is to invite you to be interviewed via video conferencing about your perspectives related to your role in promoting foster-care children's sense of well-being in early childhood settings. I am seeking two administrators, two curriculum specialists, and five classroom teachers. Completing this study and writing a dissertation based on the results of the study is a requirement for the Doctor of Education degree that I am seeking.

If you are an early childhood educator with three or more years of experience in prekindergarten or kindergarten settings, who has worked with a child in the foster care system during your career, you are eligible to participate in this study. If you are interested in volunteering, please read the attached Consent Form to learn more information. You may also contact me directly by email for more information. A \$5.00 gift card will be offered to study volunteers following their participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Francoise E Snyder

Education Doctoral Candidate in Early Childhood Education

Appendix C: Interview Script

Date:

Address:

Dear Administrator/Curriculum Specialist/Teacher:

You are invited to volunteer to participate in a research study. My name is Francoise Snyder. I am enrolled at Walden University in the Richard W. Riley College of Education to pursue a Doctoral Degree (EdD) in Early Childhood Education and Leadership. As a requirement of degree completion, I will be conducting a basic qualitative study with interviews to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings in a school district in the southwestern United States. The working title of my dissertation is "Educators' Roles in Promoting Foster Care Children's Sense of Well-being."

The study requires educators who have worked or are working with children in foster care in the classroom, with three years or more of experience in Early Childhood Programs (Pre-K and Kindergarten). I would like to know your perspectives about this topic through your responses to eight face-to-face, open-ended questions about foster care children's sense of well-being in early childhood programs. The interviews will not take longer than 30 to 45 minutes, and it will take place in a digital format of your preference (zoom, facetime, or skype) or by telephone. The interview questions are the following:

1. Please tell me about your experiences in working with children in the foster care system.

2. Please discuss your successes in working with children in foster care in your early childhood setting.
3. Please discuss the challenges you have faced in working with children in foster care in your early childhood setting.
4. What is your perspective regarding barriers that prevent foster care children from developing a sense of well-being in early childhood programs?
5. In your own words, what is meant by the term well-being?
6. What types of resources and supports have you received to promote well-being in children in foster care in your classroom?
7. What types of additional resources and/or supports would you like to receive to promote a sense of well-being in children in foster care in your classroom?
8. Please talk about your curriculum and pedagogy in the context of promoting well-being in children in foster care.

All of your answers will be kept strictly confidential as well as your identities. I will need your permission to record your responses digitally. I will transcribe your responses and you will have an opportunity to review the responses and confirm or contest the accuracy of the transcript summary. This process is completely voluntary and withdrawing from the process will not have any impact on the school or program that you work. Please contact me if you have any questions or need more information about the study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Francoise Snyder
Education Doctoral Candidate in Early Childhood Education
Email: Redacted

Appendix D: Content Expert Request Letter

Date:

Address:

Institution:

Dear:

My name is Francoise Snyder. I am enrolled at Walden University in the Richard W. Riley College of Education to pursue a Doctoral Degree (EdD) in Early Childhood Education and Leadership. As a requirement of degree completion, I will be conducting a basic qualitative study with interviews to help me explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings in a school district in the southwestern United States. The working title of my dissertation is "Educators' Roles in Promoting Foster Care Children's Sense of Well-being in Early Childhood Settings."

I am soliciting your assistance as an expert in the subject and as a juror, to support the validity of the questions that I will be using as a data collector for this qualitative study with interviews. I will appreciate your input and consideration to revise any potential psychological risks in the interview questions. I am inviting early childhood teachers from different programs who have worked with children in foster care and early childhood environments. I will be asking them eight questions about promoting well-being in foster care in early childhood settings.

Sincerely,

Francoise Snyder
Doctoral Candidate
Email: Redacted

Appendix E: Interview Protocol & Research Questions

Welcome, and thank you for volunteering to participate in this research study. My name is Francoise Snyder. I am enrolled at Walden University in the Richard W. Riley College of Education to pursue a Doctoral of Education degree (EdD) in Early Childhood Education and Leadership. As a requirement of degree completion, I will be conducting a basic qualitative study with interviews to explore educators' roles in promoting foster care children's sense of well-being in their settings in a school district in the southwestern United States. The working title of my dissertation is "Educators' Roles in Promoting Foster Care Children's Sense of Well-being in Early Childhood Settings."

I would like to know your perspectives about this topic through your responses of eight face to face, open-ended questions via video conference about your work with children in foster care. Interviews will be digitally audio recorded and will not take longer than 45 minutes, and it will take place in a virtual video. All of your answers to interview questions will be kept strictly confidential, as well as your identities. I will need your permission to record your responses with a digital tape recorder. I will transcribe your responses, and you will have an opportunity to review the answers and confirm or contest the accuracy of the transcript summary. This process is entirely voluntary and withdrawing from the process will not impact the school or program where you work. You may stop the study at any time.

Interview Questions/Prompts
<p>1. Please tell me about your experiences in working with children in the foster care system. Prompt: I heard you say...Please elaborate about...</p>
<p>2. Please discuss your successes in working with children in foster care in your early childhood setting. Prompt: I heard you say...Please give me an example.</p>
<p>3. Please discuss challenges you have faced in working with children in foster care in your early childhood setting. Prompt: I heard you say...Please give an example.</p>
<p>4. What is your perspective regarding barriers that prevent foster care children from developing a sense of well-being in early childhood programs? Prompt: I heard you say...Please give an example.</p>
<p>5. In your own words, what is meant by the term well-being? Prompt: I heard you say...Please elaborate on...</p>
<p>6. What types of resources and supports have you received to promote well-being in children in foster care in your classroom? Prompt: Please give an example.</p>
<p>7. What types of additional resources and/or supports would you like to receive to promote a sense of well-being in children in foster care in your classroom? Prompt: Please give an example.</p>
<p>8. Please talk about your curriculum and pedagogy in the context of promoting well-being in children in foster care. Prompt: Please share examples.</p>

Thank you for your participation. I will send you a summary of your interview transcript within a week. Please communicate with me if you would like changes. Thank you.

Appendix F: Initial Codes by Interview Questions and Themes Classification

<p>1 Experiences in working with foster children.</p>	<p>T1 Meltdowns at home, let out at school when safe otherwise, adjusted controlled. High levels of trauma</p> <p>T2 Aggressiveness Emotional pain Separation anxiety Teacher frustration Teacher own trauma addressed Children love unconditionally Teacher need to work with his/her own trauma</p> <p>T3 Experience</p> <p>T4 Behavioral issues Introspectiveness (shyness)</p> <p>T5 Affection needs (parents with addictions) No learning parental support</p> <p>C1 Experience</p> <p>C2 School history of a child missing Respect and appreciation infused into them</p> <p>A1 Foster children population increases</p>	<p>T1a (15yrs) Communication-present (honest-two way) with foster parent T1b Observation of the behavioral effects of trauma T1c Observation of adjusted control in school environment. T2a (25yrs-diverse role experience) Supportive of needs and requests of foster parents. T2b Recognition of need for training in ACES and working with children who had faced trauma. T2c Implementation Design and of Soc-Emo curriculum. T2d Observation of separation anxiety with aggression, non-compliant behavior. T2e Recognition of teacher frustration. T2d Recognition of teacher need to work with his/her own trauma T3 (10 yrs)</p> <p>T4a (3 yrs) T4b Interpretation of children behaviors shyness, not confident, non-compliant behavior. T4c Recognition of children's work defiance. T5 (20 yrs) T5a Recognition that children need love and hugs. T5b Recognition Lack of parental support T5c Communication-non-present (working parents, lack of transportation for children, teacher illness)</p> <p>C1 (20 yrs) C1a Personal and professional experience. C2 (25 yrs) C2a Experience was within are of area of curriculum, inclusive practices. C2b Disposition for inclusive practices C2c Disposition Creation of positive environment based on respect and child safety. A1 (15 yrs) A1a Intervention-responsive to diverse situations that are traumatic for the child.</p>
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	<p>with down-turn in the economy A2 Emotionally hurt Unstable environments Insecure Trust and boundaries missing.</p>	<p>A2 (7 yrs) A2a Intervention-responsive to diverse situations that are traumatic for the child. A2b Observations-child is emotionally tough, has unstable environments, lack of trust, insecure.</p>
<p>2 Successes in working with foster children.</p>	<p>T1 Connecting with guardians Appointing helpers in class (child helps child) Sense of belongingness Predictability=safety</p> <p>T2 Teacher own work on trauma before strategy on child behavior Teacher understands a child needs trust comfort, security. Straight boundaries and routine Validation through a class job= belongingness</p> <p>T3 Attention and playtime</p> <p>T4 Safe environment Strive for the child to trust me Enable the child to be themselves and confident</p> <p>T5 Small classes=attention</p> <p>C1 Care for them Offer security, trust=success in learning Teacher could be the only caring person in the child's life. Well-being in learning and basic needs concern</p>	<p>T1a Communication-guardians, to support the child capacities. T1b Intervention- predictable and stable routines. Children helpers.</p> <p>T2a Recognition-teacher works on own socio-emotional state of mind. T2b Observation- teacher understands a child needs trust comfort, security. Straight boundaries and routine. T2c Intervention- Validation through a class job = belongingness</p> <p>T3a Observation-school mobility hinder success. T3b Intervention- Attention and playtime. T4a Intervention-Safe environment, comfort. T4b Implementation- Strive for the child to trust me. Enable the child to be themselves and confident.</p> <p>T5a Recognition-Teacher/child ratio matters. Aides are missing on kinder public schools. C1a Intervention- Care for them Offer security, trust=success in learning C1b Recognition- Teacher could be the only caring person in the child's life.</p>

	<p>C2 Inclusiveness watch for stigmatizing as for being different (foster, etc). Equality and appreciation for uniqueness's.</p> <p>A1 Caring staff that understands transitional status of a child. Long term at school=learning successes Seeing a child open up regardless of lack of normalcy. A2 A good fit teacher Moving affects the child, seeing them do well during their stay at our school.</p>	<p>C2c Disposition-Inclusive class, equality and appreciation for uniqueness's C2d Recognition-stigma as for being different (foster, etc.) eradication.</p> <p>A1a Implementation-Agencies try to keep a child in the same school ensures academic success. A1b Intervention- With care and consistency at school, a child open up regardless of lack of normalcy and transitional settings at home.</p> <p>A2a Implementation-right teacher fit for the child. A2b Observation-school mobility affects behavior.</p>
<p>3 Challenges faced in working with children.</p>	<p>T1 Trauma impulsiveness No boundaries No guidance since early on</p> <p>T2 Spanish (language) Massive Trauma Violence infused as witnessed Thoughtfulness (constant) on what a child could had gone through to see thru a child emotion. Learning what is the child's "currency" for room to negotiate behavior Parents refusing to help modifying behaviors.</p>	<p>T1a Experience-A child with trauma, impeded the reasoning to follow transitions in school. T1b Observation-Attachment disorders, stealing no proper age-upbringing, no boundaries.</p> <p>T2a Recognition- teacher non-native language barrier. T2b Communication with parents, connecting with others that could interpret. T2c Intervention- Violence infused as witnessed Thoughtfulness (constant) on what a child could had gone through to see thru a child emotion. Learning what is the child's "currency" for room to negotiate behavior. T2d Recognition-Parents refused to help modifying negative behaviors.</p>

	<p>T3 Short term schooling prevent connection with the child and families.</p> <p>T4 Language barriers Phone or address changes when trying to send supplies (covid support x child)</p> <p>T5 Run away children (from class) Mother's missing=behavioral child at class</p> <p>C1 Making connections to create trust show care and sharing feelings 3-5 shut down don't know how to communicate their emotions Defiance and violence learned 40% not emotionally ready for kindergarten.</p> <p>C2 Defiance, no boundaries Violence Being aware to give extra support when a child can't use their words (on violence)</p> <p>A1 Children emotionally and academically behind 90% of the times Nervous and scared Not enough counseling available for children No intervention until a behavior shows (child acting up)</p>	<p>T3a Interpretation-challenging to see growth in a child and set relationships with a child that is transitional.</p> <p>T4a Recognition-Language barrier with the child and guardians. T4b Intervention-Virtual support (Covid) challenge the communication with guardians.</p> <p>T5a Intervention-No direct support in the classroom to address crises in a child behavior. T5b Observation-no medical awareness/resources for guardians to address psychological disorders needs in a child.</p> <p>C1a Recognition- Making connections to create trust show care and sharing feelings with a child. C1b Observation-The child 3-5yr shut down don't know how to communicate their emotions. Sadness. C1c Interpretation- Defiant and violence learned inflicted into peers. Challenge to help them express themselves properly. C1d Intervention-Classroom intervention understanding emotions more than academics at an early age. Self-regulation materials.</p> <p>C2a Experience- Defiance, no boundaries exposure early on. C2b Interpretation- Defiant and violence learned inflicted into peers. Challenge to help them express themselves properly.</p> <p>A1a Recognition- Children emotionally and academically behind 90% of the times. A1b Intervention-School staff waits until behavior show or low academic progress. A1c Observation-Child is nervous and scared. A1d Disposition-No in-campus counselors.</p>
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	<p>No immediate care to a crying child at lunch by herself (lack of confidence of proper training to assess)</p> <p>A2 Academic progress is halted from the lack of a consistent home environment.</p>	<p>A2a Recognition- Academic progress is halted from the lack of a consistent home environment.</p>
<p>4 Perspectives regarding barriers that prevent foster care children from developing a sense of well-being.</p>	<p>T1 The need of high-quality emotional support for children.</p> <p>T2 Trust (pain prevents them from trusting)</p> <p>T3 Food, trust, affection, love</p> <p>T4 Guardians negative cooperation</p> <p>T5 Poverty, basic needs Parents absent into school progress</p> <p>C1 Trust, no security anxiety, no self-identity on who they are, unaddressed behaviors. Basic needs to be able to learn</p> <p>C2 Guardians not cooperating Lack of parents in their lives=no consistency = disruptive behaviors</p> <p>A1 Lack of attachment Very emotional children Developmental skills work needed</p>	<p>T1a Recognition-Trauma effects without support can have long lasting consequences.</p> <p>T1b Intervention- A need of high-quality education on emotional support for children.</p> <p>T2a Observation-Not all guardians (foster parents) protect, love, care and meet their needs.</p> <p>T2b Interpretation-Trust has been broken by adults. A child inquires trust, an adult must follow through, to develop well-being.</p> <p>T3a Observation-Basic needs, lack of food, trust, affection, love can hinder development of well-being.</p> <p>T4a Experience- Guardian lack of cooperation with teacher.</p> <p>T5a Observation- Poverty no basic needs Parents' absence impact child's school progress.</p> <p>C1a Recognition-Trauma creates no trust, separation anxiety, loss disorders (cling to things) lack of identity.</p> <p>C1b Observation-hunger prevents learning and a source of negative behavior.</p> <p>C2a Communication-eliciting cooperation from guardians to parent children consistently with teacher to change disruptive behavior.</p> <p>C2b Recognition-no self-regulation skills taught at home (no boundaries).</p> <p>A1a Recognition-No attachments.</p>

	<p>Duration at school (regardless) stable to connect with teacher.</p> <p>A2 Lack of high-quality programs in the area in early education and well-being intervention</p>	<p>A1b Observation-Not enough adults available to foster children. Foster parent gives up on the child.</p> <p>A1c Disposition- Developmental skills work needed. No consistency on how to offer attachment skills.</p> <p>A2a Recognition- Lack of high-quality programs in early education and well-being intervention.</p> <p>A2b Recognition- Agencies funding is limited.</p>
<p>5 What is meant by the term well-being.</p>	<p>T1 Secure attachment, confidence, courage, self-care. Teacher-child attaching to be able to learn</p> <p>T2 Child is validated as a human being Child feels safe and turn into the best person they can be.</p> <p>T3 Having their basic needs met. Emotionally cared for Comfort, calmness.</p> <p>T4 Basic needs met</p> <p>T5 Basic needs Happy child Compassionate teaching</p> <p>C1 Sense of security and identity Separation anxiety resolved Sense of belongingness Proper attachment after loss</p>	<p>T1a Intervention-Giving the child a secure attachment, confidence, courage, self-care.</p> <p>T1b Experience-Teacher-child attaching to be able to learn</p> <p>T2a Implementation-Validation as a human being (give a child).</p> <p>T2b Experience-Emotional exhaustion. Teacher worry about honoring a child's freedom to be.</p> <p>T2c Implementation-A safe school environment free of fear to be themselves without repercussion.</p> <p>T2d Recognition-A rewarding feeling is to witness a child flourish.</p> <p>T3a Recognition-Basic needs, emotional support and sense of peace.</p> <p>T4a Recognition-Basic needs met.</p> <p>T4b Recognition-Giving them a sense of being cared and safety.</p> <p>T5a Disposition-A child is happy with basic needs met.</p> <p>T5b Intervention-Compassionate teaching for a child to be able to learn.</p> <p>C1a Recognition- Giving them a sense of safety through basic needs.</p> <p>C1b Teacher Awareness- Identity and belongingness of the child has been tempered.</p> <p>C1c Experience-A foster child finds difficult to get attached.</p>

	<p>C2 Safety, basic and emotional well-being. Offer children tools to recognize unsafe situations. Empower the child to speak up</p> <p>A1 Child feels secure, safe emotionally to be able to be present at school Properly attached to an adult Life is predictable</p> <p>A2 Soc-emotional support and guidance Whole child well-being Belongingness Confidence for learning take place.</p>	<p>C1d Reflection -Early help can make a difference long term to set them up for success.</p> <p>C1e Reflection-Effect of COVID on well-being of foster children is yet to be seen (concerned).</p> <p>C2a Awareness-Basic and emotional needs met is crucial. Having socio-emotional skills on life.</p> <p>C2b Intervention-Talk to children about safety or basic needs worries at home, reporting. Tools to empower self-sufficiency within their reach (teacher or any other agencies close to them).</p> <p>A1a Recognition- Giving them a sense of safety at school.</p> <p>A1b Intervention-Talk to children about safety or basic needs worries at home, reporting. Life can be predictable when a child controls own choice at home (chaotic situations beyond their control, remove yourself and go reading etc.). School strives for predictable settings to promote well-being.</p> <p>A1c Awareness-Teacher’s check on each other’s well-being for emotional exhaustion. COVID inflicted stress on staff.</p> <p>A2a Interpretation-Socio-emotional support implementation to successfully bring up a complete human.</p> <p>A2b Reflection- A confident child that belongs, spring into learning, friends and well-being as a whole.</p>
6 Types of resources and supports received to promote well-being.	<p>T1 No support received Free classes Protocol to escalate an evaluation (child) Own initiatives reach out to team if needed I watch for stigma from peers</p> <p>T2 Training offered by state and own initiative Reach out to experts School offers basic needs supplies and food</p>	<p>T1a Professional training- Not provided on promoting well-being in foster care children, own reliance on teacher self-sufficiency.</p> <p>T1b Situational intervention-protocols to escalate a child’s evaluation.</p> <p>T1c Intervention-Stigma avoidance in the classroom, for success in promoting well-being.</p> <p>T2a Professional training- (Not specifically on promoting well-being in foster care children). State available, own reliance on teacher self-sufficiency.</p>

	<p>T3 No support, own initiatives Trauma training was an option</p> <p>T4 Lessons prepared by social workers Own initiatives</p> <p>T5 Counselors</p> <p>C1 Special ed training and socio-emotional, free classes Own cost supplies for children in need</p> <p>C2 Own cost supplies for children in need Community related resources referrals A1 Counselors when available Connecting child with programs Skills development with volunteers Communication through groups</p>	<p>T2b Interrelation-School offers basic needs supplies and food for children.</p> <p>T2c Communication-Link families with same experience struggles.</p> <p>T3a Professional training- Not provided on promoting well-being in foster care children, own reliance on teacher self-sufficiency by taking “Conscious Discipline” training. Trauma related classes are optional.</p> <p>T3b Communication-Ongoing foster parent-teacher interaction.</p> <p>T4a Professional training- Not provided, on promoting well-being in foster care children; own reliance on teacher self-sufficiency by SEL lessons.</p> <p>T5a Professional training- Not provided on promoting well-being in foster care children.</p> <p>T5b Situational Intervention-Behavioral coaches and counselors.</p> <p>C1a Professional training- (Did not specifically stated on promoting well-being in foster care children). State available (free classes) own reliance on teacher self-sufficiency. School creates their own “trilateral goal” training last 3 years socio-emotional material.</p> <p>C1b Implementation- By own funding supplies for children and by providing community sponsored available sources to parents with special needs children.</p> <p>C2a Professional training- Not provided on promoting well-being in foster care children.</p> <p>C2b Implementation-By own funding supplies for children and providing community sponsored available sources to parents.</p> <p>A1a Professional training- (Did not specifically stated on promoting well-being in foster care children).</p> <p>A1b Implementation- Connecting a child with district promoted programs on relations skills building.</p> <p>A1c Agency Support-Child skills development through community volunteers.</p>
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	<p>A2 State funds mandates training to focus Soc emo own initiatives Through materials to manage behavioral issues (puppets and letter people).</p>	<p>A2a Professional training- (Did not specifically stated on promoting well-being in foster care children). A2b Socio-emotional training by own school decision. A2c Implementation-Through soc-emo songs and materials to manage behavioral issues (puppets and letter people).</p>
<p>7 Additional resources and/or supports would you like to receive.</p>	<p>T1 Professional training on trauma Aides</p> <p>T2 Training trauma and discipline</p> <p>T3 Training for awareness on trauma signs</p> <p>T4 Training trauma or foster care issues.</p> <p>T5 Training in trauma</p> <p>C1 Foster care parent training classes Available resources for children in systems</p>	<p>T1a Professional Training-School could provide workshops on what trauma does to a child's brain development. T1b Recognition-Own initiative teacher looks for trauma-related classes (presently non-mandated). T1c Recognition-Aides should be readily available if a child needs support in class. T2a Professional Training-School could provide workshops on what various traumas does to a child. T2b Reflection-Teacher would like discipline training to arrive to her/his own integrity as an agent of change to help a child properly. T3a Professional Training-School could provide training on foster care children's behaviors to identify traumatic trends. T3b Reflection -Gain knowledge of supportive methods to promote well-being and emotional state of mind of a foster child. T4a Professional Training-School could provide training on foster care children's behaviors to identify issue trends. T4b Reflection -Available resources to help parents with sources and education on basic social needs. T5a Professional Training-School could provide training on foster care children's behaviors to identify traumatic trends. C1a Professional Training-School could provide training on foster care children's behaviors to identify traumatic trends. Training for teachers with same content as potential foster parents have, to be licensed. C1b Agency- Continued education (up to date) coordinator that refresh current resources and training to teachers about</p>

	<p>C2 food for teachers to facilitate anytime</p> <p>A1 Plenty of staff Trauma responsive staff with qualifications On a full array of behavior and regulation knowledge. A2 Training of abuse, drug exposed new-born addiction knowledge on how they process and learn. Updated materials and professional development that is received in a constant basis. Sharing of recourses between programs.</p>	<p>changes on foster care children's issues and sources visit our school. C1c Disposition-Teacher ability to know of agency' resources to share with foster parents. C2a Agency Support-Food (healthy) readily available anytime for children at school. Learning happens without hunger.</p> <p>A1a Reflection -Counselor that is dedicated and qualified to manage crises (to include suicide treats) with a building. A1b Recognition-Foster children need self-regulation and emotional support. Trauma is complex and requires competency. A2a Professional Training- District could provide training on foster care children's behaviors to identify traumatic trends. A2b Reflection -Preparedness -on current research findings training on today's issues of foster care children matters how they learn and process in educational environments.</p>
<p>8 Curriculum and pedagogy in the context of promoting well-being.</p>	<p>T1 Constant improvising to adjust. Behavior and functioning in class monitoring. T2 Socio-emotional issues and regulation intervention. Score at beginning and end of the year to measure well-being progress T3 Self-sufficiency on problem solving through toys instills confidence.</p>	<p>T1a Implementation-Adjusting to the foster child developmental level to cope emotionally with the class content.</p> <p>T2a Implementation -Didactic material for socio-emotional issues and self-regulation only. T2b Situational intervention-When soc-emo (ASQ) scores are low only, child is assessed.</p> <p>T3a Recognition-No curriculum to promote well-being. T3b Reflection/Perspective-Uses manipulative material for conflictive issues in class for the child to visualize it (expects the child to resolve peer issues on their own).</p>

	<p>T4 SEL lessons, communication and choices at class to give them confidence T5 Humanistic and compassionate curriculum to gain their trust. Appoint helpers in class</p> <p>C1 SEL Curriculum Modeling Self-talk Teach independence Show what means or looks like beyond words life-skills. C2 community learning by appointing helpers Caring peers Combination of movement and academics Observation of all domains functioning to escalate if needed a concern. Strive to be a warm and caring teacher. A1 extra programs for life skills and a sense of well-being. Use of positive charts on behavior and academics as they are interrelated. A2 All age inclusive classrooms and communication coaches (for teachers) Age doesn't dictate development or learning stage in a child, helpers within peers for all to work together.</p>	<p>T4a Implementation -Soc-emo lessons and choices in class only. T4b Communication-Strives to connect with all guardians. T5a Experience- Humanistic and compassionate to gain their trust. Having them help. T5b Disposition -Compassion and humanistic is not something acquired when becoming an educator, it's a method to gain a child's trust.</p> <p>C1a Recognition-No curriculum to promote well-being on foster child. C1b Disposition-Intent to be present and model behaviors and teacher self-talk scaffolding. C1c Implementation-Character building techniques for self-sufficiency to make a difference in the child's future. C2a Implementation-A safe environment for all. A sense of acceptance by boosting children's confidence with helpers. C2b Situational intervention- Child observation of all domains functioning to escalate a well-being concern if needed. C2c Experience-Model a warm and caring teacher to make a difference.</p> <p>A1a Agency Support-After school programs for life skills and a sense of well-being. (non-direct class related). A1b Situational intervention- Use of positive charts on behavior and academics progress, as they are interrelated. A2a Reflection- All age inclusive classrooms and communication coaches (for teachers) A2b Implementation- Age doesn't dictate development or learning stage in a child, helpers within peers for all to work together.</p>
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Theme's classification in connection to the RQs

RQ1: What are educators' experiences working with foster care children in early childhood settings? IQs 1-4

Communication	<p>T1 Communication-present (honest-two way) with foster parent.</p> <p>T1 Communication with guardians, to support the child capacities.</p> <p>T2 Communication with parents, connecting with others that could interpret.</p> <p>T5 Communication-non-present (working parents, lack of transportation for children, teacher illness).</p> <p>C2 Communication-eliciting cooperation from guardians to parent children consistently with teacher to change disruptive behavior.</p>
Observation	<p>T1 Observations on the behavioral effects of trauma</p> <p>T1 Observations of child adjusted control in school environment.</p> <p>T1 Attachment disorders, stealing no proper age-upbringing, no boundaries.</p> <p>T2 Observation of separation anxiety with aggression, non-compliant behavior.</p> <p>T2 Not all guardians (foster parents) protect, love, care and meet their needs.</p> <p>T2 Teacher understands a foster child needs trust comfort, security.uses straight boundaries and routine.</p> <p>T3 School mobility hinder success.</p> <p>T3 Basic needs, lack of food, trust, affection, love can hinder development of well-being.</p> <p>T5 No medical awareness/resources for guardians to address psychological disorders needs in a child.</p> <p>T5 Poverty no basic needs available to the child.</p> <p>C1 Observation-hunger prevents learning and a source of negative behavior.</p> <p>C1 Observation-The child 3-5yr shut down don't know how to communicate their emotions. Sadness.</p> <p>A1 Observation-Child is nervous and scared.Parents' absence impact child's school progress.</p> <p>A1 Observation-Not enough adults available to foster children. Foster parent gives up on the child.</p> <p>A2 Child is emotionally tough, has unstable environments, lacks trust, insecure.</p> <p>A2 Observation-school mobility affects behavior.</p>

	<p>A2 An increase in the volume of foster children entering her school, upon the economy's as it is in this Covid-19 pandemic situation.</p>
Intervention	<p>T1 Have predictable and stable routines. Children helpers. T1 Sees the need of high-quality education on emotional support for children. T2 Validation through a class job = belongingness T2 Violence infused as witnessed. Thoughtfulness (constant) on what a child could had gone through to see thru a child emotion. Learning what is the child's "currency" for room to negotiate behavior. T3 Attention and playtime. T4 Safe environment, comfort. T4 Virtual support (Covid) challenge the communication with guardians. T5 No direct support in the classroom to address crises in a child behavior. C1 Classroom intervention understanding emotions more than academics at an early age. Self-regulation materials. C1 Care for them. Offer security, trust=success in learning. C2 Awareness of child being different, not allowing other children to create issues. A1 With care and consistency at school, a child open up regardless of lack of normalcy and transitional settings at home. A1 School staff waits until behavior show or low academic progress for intervention. A1 Act responsive to diverse situations that are traumatic for the child. A2 Realizes instability and experience of unpleasant traumatic instances is hard for the foster child.</p>
Reflection	<p>T1 Trauma effects without support can have long lasting consequences. T2 Recognition of teacher impact by keeping her word in the classroom. T2 Recognition of teachers need to work with his/her own trauma. T2 Recognition-teacher works on own socio-emotional state of mind. T2 Teacher not understanding a non-native language is a barrier. T2 Parents refuse to help modifying negative behaviors. T4 Recognition of children's work defiance. T4 Language barrier with the child and guardians. T5 Recognition that children need love and hugs. T5 Reflected on the lack of parental support.</p>

	<p>T5 Teacher/child ratio matters. Aides are missing on kinder public schools.</p> <p>T5 Compassionate and humanistic teaching are not skills acquired when preparing to become an educator</p> <p>C1 Teacher could be the only caring person in the child's life.</p> <p>C1 Trauma creates no trust, separation anxiety, loss disorders (cling to things) lack of identity.</p> <p>C1 Making connections to create trust show care and sharing feelings with a child.</p> <p>C2 Recognition-stigma as for being different (foster, etc.) eradication.</p> <p>C2 Recognition-no self-regulation skills taught at home (no boundaries).</p> <p>A1 Children are emotionally and academically behind 90% of the times.</p> <p>A1 No attachments. Behind academically.</p> <p>A2 Academic progress is halted from the lack of a consistent home environment.</p> <p>A2 Lack of high-quality programs in early education and well-being intervention in the area.</p> <p>A2 Agencies funding is limited.</p>
Collaboration	<p>T2 Supportive of needs and requests of foster parents.</p> <p>T5 Appreciation for school staff</p> <p>C1 Assist children with food in class</p> <p>A1 Volunteers and after school programs</p> <p>A2 25% of her students have access to resources from staff.</p>
Introspection	<p>T1 Experience-A child with trauma, impeded the reasoning to follow transitions in school.</p> <p>T2 Trust has been broken by adults. A child inquires trust, an adult must follow through, to develop well-being</p> <p>T3 Challenging to see growth in a child and set relationships with a child that is transitional.</p> <p>T4 Experience- Guardian lack of cooperation with teacher.</p> <p>T4 Children behaviors shyness, not confident, non-compliant behavior.</p> <p>C1 Defiant and violence learned inflicted into peers. Challenge to help them express themselves properly.</p> <p>C1 Not enough information to share to assist foster children and families</p> <p>C2 Defiant and violence learned inflicted into peers. Challenge to help them express themselves properly.</p> <p>C2 Experience was within one area, uses inclusive practices.</p> <p>C2 Experience- Child defiant, no boundaries due to exposure early on.</p>

	A1 Counselor not provided as resource enough to sustain demand of children.
Preparation	<p>T2 Recognition of need for training in ACEs and working with children who had faced trauma.</p> <p>T4 District does not provide focus on foster care children issues.</p> <p>C1 No ongoing training in ACEs</p> <p>C2 Disposition for inclusive practices</p> <p>C2 Disposition Creation of positive environment based on respect and child safety.</p> <p>C2 Disposition-Inclusive class, equality and appreciation for uniqueness's</p> <p>A1 Disposition-No in-campus counselors.</p> <p>A1 Disposition- Developmental skills work needed. No consistency on how to offer attachment skills.</p> <p>A2 Up to date professional development is lacking on foster care child behavior.</p>

RQ2 How do educators promote a sense of well-being? IQs 5-8

Forming relationships	<p>T2 Link families with same experience struggles, value them.</p> <p>T2 Learn the child's preferences from families.</p> <p>T3 Ongoing foster parent-teacher interaction.</p> <p>C1 Connect with the child for them to open up.</p> <p>A1 Establish relationship with the child first then learning.</p>
Safe environment	<p>T1 Aides should be readily available if a child needs support in class.</p> <p>T1 Adjusting to the foster child developmental level to cope emotionally with the class content.</p> <p>T2 Didactic material for socio-emotional issues and self-regulation only.</p> <p>T2 Validation as a human being (give a child).</p> <p>T2 A safe school environment free of fear to be themselves without repercussion.</p> <p>T2 Teacher would like discipline training to arrive to her/his own integrity as an agent of change to help a child properly.</p> <p>T3 Gain knowledge of supportive methods to promote well-being and emotional state of mind of a foster child.</p> <p>T4 Giving them a sense of being cared and safety.</p> <p>T4 Soc-emotional lessons and choices in class only.</p> <p>T5 A child is happy with basic needs met.</p> <p>T5 Compassion and humanistic is not something acquired when becoming an educator, it's a method to gain a child's trust.</p>

	<p>C1 By own funding supplies for children and by providing community sponsored available sources to parents with special needs children.</p> <p>C1 Teacher ability to know of agency' resources to share with foster parents.</p> <p>C1 Intent to be present and model behaviors and teacher self-talk scaffolding.</p> <p>C2 By own funding supplies for children and providing community sponsored available sources to parents.</p> <p>C1 Character building techniques for self-sufficiency to make a difference in the child's future.</p> <p>C2 A safe environment for all. A sense of acceptance by boosting children's confidence with helpers.</p> <p>A1 Connecting with the child to provide an attachment for a secure sense at school.</p> <p>A2 Through soc-emo songs and materials to manage behavioral issues (puppets and letter people).</p> <p>A2 Age doesn't dictate development or learning stage in a child, helpers within peers for all to work together.</p> <p>A2 Socio-emotional support implementation to successfully bring up a complete human.</p>
Providing resources	<p>T1 Giving the child a secure attachment, confidence, courage, self-care. Flexibility.</p> <p>T1 Protocols to escalate a child's evaluation.</p> <p>T1 Stigma avoidance in the classroom, for success in promoting well-being.</p> <p>T2 Situational intervention-When soc-emo (ASQ) scores are low only, child is assessed.</p> <p>T3 No curriculum specific to foster care children.</p> <p>T4 Available resources to help parents with sources and education on basic social need.</p> <p>T5 Compassionate teaching for a child to be able to learn.</p> <p>T5 Situational Intervention-Behavioral coaches and counselors.</p> <p>s.</p> <p>C1 Early help can make a difference long term to set them up for success.</p> <p>C2 Child observation of all domains functioning to escalate a well-being concern if needed.</p> <p>A1 Counselor that is dedicated and qualified to manage crises (to include suicide treats) with a building.</p> <p>A1 Use of positive charts on behavior and academics progress, as they are interrelated.</p>

	<p>C2b Talk to children about safety or basic needs worries at home, reporting. Tools to empower self-sufficiency within their reach (teacher or any other agencies close to them).</p> <p>A1b Talk to children about safety or basic needs worries at home, reporting. Life can be predictable when a child controls own choice at home (chaotic situations beyond their control, remove yourself and go reading etc.). School strives for predictable settings to promote well-being.</p> <p>A2 Preparedness -On current research findings training on today's issues of foster care children matters how they learn and process in educational environments.</p>
Advocacy	<p>T1 Own initiative teacher looks for trauma-related classes (presently non-mandated).</p> <p>T2 A rewarding feeling is to witness a child flourish.</p> <p>T3 Basic needs, emotional support and sense of peace.</p> <p>T3 Uses manipulative material for conflictive issues in class for the child to visualize it (expects the child to resolve peer issues on their own).</p> <p>T3 A need exist to promote well-being in the foster child.</p> <p>T4 Child needs basic needs met.</p> <p>C1 Effect of COVID on well-being of foster children is yet to be seen (concerned). No curriculum to promote well-being.</p> <p>C2 Basic needs-healthy food.</p> <p>A1 Foster children need self-regulation and emotional support. Trauma is complex and requires competency.</p> <p>A1 Giving them a sense of safety at school.</p> <p>A2 A confident child that belongs, spring into learning, friends and well-being as a whole</p> <p>A2 All age inclusive classrooms and communication coaches (for teachers).</p>
Interrelationships	<p>T2 School offers basic needs supplies and food for children.</p> <p>T3 Continued education on foster child's behaviors is needed.</p> <p>C1 Information missing to serve families and children.</p> <p>C1 Continued education (up to date) coordinator that refresh current resources and training to teachers about changes on foster care children's issues and sources visit our school.</p> <p>C2 Food (healthy) readily available anytime for children at school. Learning happens without hunger.</p> <p>A1 Child skills development through community volunteers.</p> <p>A1 After school programs for life skills and a sense of well-being. (non-direct class related).</p>
Own wellness	<p>T1 Experience-Teacher-child attaching to be able to learn</p> <p>T2 Experience-Emotional exhaustion-Teacher worry on honoring a child's freedom to be.</p>

	<p>T2 Self-care on own emotional well-being.</p> <p>T5 Experience- Humanistic and compassionate to gain their trust. Having them help.</p> <p>C1 Experience-A foster child finds difficult to get attached.</p> <p>C1 Teacher Awareness- Identity and belongingness of the child has been tempered. Goals on own emotional growth (professional development).</p> <p>C2 Meeting basic and emotional needs, is crucial. Having socio-emotional skills on life matters for a foster child.</p> <p>C2 Experience-Model a warm and caring teacher to make a difference.</p> <p>A1 Teacher's check on each other's well-being for emotional exhaustion. COVID inflicted stress on staff.</p> <p>A2 Working together with staff for improvements.</p>
Seeking support	<p>T1 Professional training- Not provided on promoting well-being in foster care children, reliant on own self-sufficiency to learn.</p> <p>T1 School could provide workshops on what trauma does to a child's brain development.</p> <p>T2 School could provide workshops on what various traumas does to a child.</p> <p>T2 Professional training- (Did not specifically stated on promoting well-being in foster care children). State available, own reliance on teacher self-sufficiency.</p> <p>T3 School could provide training on foster care children's behaviors to identify traumatic trends.</p> <p>T3 Professional training- Not provided on promoting well-being in foster care children, own reliance on teacher self-sufficiency by taking "Conscious Discipline" training. Trauma related classes are optional.</p> <p>T4 School could provide training on foster care children's behaviors to identify issue trends.</p> <p>T4 Professional training- Not provided, on promoting well-being in foster care children; own reliance on teacher self-sufficiency by SEL lessons.</p> <p>T5 School could provide training on foster care children's behaviors to identify traumatic trends.</p> <p>T5 Professional training- Not provided on promoting well-being in foster care children.</p> <p>C1 Professional training- (Not specific on promoting well-being in foster care children). State available (free classes) own reliance on teacher self-sufficiency. School creates their own "trilateral goal" training last 3 yrs soc-emotional focus.</p>

	<p>C1 School could provide training on foster care children's behaviors to identify traumatic trends. Training for teachers with same content as potential foster parents have, to be licensed.</p> <p>C2 Professional training- Not provided on promoting well-being in foster care children.</p> <p>A1 Professional training- Not provided on promoting well-being in foster care children).</p> <p>A2 Professional training- Not provided on promoting well-being in foster care children.</p> <p>A2 Socio-emotional training by own school decision.</p> <p>A2 District could provide training on foster care children's behaviors to identify traumatic trends.</p>
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