JOHNSON, AMY VAN SCHAGEN, Ph.D. A Mixed Methods Study of Early Childhood Preservice Teachers: Beliefs About Poverty, Perceived Learning from Specific Instructional Strategies, and Preparedness to Serve Children and Families in Poverty. (2016).
Directed by Dr. Danielle Crosby and Dr. Karen La Paro. 147 pp.

A large number of young children experiencing poverty are receiving some type of formal early care and education. Effective early childhood teachers are an important component to providing high quality early childhood education. Yet, limited research has examined from the preservice teacher perspective how early childhood teacher preparation programs are preparing teachers to serve children and families experiencing poverty. Therefore, using a mixed method design the current study had two aims. Aim one was to explore early childhood education preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty. The second aim was to describe their perceived preparedness by their teacher preparation program to serve children and families in poverty including specific instructional strategies (lecture, readings, class discussion, field experiences) preservice teachers perceived as influential in learning about poverty. Eighty undergraduates in their final two semesters of an early childhood teacher preparation program completed an online survey and 11 of the 80 participants completed the qualitative interview. Results were discussed in terms of qualitative themes. Themes that emerged about preservice teachers' beliefs about the causes and perpetuation of poverty include holding both systemic and within person reasons, the role of luck, and the intersection of race and poverty. In addition, results indicate at trend level that students who have never personally experienced poverty are slightly more likely to hold more within person beliefs about the causes of poverty. Regarding aim two, findings suggest preservice

teachers may perceive they learn about topics related to serving children and families in poverty through all types of instructional strategies, but that class discussions, assigned readings, and field experiences may be perceived as most influential in their learning. Themes that emerged about preservice teachers perceived preparedness to serve children and families in poverty include: the importance of family, possible experiences while in poverty, teaching with empathy, responsibility to provide children's basic needs, and differences between teacher preparation or personal upbringing and real life experiences. The results are described and discussed in relation to recommendations for future research and implications for practice.

A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PRESERVICE

TEACHERS: BELIEFS ABOUT POVERTY, PERCEIVED LEARNING

FROM SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES, AND

PREPAREDNESS TO SERVE CHILDREN

AND FAMILIES IN POVERTY

by

Amy van Schagen Johnson

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
2016

Approved by

_____
Committee Co-Chair

_____
Committee Co-Chair

To my Grandma Ann and Grandma Jean for being pioneering business women, for always reminding me to fight for justice, and give voice to those who are not heard. You laid the path for me to serve young children.

To Denise who has always known my path, even before I did, and cheered me on; you reminded me that peace is found within no matter the chaos that surrounds us.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Amy van Schagen Johnson has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair _____

Committee Co-Chair _____

Committee Members _____

_____

_____
Date of Acceptance by Committee

_____
Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There would never be enough pages to adequately show my gratitude and appreciation to all those involved in this journey. To my dissertation committee: Dr. Deborah Cassidy, Dr. Danielle Crosby, Dr. Karen La Paro, and Dr. Catherine Scott-Little thank you for the support, sensitivity, encouragement, hard questions, priceless feedback, and life advice you provided me over the years; I could have never made it through this process without each of you. Your passion and advocacy for young children and ECE is inspiring and energizing. Thank you Catherine for being the calm voice of reason throughout my educational experience. Your winks of affirmation during presentations and defenses meant so much. Thank you Deb for your insight and feedback regarding the inextricable link between race, opportunity, and economic disparities and for your playful sarcasm.

Endless thanks and admiration to my co-chairs Danielle and Karen, who taught me about research and teaching. Our meetings always left me feeling invigorated and ready to conquer the next aspect of my research. Danielle, thank you for spending endless hours sifting through measures, item by item, to help me refine my dissertation survey. Karen, thank you for your willingness to provide such detailed feedback on drafts and your gentle nudges to keep up with my timeline. Karen and Danielle, thank you for creating a comfortable and accepting environment for me to ask questions, continue talking until I started making sense, and to stretch myself intellectually. I am honored to have you both in my life as mentors, friends, and colleagues.

iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

More than 16 million children in the United States (22 percent) live in families

that are experiencing poverty and 5.7 million of those children are under the age of six

(Jiang, Ekono, Skinner, 2015; National Center for Children in Poverty, 2006). Research

has underscored the potential negative impact that poverty has on young children's

development and health (Schmit, Matthews, Smith, & Robbins, 2013). Struggling to

have consistent food, shelter, and clothing is stressful for children and families

experiencing poverty. The experience of poverty in early childhood has been associated

with lower academic achievement, developmental delays, and biological changes to the

brain and at the cellular level (Ladd, 2012; Shonkoff & Gardner, 2012).

Experiencing high quality early childhood education (ECE) can be a buffer to

some of the potential negative affects of living in poverty (The Annie E. Casey

Foundation & Kids Count, 2013). Effective early childhood teachers are an important

component to providing high quality early childhood education. However, little is known

about the preparation and beliefs of early childhood educators in regards to working with

children and families experiencing poverty (Hallam, Buell, and Ridgley, 2003; Hallam,

Ridgley, and Buell, 2003). In addition, out of 20 million children under the age of 5

years old living in the United States (U.S.), an estimated 12.7 million (63 percent) are

1

attending some form of regular childcare (Laughlin, 2010). With the consistent increase of children participating in routine childcare, preschool, and pre-kindergarten programs and the large number of children under age six experiencing poverty, it is important to understand how undergraduate programs are preparing early childhood teachers to effectively work with children and families experiencing poverty. Thus, the current descriptive study will use mixed methods to describe early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty, their perception of instructional strategies that influenced their learning about poverty, and their perceptions of preparedness to work with children and families experiencing poverty.

Within teacher preparation literature there is variation in how terms such as field experiences, classes, and students, are defined (Koc, 2012; Siwatu, 2011). In the current study, there are five key terms: preservice teachers/students, field-based experiences, course, university class, and instructional strategies. In an effort to provide clear explanations of what these terms mean in the context of the current study the terms are defined below. First, the current study uses the terms preservice teachers and students to refer to undergraduate students enrolled in a four-year early childhood teacher preparation program in their last two semesters prior to graduation. These preservice teachers have completed the majority of courses required in the teacher preparation program and have completed multiple field based experiences in early childhood classrooms. Second, field-based experiences are early childhood classrooms in which preservice teachers have opportunities to observe and interact with young children, implement activities and lesson plans, practice teaching skills, and assess children's

learning. Third, the term course refers to the classes taught at the university. Forth, the

term university class refers to the students class meetings for each course. The final term

is instructional strategies and it is conceptualized as ways instructors support and

facilitate preservice teachers' learning and understanding of early childhood education;

examples of instructional strategies include lecture, assigned readings, class discussions,

and field experiences within the courses of their teacher preparation program.

National education organizations underscore the importance of teacher

preparation programs incorporating poverty into curriculum (NAEYC, 2009; CAEP,

2013). National teacher preparation standards incorporate issues of diversity to prepare

effective teachers (NAEYC, 2009; CAEP, 2013). For example, the Council for

Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) accreditation standards for high quality

teacher preparation programs stipulates that in any quality teacher preparation program

diversity should be a major characteristic (CAEP, 2013). Specifically, teacher

preparation students should have an understanding

> of their own frames of reference (e.g., culture, gender, language, abilities, ways of
> knowing), the potential biases in these frames, the relationship of privilege and
> power in schools, and the impact of these frames on educators' expectations for
> and relationships with learners and their families (p. 21, CAEP, 2013).

In addition to having self-awareness of these issues, CAEP (2013) discuss the diverse

types of children teachers are likely to work with including children in poverty.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children standards for early

childhood professional preparation highlight that diversity and inclusion is not a separate

standard because it is integrated within other standards that recognize the diversity among children including, socioeconomically (NAEYC, 2009). Specifically, standard 2 *building family and community relationships* (p. 12) discuss the importance of preservice teachers having knowledge and understanding of diverse family and community characteristics (NAEYC, 2009). Taken together, the CAEP and NAYEC teacher preparation standards support the argument presented in the current study, that it is important to explore preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty as they relate to their perceptions of preparedness and having strategies to support children and families in poverty.

Although research is limited, Hallam and colleagues (2003) examined teacher preparation programs. Their work focused on early childhood teacher preparation program-level content used to support students' learning about supporting children and families in poverty (Hallam, Buell, and Ridgley, 2003; Hallam, Ridgley, and Buell, 2003). This work suggested a need to further examine preservice teachers' reports of how prepared they are to serve children and families in poverty as well as the instructional strategies in their teacher preparation that most influenced their learning about families and children experiencing poverty.

Beliefs are strong indicators of choices people make (Bandura, 2001); for the purposes of this study teacher beliefs may be indicators of how to they interact, build relationships, and plan lessons for young children. Teacher beliefs have been linked to teaching practices in the classroom and with child outcomes (Maxwell, et. al., 2001; Pajares, 1992; Stipeck & Byler, 1997; Vartuli, 1999). Through course work and field experiences preservice teachers encounter new knowledge and information that may

influence their general beliefs about poverty, which in turn may influence their interactions with children and families experiencing poverty.

Research has yet to examine students' experiences and beliefs about poverty within early childhood teacher preparation programs and their preparedness to support children and families in poverty, though it is probable that a majority of teachers will work with children in poverty at some point in their career. This exploratory, mixed methods study has two main goals: 1) to describe preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty and children and families experiencing poverty; and 2) examine how students' perceptions of instructional strategies, within university classes, that have influenced their learning about poverty and their perceptions of their level of preparedness to serve children and families in poverty.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development is useful as a framework for early childhood education and research and the current study draws on some of its key tenets. It is important to acknowledge the current study does not attempt to be an exhaustive example of the use of bioecological theory or to test the bioecological theory; rather it uses specific tenants from the theory to guide the research (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). The following components of the bioecological theory have informed the current study: experiences, proximal processes, person, context, microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

The bioecological model defines development as "the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsycholgical characteristics of human beings, both as children and groups" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 793; Bronfenbrenner, 2001). In essence, development continues throughout the life span as individuals continue to learn (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). The current study identifies experiences (e.g., field experiences, previous experiences with poverty) and instructional strategies that have influenced students teachers learning about poverty and topics related to children and families in poverty. From the bioecological theory perspective, preservice teachers have been

developing an understanding or framework about poverty through interactions across contexts and experiences over time from childhood continuing through their early childhood teacher preparation program.

Experiences

An important aspect of the bioecological theory is the emphasis on experiences with the environment, both the objective and subjective aspects of experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). That is, how experiences such as home life or field experiences in early childhood classrooms occur and the way preservice teachers' interpret, perceive, and take in information about these experiences varies. Bronfenbrenner (2001) posits that the subjective experience of individuals is an important component because the way experiences influence people depend much on how they perceive them. Objective descriptions of experiences and environments often lack the depth of how they influence the individuals' development. Therefore, the current study uses a mixed method approach in an effort to collect information about both objective and subjective experiences. Demographic survey data about students such as course currently enrolled in, previous experiences working in early childhood education, and the type of program they completed their final field experience help provide an objective understanding of preservice teachers' experiences. Additional survey data and qualitative interviews provide an opportunity for the subjective experiences of preservice teachers regarding experiences in their teacher preparation program and personal experiences with poverty to emerge.

Proximal Processes

Proximal processes are the interactions that take place between the developing individual, in this case preservice teachers, and their environments (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Proximal processes can occur between individuals but can also be with objects, symbols, and settings (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). It is possible that preservice teachers further develop their knowledge of being an effective teacher and how to serve children and families in poverty through proximal processes in their field experiences, university classes, and external contexts such as home and community. Proximal processes are seen as occurring over time and are the crux of how human development takes place. Within proximal processes, for an activity to be "effective" it must take place on a regular basis and over an extended period of time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Additionally, repeating the same activity over and over may not facilitate development, but it is the increasing complexity of the activity, interaction, or experience that aids the proximal process and thus furthers development. In the context of teacher preparation, field experiences with varying levels of responsibility and expectations are activities that may lead to or promote proximal processes. In the teacher preparation program where the current study data was collected, students have a variety of field experiences, with successively increasing hours in early childhood classrooms and more complex assignments and responsibilities. For example, in the course titled *Introduction to Early Childhood Education*, which is taken early in the course sequence, preservice teachers spend two hours per week in early childhood classrooms observing the teacher, children, and activities. As the students continue through the program they

8

have field experiences in other courses for extended periods of time (six hours per week), where they implement small group activities and then eventually help implement full day lesson plans. These field experiences occur across time and are designed to scaffold learning by including additional responsibilities and skills as preservice teachers are learning new knowledge and strategies within their courses and field experiences.

Person. Proximal processes are influenced by context, but also by the developing individual; individual characteristics such as temperament, gender, race, and ethnicity influence how individuals respond to experiences and objects as well as how others perceive and respond to them (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnick, 2009). According to bioecological theory, these person characteristics involve disposition, resources, and demand. Disposition speaks to a persons natural state of being and attitude towards the world. Within the bioecological theory, a person's biological resources include their knowledge, skills, experience, and ability (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In addition, demand characteristics "invite or discourage reactions from the social environment" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 796). Tudge et al., (2009) suggest that demand characteristics are easily seen such as hair, skin color, body shape, clothing and facial features. These individual nuances can shape and influence the power and direction of proximal processes that occur. To account for person characteristics of the target population, the current study collected demographic data about preservice teachers such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, if they are a parent or guardian, whether they are currently working directly with young children in a paid position, and if and when they have experienced poverty in their lifetime. These data provide additional depth and

understanding about how individual characteristics may influence preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty.

Context. Context refers to the interaction and interplay between the developing individual and their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This includes objects, settings such as university classes, young children's classrooms and homes, and symbols. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) highlight that within any context it is important to consider aspects that promote and support proximal processes and those that hinder or interfere with proximal processes. Multiple contexts are likely to influence preservice teachers' beliefs and understanding of poverty and children and families experiencing poverty. For example, whether or not preservice teachers have experienced poverty within their own lives or in their community may shape their perspective about poverty and people in poverty. Similarly, preservice teachers may have varying levels to which their work context or field experiences have included children from families experiencing low income or poverty. The presence or lack of these experiences across multiple contexts may influence how prepared teachers feel about early childhood topics associated with supporting families and children in poverty. Therefore, the current study used survey questions and interviews to understand what contexts may influence preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty.

Time. Time is an aspect of the bioecological model that influences proximal processes. Within the bioecological perspective there are three levels of time micro, meso, and macro (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Although the current study acknowledges the importance of time for proximal processes, because of the time

10

constraints and methodology used, the current study does not measure time within the study as it relates to proximal processes. However, the chronosystem was taken into account and is discussed further below.

Systems

The set of systems in which development is embedded represent another major tenet of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory. The bioecological theory places the developing individual in the center of a set of systems that are defined as the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The boundaries are fluid between systems and it is common for contexts and individuals to be a part of, to a certain extent, multiple systems. Each of these systems are constantly interacting and influencing one another. It is possible the influence may be temporary or happen within the context of only one day or a week or month, similarly it can have prolong and profound affects that transcend through multiple developmental stages or across the life time. This is determined by experiences that take place as well as the amount of time. Below are descriptions of each system that informed the current study including the microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

The microsystem engages most closely to the developing individual and involves direct contact with people, objects, contexts, and symbols (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In the case of preservice teachers, relationships with instructors, cooperating teachers (early childhood lead teachers) and peers, social roles, and patterned activities with objects and symbols take place within the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) discuss objects for children as toys,

11

utensils, bottles, and other physical items that promote learning. In regard to preservice teachers, examples of objects include: assessment tools, using technology, and using higher level thinking to figure out how to use child objects (e.g., blocks) to support children's learning and development. A key component to the microsystem that promotes development is the quality of the environment. For example, does the teacher preparation program promote learning? A primary mode of proximal processes occurring with objects and symbols requires preservice teachers to feel comfortable to practice their teaching skills within their environment. Another aspect is the availability of increasingly more complex experiences and objects to support increased cognitive development. Specifically, having courses and field experiences set up to provide an appropriate level of challenge to support learning.

The mesosystem is defined as being the association, or bridge, between two microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Mesosystems can be explained as a bridge between two microsystems. When connections are strong (positive or negative) between the two microsystems it has more influence on the individual's development (Swick & Williams, 2006). This may be particularly important when considering preservice teachers' beliefs and understanding of poverty. For example, a bridge may develop between home and university contexts for preservice teachers in which preservice teachers may draw connections between their experiences at home with poverty and what they are learning or experiencing in university classes and field experiences. In addition, students who are currently experiencing poverty may have additional hardships such as lack of transportation and availability in regards to

technology that may impact their experiences in university classes and field experiences. These associations between these two microsystems may facilitate additional understanding or conflict in beliefs and knowledge about poverty and teacher preparation.

Macrosystem is a lens that filters experiences that are formed by previous and currently occurring experiences and belief systems; "over arching pattern of the micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristics of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40). Specific to preservice teachers, there may be variation in the degree to which their past and present experiences in multiple contexts contribute to the development of their perspectives and understandings about poverty and ways to serve children and families in poverty. Although the actual "lens" that preservice teachers are using to filter experiences is not being measured in the current study; the current study seeks to understand how beliefs about poverty and teaching young children in poverty have developed across time. Aspects of the lenses that preservice teachers use to make sense of experiences and belief systems may emerge through the qualitative interviews.

The chronosystem addresses the time component of the model (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Eamon, 2001). Examples of elements within the chronosystem include life transitions, social conditions with the environment, and people moving in and out of the house. The current study addresses some aspects of time by identifying some social conditions within the environment. For example, the current

13

study will identify to what extent participants have personally experienced poverty in their lifetime. Understanding the extent and timing (early childhood, middle, and/or adulthood) of exposure to poverty may be very meaningful to the preservice teacher and influence how they may interact with families and children experiencing poverty. In addition, preservice teachers were enrolled in either their second to last semester (final field experience) or last semester of the teacher preparation program (after final field experience). It is possible that preservice teachers in their final semester may have further developed their understanding and beliefs about poverty and how to support families and children in poverty because of additional opportunities to participate in discussions, complete assignments, and reflect on this topic. Therefore, the current study tests whether preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty vary by status in the program (i.e., currently completing final field experience or already completed final field experience). Time is a critical piece throughout the bioecological theory and underscores the longevity of development across the life course and the need for time within proximal processes. Due to time constraints the current study does not, however, account for change in development across time.

As a framework for understanding the factors and mechanisms involved in human development, the bioecological theory provided guidance for this study of one aspect of teacher development – namely, the beliefs preservice teachers have about poverty and how these students may perceive the influence of field experiences during their undergraduate education. The key tenets of experiences, proximal processes, person, context, and interacting systems of context identify important considerations in the study

of early childhood teacher preparation and development. For example, this framework suggests, it is important to consider the experiences and opportunities that preservice teachers have within the university context as well as other microsystems such as their home. In addition to theory, current literature on the topic of early childhood preservice teacher preparation is discussed below to help guide the current study.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

What are the Possible Experiences of Children and Families in Poverty?

Experiences of children and families who are in poverty vary; however, research has underscored the importance of teachers knowing about the possible experiences of children in poverty (Milner & Laughter, 2015). Specifically, children in United States who are experiencing poverty are at higher risk of being hungry or malnourished, having inconsistent living situations, exposure to violence, and increased stress (Child Trends, 2013; Ladd, 2012; Sullivan, 2014). In addition, research has indicated that experiencing poverty as a young child can have implications for development and academic achievement (Aratani, 2009; Ladd, 2012). It is important in early childhood education teacher preparation to educate students on possible experiences of children in poverty and how to support children and families if they have these experiences. Poverty can encompass varied components, not all families and children will experience all components nor experience them in the same way; an understanding of the multi-faceted aspect of poverty helps to understand what children who are living in poverty may experience and the potential role of early childhood teachers.

In 2011, 16.7 million American children experiencing low income lived in food insecure households (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, 2012). The US

Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as "limited or uncertain access to adequate food" that may lead to hunger (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2012). Food fuels children's energy and brain development and is a necessity for the human body to grow and function. When children are hungry in the classroom it can impact their cognitive, social, and emotional development (American Psychological Association, 2016; Howard, 2011). For example, research suggests that infants and young children who are hungry are less active and therefore are not able to explore their environment; moving and exploring are a pivotal way young children learn and grow (American Psychological Association, 2016). In addition to food insecure homes and hunger, children experiencing poverty are more likely to experience unstable living conditions with periods of homelessness (Aratani, 2009).

Experiencing poverty increases the risk of exposure to violence (Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001; Child Trends, 2013; U.S. Department of Justice, 2006). Examples of possible ways in which children in poverty may be exposed to violence include: witnessing a fight in their neighborhood, hearing gunshots, domestic abuse, and being victims of abuse or violence. Young children who experience trauma such as exposure to violence may have reactions such as nightmares, trouble sleeping, and challenges with behavior, impulse control, and attention (Child Trends, 2013) and may be present within the classroom context.

The context and challenges of poverty are stressful for young children and their families who are experiencing it. Responses to stress vary by the amount and consistency of the stressor of poverty. Three types of stress responses have been identified in young

children including positive-, tolerable-, and toxic-stress response (Shonkoff & Gardner, 2012). A positive stress response takes place during brief mild to moderate episodes of stress and relies heavily on the availability of caring supportive adults who assist the child in coping with stressors (Shonkoff & Gardner, 2012). Toxic stress occurs when non-normative multiple stressors are consistently present overtime (Shonkoff & Gardner, 2012). Toxic stress has been found to impact brain development related to memory, learning, and aspects of executive functioning (Shonkoff & Gardner, 2012). In addition, toxic stress has been associated with methylation (maturation of cells) in children who experience toxic stress while in poverty (Garner, 2013; Tidwell & Thompson, 2008). Positive, supportive, and trusting relationships with adults such as with parents have been found to counteract some of the negative effects of toxic stress (Shonkoff & Gardner, 2012). Some children experiencing poverty may have strong healthy positive adult relationships that can help counteract some of the stressors they experience. In contrast, some adult caregivers may not be emotionally or physically available to provide support to their young children given the additional stress of working multiple jobs, non-traditional work hours, and trying to provide basic needs. It is possible that for children experiencing poverty and toxic stress, a positive relationship with an effective early childhood teacher may help counteract some of the impact of toxic stress. Given the biological and developmental impacts of poverty on young children and the possible buffering effect of positive relationships with teachers, it is vital that early childhood educators are prepared to serve children and families to provide opportunities for young children in poverty to thrive and develop.

Children use their surroundings such as home, childcare, school, and neighborhoods to help learn about the world around them. For children with low income, research indicates that experiences outside of school or childcare such as neighborhoods and home contexts can spill over into the school context and impact the learning environment (Buckner, Beardslee, & Bassuk, 2004; Hill, Morris, Castells, & Walker, 2011). In addition, schools are often identified as a point of stability and consistency in children's life particularly for children experiencing poverty. It has been well documented that high quality early childhood education can help close the opportunity gap for children experiencing poverty (Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), 2011; The Schott Foundation, 2016). Yet, too often children experiencing low income or poverty are in childcare centers or preschools that are below average in quality (Schmit, Matthews, Smith, & Robbins, 2013). Families living in poverty or experiencing financial hardship may not have the luxury of choosing what early childhood program their children attends because factors such as cost, transportation, and hours of operation are essential to finding a program that meets the family's logistical needs. In addition, there are not enough government funded early childhood education programs or slots to accommodate all the young children who qualify for assistance which means that some children are waitlisted and ultimately attend some other form of care that may be lower quality (Schmit, Matthews, Smith, & Robbins, 2013). This perpetuates the opportunity gap that is described as "the disparity in access to quality schools and the resources needed for all children to be academically successful" (The Schott Foundation, 2016). In addition, research indicates that current

teachers report being under-prepared to serve children experiencing poverty and Children of Color, particularly for teachers who are White (Milner & Laughter, 2015).

Poverty and Race

Race and poverty are inextricably linked; given the current and socio-historical context of slavery and oppression of People of Color in the United States. Race is socially constructed and defined as grouping people into populations or groups on the basis of various sets of physical characteristics, a person's physical features. The phrase *People of Color* refers to anyone with skin color other than White. People of Color are more likely to experience poverty than people who are White (Milner & Laughter, 2015). In addition, institutionalized racism in the U. S. continues to widen the opportunity gap and restrict People of Color's access to resources and services (Milner & Laughter, 2015). Examples of institutionalized racism include people in administrative or power positions primarily being White, judgments being made about motivation, fashion, language, family values, and lack of material resources in schools that serve low-income areas that have predominantly Children of Color in attendance (Bullock, 2006). Specifically, some teachers may view a Parent of Color experiencing poverty who does not attend the welcome night at school as lazy or uninterested in their child's education however, they may be working during that time or do not have reliable transportation. It is important to note that racism can be covert or overt and may be unintentional. Regardless of whether racism is covert or overt, these assumptions or bias may negatively impact how teachers interact with parents or their children (Adair, 2013). For example, teachers often have lower expectations for children experiencing poverty and Children of

Color. Specifically, Ready and Wright (2011) findings suggest that teachers of kindergarteners' had lower expectations of children's abilities for Children of Color and from lower incomes.

Whiteness is a term used to describe the power of the White race pushing other groups such as People of Color, people experiencing poverty, and immigrants to be shaped, taught, and acculturated to White values and expectations in order to be considered successful in school (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006). Whiteness is important to consider when discussing poverty because being White comes with privilege and it provides additional opportunities even within the context of experiencing poverty. In addition, Whiteness is present within schools with there being large deficiencies in schools that have 50 percent or more Children of Color and at least 70 percent children experiencing poverty enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2000). Research suggests that teachers may exhibit Whiteness within the classroom context (Adair, 2013). For example, Adair (2013) explored 50 White preschool teachers beliefs about immigrant students and their families. Findings suggest that examples of Whiteness were evident in classrooms such as blaming immigrant families, creating distance between immigrant families and teachers, and expecting immigrant families to change (Adair, 2013). In addition, Whiteness was identified as a barrier for teachers' ability to respond to immigrant families in positive ways (Adair, 2013).

Early childhood students' discussion or lack of discussion about race in relation to poverty may provide insight into their awareness and acknowledgement of the intersection of race and poverty. Moreover, whether students discuss specific university

classes or field experiences within their teacher preparation programs that engaged in

topics of diversity and inequality may provide additional information related to their

perceived preparedness to serve children and families experiencing poverty. Milner and

Laughter (2015) stress the importance of teacher preparation programs asking difficult

questions to students including " Does poverty manifest for White students in the same

way as for Black students? How are these emergent manifestations similar and

different?" (p. 344). Given that race and poverty are inextricably linked, it is possible

that students may discuss race and racial issues with regard to their beliefs about poverty.

ECE Teacher Preparation and Children Experiencing Poverty

Hallam, Buell, and Ridgley (2003) indicate that 75% of all early childhood

teacher preparation programs interviewed about the inclusion of content about serving

young children and families experiencing poverty provided at least one field experience

that included opportunities to work with children who experience poverty. However,

there was often a lack of connection between field experiences and course content about

engaging families in poverty. Moreover, less than half of the programs included content

to address how to assess strengths of families experiencing poverty (Hallam et al., 2003).

Though strengths based approaches in education have been shown to be effective for

positive child outcomes (Gorski, 2013).

Some research suggests that inservice teachers are aware of the socioeconomic

differences in students and feel unsure how to effectively address these differences

(Milner & Laughter, 2015). Specifically, White, Mistry, and Chow (2013) interviewed

25 teachers in prekindergarten through sixth grades; their findings indicate that some

teachers attempted to "mask" socioeconomic (SES) differences in the classroom while others' discussed the challenges of SES differences in relation to parents' school involvement, parental power, and lack of geographic proximity. Parents with higher SES were more available to be involved in school events and provide their feedback about the school. In contrast, parents with lower SES and those who lived outside of the school neighbor had a challenging time being involved and having influence on the school. White et al., (2013) underscore the need for specific strategies for teachers, and schools to better address SES differences. Teacher preparation programs may provide opportunities for future teachers to learn about SES and strategies for supporting children and families from different socioeconomic backgrounds; this may help teachers to be more prepared to handle differences in SES within their classrooms.

In addition, studies about teacher beliefs underscore the importance of having knowledge related to socioeconomic and cultural oppression of specific groups. Hermes (2005) used ethnography over three years to learn about teachers' insights into the influence of poverty and culture in four Ojibwe tribal schools. Teachers in the Ojibwe tribal schools, discussed the impact of poverty on their students, yet professional development opportunities only focused on including culture (such as traditions and values) in the curriculum (Hermes, 2005). Taken together, White et al., (2013) and Hermes (2005) both highlight the need for more training and understanding surrounding income variation, specifically poverty. Exploring teachers' beliefs about poverty in addition to identifying knowledge and content areas about poverty at the teacher preparation level that preservice teachers perceive being less prepared for may help

provide information to teacher preparation programs of topics, experiences, and content that may need further explanation or coverage in courses. Therefore, the current study examines the perceptions of influential instructional strategies in learning about topics related to serving children and families in poverty and their preparedness to serve children and families in poverty.

Teacher Beliefs about Poverty

"Beliefs start to change as soon as prospective teachers experience that they possess or can develop competencies" (Vartuli & Rohs, 2009, p. 312; Bandura, 2001). This quote emphasizes the impact that field experiences and course instructional strategies may have on preservice teachers' beliefs. The opportunity preservice teachers have to watch their own interactions, reflect on their teaching style and instances when they are able to observe how their teaching impacts children's learning may influence their teacher beliefs. Subsequently, teacher beliefs about poverty may influence how they support children and families experiencing poverty. Research in education suggests that teacher beliefs about teaching are associated with teacher practices (Maxwell et al., 2001; Stipek & Byler, 1997; Vartuli, 1999). Stipek and Byler (1997) examined preschool and kindergarten teachers' beliefs about instructional practices such as basic-skills and child-centered orientation. Specifically, teacher beliefs are positively associated with teacher practices for preschool and kindergarten teachers (Stipek & Byler, 1997). Although Maxwell et al. (2001) focused on kindergarten through third grade teachers, findings indicate that teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate and inappropriate

practice were associated with observed classroom practices and accounted for 11 percent of the variance.

Vartuli (1999) suggests that the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices may vary based on teaching experience. Specifically, early childhood teachers' beliefs about teaching were moderately positively correlated with observed practice and developmentally appropriate practice but varied by years of teaching experience and with early childhood certification with teachers; with early childhood certification being more likely to believe in and use developmentally appropriate practice (Vartuli, 1999). Given Vartuli (1999) findings it may be helpful to explore teacher beliefs about poverty while preservice teachers are still involved in a teacher preparation program because teacher beliefs about poverty may influence their learning and understanding about children and families experiencing poverty. Although a direct connection between beliefs and practice is not a focus of the current study, the association between beliefs and practice support examining preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty in addition to the perceptions of preparedness in their teacher preparation related to serving children and families in poverty.

Although teachers' general beliefs about teaching has been examined in the literature (Stipek & Byler, 1997; Vartuli, 1999), and some research exists related to adult beliefs about poverty, limited research has explored undergraduate ECE students' beliefs specifically about poverty. Therefore, the current study draws on research conducted about individuals' beliefs about poverty. Research suggests that individuals may hold both systemic and within person beliefs about the causes of poverty (Merolla, Hunt, &

Serpe, 2011; Hunt, 2004). Findings from a study conducted on adults 18 years or older who are experiencing economic hardship in the Los Angeles areas, suggest that some individuals hold both systemic and within person beliefs about the causes of poverty (Merolla, Hunt, & Serpe, 2011). Specifically, systemic beliefs that individuals identified as reasons for poverty included "failure of society to provide good schools, low wages, prejudice and discrimination" (Merolla, Hunt, & Serpe, 2011, p. 210). In contrast, within person beliefs about poverty such as "lack of thrift or proper money management, lack of effort, and lack of ability, and talent" (Merolla, Hunt, & Serpe, 2011, p. 210). In regard to the current study, it is possible that preservice teachers who have experienced or are currently experiencing poverty may be more likely to have lower levels of individualistic beliefs about the causes of poverty. In addition, Hunt (2004) findings suggest that people with more education may have less individualistic (within person) views of causes of poverty. Research suggests that some students report that field experiences have the largest impact on them and are more likely to identify field experiences as being the most influential in their teacher preparation program (Ritblatt, Garrity, Longstreth, Hokoda, & Potter, 2013; Zeichner, 2010). Thus, it may be important to examine whether students in their last semester of classes who have already completed their final field experience may differ from students' currently enrolled in their final field experience. The current study examines whether preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty vary by their own experiences with poverty, their course, and potentially by format of the teacher preparation program.

26

Limited literature has examined undergraduates' beliefs about poverty. However some research examining undergraduate nursing students suggests that their beliefs about poverty tended to have structural or systemic beliefs about poverty (Reutter, Sword, Meagher-Stewart, & Rideout, 2004). Moreover, students were more likely to hold structural reasons for the association between health and poverty particularly if they had positive attitudes towards people who are economically disadvantaged or were students that had more exposure to poverty in their courses (Reutter et al., 2004). Research has identified that individuals may hold both individualistic and structural reasons for poverty (Hunt, 2004; Reutter et al., 2004); overarching these two types, *structural* (systemic) and *individualistic* (within), are the strengths-based and deficit perspectives about poverty.

Strength and deficit beliefs about poverty. Research has highlighted the presence and influence of teachers having strength and/or deficit beliefs when serving children and families from diverse contexts (Ahlquist, Gorski, & Montano, 2011; Dworin & Bomer, 2008; Gorski, 2013). Understanding students' possible strength and deficit beliefs about poverty may help identify specific aspects of their teacher preparation program that either reinforce or challenge these beliefs that may inevitably influence how some teachers respond to children in their classrooms who are experiencing poverty. Below the deficit and strengths based beliefs (also referred to as perspectives) are defined and described in relation to preservice teachers and preparation.

Deficit beliefs are broadly defined as viewing the individual being personally responsible for their success and failures, often identified as within-person or individualistic beliefs. It is "conceptualized as approaching children based on

preconceived ideas about their weaknesses instead of their strengths" (Ahlquist, Gorski, & Montano, 2011, p. 152). The deficit perspective focuses on the beliefs that individuals have a choice, and the notion that failure is because of individual choices to do so. It is possible that preservice teachers using the deficit perspective may discuss children and families from poverty by addressing individual factors only as descriptors for why certain groups of people are more likely to remain in poverty. For example, preservice teachers may report or discuss the causes of poverty being primarily due to individuals' lack of motivation or making bad choices. Specific to children and families experiencing poverty, deficit beliefs focuses on 'fixing' people in poverty and view children, youth, and adults as "intellectually, morally, (and) or spiritually deficient" (Gorski, 2013, p. 111). Education then shifts focus from learning and scaffolding development to focusing on "fixing" broken and inadequate children and families. In this respect, this perspective is that people are the problem not structural contexts contributing to poverty. For example, preservice teachers operating from a deficit perspective may identify their role as teacher as being a hero or fixing children and families; it is possible that this may shape their interactions with young children and families experiencing poverty such that preservice teachers may approach a family experiencing poverty in a less sensitive way or make assumptions about what particular families need rather than taking time to listen and learn about each family.

In contrast, strengths-based beliefs (also referred to as the resilience perspective) focus on identifying children's and families' strengths rather than deficits (Gorski, 2008b). The strengths-based perspective is conceptualized as an ecological perspective

28

that is solution and strength focused (Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014). Overall, this perspective acknowledges the contextual and environmental influences on individuals. By acknowledging the context it allows the focus to move to identifying strengths, interest, dreams, abilities, knowledge, and potential within in children as individuals (Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014; Sato & Lensmire, 2009). The strengths-based perspective supports the concept that children and families experiencing poverty are "cultural beings" that have hopes, dreams, wishes, and intelligence (Sato & Lensmire, 2009). It also recognizes that the experience of poverty varies and there are causes at a societal or systemic level. No one person or child in poverty will have the same experience as another individual. Within the context of the classroom, a focus is placed on children's competency and abilities related to their development. Fenton and McFarland-Piazza (2014) described the learning of preservice teachers who completed a strengths based approach to a child protection module. The module used a strengths based approach by McCashen (2005) as cited in Fenton and McFarland-Piazza (2014). The module about child protection integrated six key stages for reflection, planning, and action (Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014). The six stages included: listening to others' stories, developing a vision of the future and setting goals, identifying and emphasizing strengths and exceptions to problems, finding additional resources needed for the future, mobilizing strengths in a plan of action, and reviewing progress and change (McCashen, 2005 as cited in Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014). Findings suggested that prior to the module preservice teachers were apprehensive about working with families dealing with serious topics and were unsure of their approach to families (Fenton & McFarland-

29

Piazza, 2014). Following completion of the module preservice teachers showed shifts in their perspectives from "glass half full" to parents and educators partnering together and valuing differences in families instead of judging them (Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014). Schwartz and Robinson (1991) findings support that when a strengths based approach is infused in the program that undergraduate social work students rated structural causes of poverty as more influential in the causes of poverty than causes focused on individual factors. Their views aligned with the strengths based philosophy and course content within the program (Schwartz & Robinson, 1991).

Given that research has identified the positive outcomes of strengths based beliefs with children and families (Ahlquist, Gorski, & Montano, 2011; Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014; Gorski, 2012), it is important to understand the perspective of early childhood preservice teachers when discussing poverty. Therefore, the current study will explore the extent to which the strength and deficit perspective are present in the preservice teachers' responses regarding their beliefs about poverty. In addition, to examining the perspectives that may be implicit within preservice teachers' beliefs, during their teacher preparation program, preservice teachers may learn about topics related to supporting children and families in poverty through different instructional strategies used in their university classes.

Instructional Strategies in ECE Teacher Preparation

Early childhood is a period of rapid development, this means that teacher preparation programs need to prepare future teachers through course content about child development, supporting families, teaching strategies to support student learning and

knowledge about subject areas (e.g., math and language) (Darling-Hammond, 2006). In order to accomplish these multiple instructional strategies within courses are employed to provide preservice teachers with learning opportunities. Instructional strategies are defined as approaches to support preservice teachers' learning and understanding of topics and skills in early childhood education. In the current study instructional strategies were broadly defined as field experiences, lectures, assigned readings, and class discussions.

Effective early childhood education programs involve both course content and practical experiences in the classroom. Specifically, the CAEP accreditation standard: *Content and Pedagogical Knowledge Standard* states, "Content knowledge describes the depth of understanding of critical concepts, theories, skills, processes, principles, and structures that connect and organize ideas within a field" (CAEP, 2013, p. 2). This standard emphasizes the importance of course content being thorough and incorporating multiple knowledge bases to provide a foundation for teaching. Within course content, multiple instructional strategies are used to promote learning of course content such as, readings, class discussion, and lectures (Hallam et al., 2003). Identifying instructional strategies that have been influential in preservice teachers' learning related to poverty and supporting children and families in poverty may provide additional information about what strategies support learning about this specific topic.

Field experiences have been touted as in integral part of preparing effective future teachers in early childhood education (Wedman, Espinosa, & Laffey, 1999). Field experiences are broadly defined as opportunities in early childhood classrooms or related

environment that provide early childhood preservice teachers an opportunity to practice teaching strategies (NAEYC, 2009). However, the amount, type, and diversity (e.g., variety of age groups and diversity in student make up) of these experiences vary. Current research underscores that effective field experiences include placements that have children with and without disabilities, are from families of varying income levels, and are diverse by race, ethnicity, and culture (Jones, 1995; Lim, Maxwell, Able-Boone, & Zimmer, 2009). In addition, these field experiences must be supervised and supported by instructors as well as the lead teachers (also referred to as cooperating teachers) in the classroom for optimal learning to take place.

Broadly, research has examined the effectiveness of different instructional strategies for adult learners (Garside, 1996; Hwang & Kim; 2006). For instance, Garside (1996) compared the use of lecture and group discussion in learning and developing critical thinking skills for undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory communication course. Using a pre- and post-test method, items on the tests were identified as lower-level thinking (knowledge, comprehension, application) and higher level thinking (required analysis, synthesis, evaluation of material). Results indicated that both strategies, lecture and group discussion, had significantly increased learning and critical thinking skills. However, through lecture, students learned more lower-level thinking items, while group discussion yielded learning for more higher-level items. Similar findings suggest that collaborative learning that promotes problem solving, collaboration with peers, and feedback increased engineering students' learning more than only lecture and discussion (Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Parente, & Bjorklund,

2001). Although limited, there is research on the use of assigned readings (Roberts & Roberts, 2008). Specifically, findings suggest that undergraduate sociology students found assigned readings more helpful when paired with required written responses to the readings and connections are drawn during class between content and the readings (Roberts & Roberts, 2008). In addition, students stated assigned readings can give students time to reflect on the topic prior to having a response (Roberts & Roberts, 2008).

Some instructional strategies may be more meaningful than others for specific topics or skills related to supporting children and families in poverty. That is not to say that there may be only one instructional strategy to help preservice teachers learn specific topics, but that it is possible that certain instructional strategies may be more meaningful for preservice teachers to learn certain topics, knowledge, or skills, in this case poverty. For example, lectures may be more influential in learning about topics that are not necessarily observable such as the impact of chronic hunger on child development and the effects of neighborhood contexts on child development (Garside, 1996; Hwang & Kim; 2006). In contrast, it is possible that field experiences are more influential in learning about communicating effectively with adults and children because students would have opportunities to observe and practice communication with adults and children in the classroom (Ritblatt, Garrity, Longstreth, Hokoda, & Potter, 2013; Zeichner, 2010). In addition to examining instructional strategies, understanding preservice teacher perceptions of how prepared they feel to serve children and families in poverty may help programs identify areas in which preservice teachers need additional supports or experiences.

Perceived Level of Preparedness to Work with Children and Families in Poverty

"Teachers' feelings of preparedness are one important indicator of the extent to which they are prepared to meet the challenges that characterize their profession" (no page, U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Limited research has examined preservice teachers' level of preparedness specifically to work with children and families in poverty, although preparedness has been examined in other areas of teacher preparation (Onchwari, 2010; Wenger & Dinsmore, 2005). For example, Onchwari (2010) examined preservice teachers' perceived levels of preparedness to handle stress in children. Findings from this study highlighted that preservice teachers, in an elementary education preparation program, felt most prepared to handle school related stress and least prepared to handle society-related stress.

Research suggests that in regard to issues of diversity such as supporting limited English proficient or culturally diverse students teachers perceived being less prepared as compared to other topics such as meeting core classroom requirements (U. S. Department of Education, 1999). Although these findings were for inservice teachers, it does provide insight that some teachers feel less prepared to support marginalized groups. By examining preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty and perceived preparedness to serve children in poverty including instructional strategies they perceived as influencing their learning about the impact of poverty on children and families, the current study will address an important gap in the literature.

CHAPTER IV

THE CURRENT STUDY

The current exploratory descriptive study seeks to describe the essence of students' beliefs about poverty, teaching strategies they perceive influenced their learning about serving children and families in poverty, and their reports of perceived preparedness to serve children and families in poverty. A mixed method approach is used to address these aims. Mixed method research has employed different strategies in developing research questions, including the use of separate research questions for qualitative and quantitative data and developing research questions that combine both methods to address a single research question (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007; Leader-Janssen & Rankin-Erickson, 2013). Aligning with the methodological perspective and the mixed method phenomenological approach, I developed the research questions for the current study to incorporate both methods into one question (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007; Fisher & Stenner, 201; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). The following research questions were developed for the current study.

> 1) What are students' beliefs about poverty and do they vary by their own
>
> experiences with poverty, the course they are currently enrolled in, or course
>
> format (i.e., online or face to face)?
>
> 2) How prepared do students perceive they are for serving young children and
>
> families experiencing poverty from their teacher preparation program?

Specifically, what type of instructional strategies (assigned readings, lecture, class discussion, or field based experiences) did students perceive as most influential in their learning about poverty and serving children and families in poverty?

CHAPTER V

METHODS

The current study uses a mixed method approach because collecting both

qualitative and quantitative data provides researchers with the ability to increase the

quality and quantity of interpretations of the data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). In

addition, the type of information gained from using each method varies. For example,

quantitative data allow for statistical comparison of individuals and groups, and often

provides participants a variety of responses to choose from when answering specific

questions. Quantitative data typically allow for more questions to be answered in a

shorter period of time than most qualitative methods. Although qualitative data are often

more time consuming to collect and analyze, they are formatted to allow participants to

express and respond to questions more freely, in their own words without the constraints

of a list of answer choices. Considerations of quantitative methodology include that it is

deductive; the researcher is removed from the data completion, and it is more

generalizable and population oriented (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007; Day, Sammons, &

Gu, 2008; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Qualitative data often provide more depth

and understanding with responses. Considerations of qualitative methodology include

that it is inductive, the researcher is close to the data, it tends to be less generalizable

because of the smaller sample size, it provides more depth and layers of responses, and it

lacks statistical conclusions (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007; Day, Sammons, & Gu, 2008; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In the context of this study, the use of only quantitative methods could create a threat to the ability to adequately describe students' beliefs about poverty and could miss details about their specific teacher preparation program experiences that may or may not have resonated with individual participants. Similarly, if only qualitative data were collected it could minimize the sample size and the ability to statistically compare responses and influences of teacher preparation programs. Therefore, mixed methods are the best choice and provide a deeper understanding of teacher beliefs, instructional strategies, and preparedness. A mixed methods approach enriches the current study's ability to interpret and describe the data in a way that could influence future practice and policy (Day, Sammons, & Gu, 2008; Fisher & Stenner, 2011).

Mixed Methods

      Methodological perspective. Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) describe four different perspectives that researchers use for mixed methods including a) the method perspective, b) the methodological perspective, c) the paradigm perspective, and d) the practice perspective. The method perspective for mixed methods only requires that one measure be qualitative and one measure be quantitative (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). The methodological perspective posits that researchers cannot separate methods from the larger process of research (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). Unlike the method and methodological perspective, the paradigm perspective focuses more on the specific underlying assumptions or worldview that informs a study and at times challenges

38

whether mixed methods can even be conducted (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). Finally, is the practice perspective or "bottom up" method where a mixed method approach is integrated into a researcher's existing understanding of research designs whether quantitative or qualitative (p.306, Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). The current study uses a methodological perspective by incorporating qualitative and quantitative perspectives throughout the research design. In alignment with the methodological perspective, the current study took steps to incorporate mixed methods in the design of the research questions, data collection, and data analysis. In addition to the influence of the methodological perspective in the design of the current study, a descriptive phenomenological approach is used.

   Phenomenological approach. Descriptive phenomenology aims to "describe or interpret human experiences as lived by the experiencer in a way that can be used as a source of qualitative evidence" (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2013, p. 2). That is, phenomenology intends to understand individuals' or shared groups of individuals' experiences through the individuals' lens or perspectives. A main component of phenomenology is that all participants must have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The current study describes the phenomenon of teachers' beliefs about poverty while enrolled in an early childhood teacher preparation program. *Experiences* is a term that is broadly used to encompass actual lived experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts. Descriptive phenomenology has four core characteristics (Giorgi, 2009 as cited in Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). First is intentionality; being aware that objects, feelings, and experiences exist in an individuals' own mind and are formed through

39

individuals' perspective. Second is that by nature descriptive phenomenology always describes (Giorgi, 2009 as cited in Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Third, similar to Gearing (2004), the researcher must bracket out their own past experiences and beliefs in order to be sensitive of the possible impact on the research. Last is identifying the essence of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009 as cited in Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). In this case, identifying the essence of students' beliefs about poverty.

There is growing support for the use of phenomenological approach in both qualitative research and as a mixed method (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007; Fisher & Stenner, 2011; Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Using phenomenology in mixed methods allows for triangulation or cross validation of data within the study (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Although phenomenology in qualitative research tends to focus on one phenomenon, using it in mixed methods research allows for opportunities to gain additional understanding through more questions that extend from the phenomenon. The current study uses phenomenology to examine students' beliefs about poverty, teaching strategies that are perceived to have influenced their understanding of serving children and families in poverty, and the perceived influence of the early childhood teacher preparation program on teachers' understandings of poverty and feeling prepared to serve children and families experiencing poverty.

Sample

The current study has a sample size of 80 students enrolled at a southeastern university in the last two semesters of their early childhood teacher preparation program. Participants were racially diverse and primarily female (see Table 1). Over 90 percent of

participants plan on teaching in early childhood education programs. Participants ranged

from 21 to 55 years of age with a mean age of 29 years old. Within the early childhood

education teacher preparation program students have two options of concentrations: early

care and education non-licensure and birth through kindergarten with teacher licensure.

More participants were enrolled in the Birth – Kindergarten Licensure program than the

early care and education program. Qualifications for participating in the study were

being at least 18 years of age and enrolled in one of the following courses Final

Professional Internship, and Student Teaching, or Diversity courses. Participants were

enrolled either in the main campus program (face-to-face) program, courses typically

completed in person, or in the online degree completion program. Once students are

eligible for student teaching they take either Final Professional Internship (for early care

and education concentration) or Student Teaching (for birth through kindergarten teacher

licensure concentration). To provide additional context about the experiences of

participants each course is described below.

Final Professional Internship is the student teaching experience for early care and

education concentration students. Students enrolled Final Professional Internship

complete 20 hours per week for fourteen weeks in an early childhood classroom

placement. The student teaching responsibilities are divided into five phases that are

formatted to get increasing more complex and then transition students out of their lead

role. The five phases are: phase I adjustment to the role of student teacher (week 1),

phase II assuming responsibilities (weeks 2 & 3), phase III co-teaching and becoming full

team member (weeks 4 & 5), phase IV full teaching responsibilities such that preservice

teacher is the leader (weeks 6-13), and phase V closure and beyond (i.e., stepping back) (week 14). Students enrolled in the Final Professional Internship course complete an Impact of Student Learning Project designed to help student teachers to demonstrate growth and development of the children in the classroom based on their performance as a student teacher. In addition student teachers are videotaped once throughout the semester and one class period is used to analyze the videos and reflect on teaching strategies and interactions. For face-to-face courses, class meetings are designed as seminars where students actively discuss different topics in relation to their student teaching experiences. Examples of topics include: Observing classroom behavior; Reflective practice, Teaching styles and Supervision; tying assessment to curriculum planning; and Family diversity. Students meet for seminar 12 times over the course of one semester. The online version of Final Professional Internship course has the same assignments, learning topics, and student teaching requirements. However, the Final Professional Internship course online meets synchronously four times via Blackboard Collaborate for two hours as a whole class.

The Student Teaching course, main campus and online follow the same five phases, cover the same topics, and complete the same assignments as described above. In addition to the assignments and description above, the Student Teaching course, face-to-face students complete ten in class reflections based on the weekly topics. Students enrolled in the Student Teaching course must complete more hours in early childhood classrooms and must lead teach for a minimum of 7 consecutive weeks to meet requirements of teacher licensure. In addition, they must also spend full time hours in

their early childhood classroom placement (40 hours per week). The Student Teaching course online has the same hourly requirements of students and assignments with the exception that students will only complete two reflections throughout the semester reflecting on their student teaching experience and course topics. The online course meets four times, for two hours, synchronously via blackboard collaborate as a whole class.

The Issues of Diversity in Inclusive Early Care and Education Settings course, is completed after student teaching and combines both students enrolled in the face-to-face and online programs. This course meets six times for one and a half hours throughout the semester. The Issues of Diversity in Inclusive Early Care and Education Settings course is a writing intensive course described as an in-depth analysis of the issues, challenges and recommended practices related to effectively serving diverse populations of young children (and families) in inclusive early care and education settings. The Issues of Diversity in Inclusive Early Care and Education Settings course is organized into six topical units with lessons within each unit. Examples of lessons covered within these units include: sources and consequences of bias and exclusion, strategies for understanding and incorporating diverse perspectives, and rights and responsibilities related to serving young children and their families in the context of diversity. Reflection papers are competed at the end of each unit as an opportunity for students to reflect on the meaning and application of course content to early childhood education. A major assignment within the course is the In-depth Inquiry Project in which students conduct a family case study and connect it to the research literature in order to deepen

their understanding of a diversity-related issue for young children and their families. The project involves data collection through a parent interview, and observations of the home, the child's early childhood program, and a community setting. The final product is an 8-10 page integrative paper that discusses relevant literature and reflections on findings from the family case study.

Eleven of the eighty participants in addition to completing the online survey they participated in an interview (See Table 2). The interview participants were racially diverse and all female. The interview participants were all female and ranged from 22 to 49 years of age. All interview participants reported planning to teach in early childhood programs after graduation. Six of the interview participants reported having personally experienced poverty.

Procedures

To recruit the sample, I attended each face-to-face course with students eligible to participate and used a script (approved by the IRB) that provided an introduction and description of the study procedures. For online courses, I recorded a video that includes the same information and script from face-to-face courses for the instructor to share with online students. Included in each course's assignments was an online survey about poverty. The online survey was made available to students through a link that was posted on the course website. The IRB-approved protocol involved asking students at the end of the online survey for permission to obtain their responses for use in the current study. After agreeing to consent at the end of the online survey, participants were asked if they would be interested in participating in an interview. Of the 92 students who completed

the survey and were eligible to participate, a total of 80 participants completed the online

survey and consented to participate, yielding a response rate of 82.5 percent. Of the 58

participants who agreed to participate in an interview, 14 participants were randomly

chosen to participate in an interview. A total of 11 participants completed the interview,

a response rate of 78.5 percent. To compensate participants for their time, students who

participated in the survey received a $10 gift card as an incentive. An additional $10 gift

card was provided for participants who also completed the interview. Data collection

occurred over two semesters and data were examined cross-sectionally.

> **Sensitive topic.** It is possible that the topic of poverty may be sensitive to

participants because it could elicit memories, thoughts, and emotions about personal or

observed experiences with poverty. These emotions and memories may cause emotional

or psychological distress. "Coweles (1988) and Sieber and Stanley (1988) define a

sensitive topic as one having the potential to cause physical, emotional or psychological

distress to participants or the researcher" (as cited in Elmir, Shmied, Jackson, & Wilkes,

2011, p. 12). For participants who may have direct experience with poverty discussing

the topic may also bring about discomfort, ambivalence, or distress. Therefore, to

minimize the possibility of additional stress or distress on participants the current study

incorporated sensitivity strategies into data collection, including building rapport,

conducting supportive interviews, and creating comfortable environments. Each of these

are discussed in further detail in the qualitative data collection section.

> **Quantitative data collection.** Online surveys were chosen as the quantitative

data collection method. Multiple strengths have been highlighted with the use of online

surveys such as being cost-effective, reducing operator error, reducing data entry errors, and reducing social desirability (Fox, Murray, & Warm, 2010; Joinson, 1999). For example, Joinson (1999) found that participants demonstrated lower levels of social desirability when responding to online surveys compared to paper-based methods, which is an important consideration in self-reports about beliefs. Specific to the current study, online surveys provided an opportunity for participants to fill out the survey at a time and location that is comfortable for them; having an environment that is comfortable to complete surveys can reduce distress related to a sensitive topic (Elam & Fenton, 2008; Elmir, Shmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011). In addition, completing the surveys online through a secure link reduced the possibility that participants may feel pressure or judgment, as they may from turning in a paper copy to a research associate.

Qualitative data collection. Interviews and focus groups have been touted as the methods of choice for descriptive phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). However, focus groups have the possibility of influencing one another's thoughts such that, one individual speaks and influences the direction of the conversation or the thoughts or opinions of others'. Therefore, the current study used interviews as the primary qualitative data collection method. Individual interviews were chosen because the topic of this research is focused on personal beliefs, individual experiences, and understandings. The phenomenological approach aims to allow participants to define and explain the given phenomenon, in this case, students' beliefs about poverty that are enrolled in an early childhood teacher preparation program. Therefore, an interview guide using open-ended questions was used as a reference for the researcher conducting

the interview. It is important to underscore that interviews were conducted in a conversational tone, a back and forth conversation between the researcher and the participant because it builds rapport (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009; Corbin & Morse, 2003). Using open-ended questions and allowing participants adequate time to respond gave participants the power to respond however they see fit and is a strategy used in research about sensitive topics (Elmir, Shmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011; Patton, 1990). Examples of open-ended questions include: "Why do you think some people are poor and some are not?" and "What do you think prevents people from being able to get out of poverty?"

Aligning with qualitative interview research recommendations, non-controversial questions were asked first to promote ease of answering (Elam & Fenton, 2008; Patton, 1990). Multiple types of open-ended questions were used to gather a greater understanding of the topic including questions about: experiences, behaviors, emotions, knowledge, opinions, values, and basic demographic information (Corbin & Morse, 2003). All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The decision was made to use audio recording instead of video recording because it provides another layer of anonymity and reduced the risk of participants being uncomfortable with their faces showing while discussing a potentially difficult and sensitive topic.

Because of the personal nature of the research inquiry, individual interviews provided an opportunity for me to hear personal beliefs independent of others'. Interviews allow researchers to enter the world and perspective of the participant and enabled me to gather their thoughts and experiences (Patton, 1990). Research that has

47

used interviews with sensitive topics underscores three important ways to have a successful interview including: building rapport, supporting interviewees, and creating a comfortable environment (Elmir, Shmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009).

Building rapport. Building rapport is a strategy used with sensitive topics and is also important to phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). A way to build rapport is sharing bidirectionally between researcher and participant (Elmir, Shmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011). In the current study, I had warm exchanges about neutral topics such as weather, dates of events (upcoming graduation or plans), and follow up to previous statements (i.e., how was your weekend). These warm exchanges communicated to the participants that that I was engaged, caring, and invested in the conversation (interview) (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Elmir, Shmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011). Researchers have suggested that having rapport with participants increases the researcher's access to the participants' *world* such as their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences (Elmir, Shmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011). When participants experience reciprocity with the researcher and begin to share more freely it allows the essence of the phenomenon to emerge through the interview.

Supporting interviewees. In the current study, I provided support to participants during the interview process by acknowledging when an emotional or painful experience or memory is shared by saying statements such as "I appreciate you sharing that experience with me", "thank you for allowing me to listen to your thoughts and feelings about _____", "that sounds difficult, thank you for feeling comfortable enough to speak about it". These statements acknowledged that sharing the experience is appreciated and

that it may not be easy expressing these types of feelings or memories to a researcher (Elam & Fenton, 2003; Patton, 1990). In addition, I provided opportunities for participants to take a break for a few minutes if participants began to get distressed during the interview.

  Comfortable environments. Participants chose the interview format they felt most comfortable using from the following choices: face-to-face meeting, online video chat (e.g., Google Hangout) or via the telephone (Elam & Fenton, 2003; Elmir, Shmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011). These options were offered in an effort to support the participant being in a comfortable environment while participating in the interview. Some participants may desire the visual feedback and human connection of face-to-face interviews such as body language and facial expressions. Online video chat and telephone both provide the participant the opportunity to be in the comfort of their own home, car, public library, or work place. Being in a comfortable environment may reduce the possibility of feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable discussing the topic of poverty (Elam & Fenton, 2003; Elmir, Shmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011). In addition, the telephone interview provided an additional level of privacy. I acknowledge the fact that telephone interviews prevent the ability to note facial expressions as part of data collection however having the participants feel comfortable with discussing a potentially sensitive topic was considered a more important priority. A total of ten interviews were conducted by phone and one interview was conducted by online video chat via *Google Hangout*.

Measures

Multiple measures were used in the current study. The focus of the current study is students' beliefs about poverty, perceived instructional strategies that supported learning and perceived level of preparedness to work with children and families experiencing poverty. The demographics, beliefs about poverty survey, instructional strategy survey, and preparedness survey were all included as one online survey that was completed at the end of the semester.

Demographics. Participant demographics were collected in the online survey. Questions include participants' racial and ethnic background, age, gender, format of program (online or face-to-face) and previous experience in a paid position working with children from birth to five years old. In addition, questions specific to personal experiences with poverty are also included in the demographics such as: "Have you ever in your lifetime experienced poverty?"

Interview guide. The qualitative interview guide consisted of open-ended questions. The interview guide was developed using multiple steps (Patton, 1990). First, I brainstormed about relevant possible open-ended questions. Then, I narrowed down the questions and developed an initial draft of the interview guide. Next, a qualitative methods specialist as well as two additional researchers reviewed the draft. Edits were made based on their feedback. Then a draft of the interview guide was piloted with 7 undergraduate students and another round of edits were completed. Example questions from the final interview guide include: "How has the teacher preparation program prepared you to be a teacher?" "Describe a time in a practicum or student teaching where

50

you learned about a child's family or a child's neighborhood or community." And "Why do you think some people are poor and some are not?" Given these were semi-structured interviews, not all questions were asked in every interview.

Beliefs about poverty survey. After reviewing literature and existing assessments about poverty, two measures -- the Macrothink Institute Poverty Survey (Cox, Watts, & Horton, 2012) and The National Public Radio/Kaiser/Kennedy School Survey about Poverty in America (Kaiser Family Foundation & the Kennedy School of Government, 2001) -- were adapted (with permission from the authors) and combined to create the Beliefs about Poverty Scale. Participants were instructed at the beginning of the section to answer questions with responses that best represent their own opinion. The survey includes questions about beliefs about people in poverty, why people are poor, participants' experiences with poverty, ethnic and age groups that participants associate with poverty, causes of poverty, and income levels that are considered poverty. The survey consisted of 38 questions/statements including likert scale questions and multiple choice. To assess participants' beliefs about people in poverty and the experiences of people who are poor, likert scale items ask about the participants' level of agreement (1= *strongly disagree,* 2= *disagree,* 3= *undecided,* 4= *agree,* 5= *strongly agree)* with fourteen statements. Examples include "most people who are poor work multiple jobs but do not earn enough money to make ends meet." and "If people on welfare managed their money better, they would not be poor". The fourteen items regarding general beliefs about poverty had acceptable reliability α = .74.

51

A confirmatory factor analysis was computed to determine if there were two subscales within the general beliefs about poverty scale; subsequently two factors were confirmed. The first subscale contains nine items and captures individualistic (i.e., with-in person) beliefs about poverty. Examples of items in this factor include: "people become poor by making bad choices and/or having an immoral lifestyle", "most people are poor because they do not want to work", and "if people on welfare managed their money better, they would not be poor". The individualistic beliefs about poverty subscale had acceptable reliability $\alpha = .84$. The second subscale contains five items and captures systemic or structural poverty beliefs and includes items such as: "many people who are poor work multiple jobs but do not earn enough money to make ends meet" and "a major cause of poverty in the United States is that policies and institutions favor the rich". The second subscale did not have acceptable reliability $\alpha = .53$. The current study describes the findings from this measure at item level. A composite score of the nine items in the individualistic subscale was used to test whether individualistic beliefs about poverty vary by students' class format, course, and personal experiences with poverty.

To assess what are the causes of poverty, eight statements ask the extent to which the statement is a *major cause of poverty, minor cause of poverty* or *not a cause of poverty*. Example items include: drug abuse, having multiple part time jobs, public schools, and lack of motivation. The eight items about the causes of poverty did not have acceptable reliability $\alpha = .47$. Eight multiple choice questions ask about characteristics of people in poverty such as race, gender, type of person, and word associations of

descriptions of people in poverty "when I think of people who are poor I think about" response choices: income, behavior/social relations, morals, intelligence, and knowledge. To assess participants' individual experiences with poverty, three multiple-choice questions ask about encounters with people in poverty (i.e., age, location, and duration of encounter with people experiencing poverty) and four multiple-choice questions about participants' economic situation. Examples of multiple-choice statements include "When I think of poor, the ethnicity that I picture is: (select one):" with response choices of "Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians" and "My sources of information about people in poverty have been:" with response choices of "parents/family, personal experiences, early childhood education program, preachers, and media". Two questions address participants' opinion on the threshold of poverty based on income such as "Select the income level you think makes a family of two parents and two children poor" with 11 response options starting at $10,000 dollars, the middle response being $40,000 dollars and the highest response $100, 000 and above. All items were first examined individually for means, range, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. The open-ended question for students to define poverty in their own words was added to the Spring 2015 survey. Only responses from Spring 2015 participants were included in the analysis of the open-ended response. Fifty-seven students or 72.5 percent of participants defined poverty in their own words and one participant left it blank.

Instructional strategy survey. The instructional strategy survey was adapted from Hallam, Buell, and Ridgley (2003) and Hallam, Ridgley, and Buell (2003). The current study adapted the format and wording to be used with students. In addition to the

53

statements/topics that Hallam and colleagues included, other general content areas were included in the survey (Maynard, King, La Paro, and Johnson, under review). The survey consists of 52 statements regarding content and topics that participants may have learned in their early childhood teacher preparation programs in general about early childhood education and specific topics that Hallam et al., (2003) suggest are areas needed to work with children and families in poverty. The decision to use specific instructional strategies was based on findings from Hallam, Buell, and Ridgley's (2003) national study of early childhood teacher preparation programs. In their study, the majority of instructional strategies used to teach about topics related to poverty, as reported by program contact person, were readings, lectures, problem based-learning (i.e., class discussions), and field based experiences. Item examples include: "effects of low parent education levels on child development", "impact of chronic hunger on child development", "how to identify and access social services for families and children", and "assess family strengths and needs of families experiencing poverty". Participants were asked to indicate which instructional strategy (*lecture, assigned readings, class discussion,* or *field-based experiences*) was most influential in their learning of each topic. The whole measure had acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .96$). The current study discusses item level descriptives for the subset topics (26 items) that are specific to serving children and families in poverty ($\alpha = .92$). In addition, other descriptive data such as percentage of participants who indicated a specific instructional strategy as most influential are described.

Preparedness survey. This survey was designed to measure the level of preparedness that students report in the topic areas that Hallam et al., (2003) recommend

54

are needed to support children and families experiencing poverty. Participants were

asked to indicate "how prepared you are as a teacher in the following areas". Thirty-eight

items that have specific skills are listed including: teacher-child interactions, behavior

guidance, reflecting on own teaching skills, provide family support, identify and access

resources, and communicate with families about sensitive topics. A five-point likert scale

is provided for each item from 1= *not at all*, 3= *somewhat,* and 5= *very* prepared as a

teacher. The whole preparedness measure had acceptable reliability of $\alpha = .91$. An

exploratory factor analysis was conducted on all 38 items and nine factors were

identified. However, none of the factors made sense conceptually. It is possible that a

larger sample size with increased power is needed to identify factors given the amount of

items within the measure. The current study uses a subset of 21 items that are specific to

being prepared to serve children and families experiencing poverty ($\alpha = .85$). These

items are similar to the items used in Hallam et al., (2003) and include addressing child

health and illness, assessing family strengths who are experiencing poverty, and

knowledge of contextual factors affecting parents/caregivers.

Data Analyses Plan

Prior to discussing each research question and how I use mixed methods to

answer the research question I describe the initial process of quantitative and qualitative

data analysis.

Quantitative data analysis. The aim of phenomenology is to describe (Creswell,

2013; Fisher & Stenner, 2011). Therefore, descriptive statistics were analyzed to

describe students. Item-level frequencies, means, standard deviations, ranges, skewness,

and kurtosis were calculated for the following surveys: Beliefs about Poverty, Causes of poverty, Instructional Strategies, and Preparedness. Instructional strategies and preparedness descriptives were computed for the subset of items that were specific to serving children and families experiencing poverty.

Bracketing. Phenomenology requires the researcher to set aside their own beliefs, understandings, and preconceived notions about the phenomenon in order to truly get the essence of the experience of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Gearing, 2004). I used bracketing to address my personal preconceived notions and beliefs about poverty. During the bracketing I took time to think about, identify, and document my personal values, judgments, personal experiences, and connections with the topic of poverty. Although it is impossible to completely bracket out my own bias, the exercise of writing down and re-reading the statements prior to conducting interviews provided greater translucence in the research process (Gearing, 2004). In addition to bracketing at the beginning of the research study, I took notes after interviews that addressed my reflections and thoughts about the interview, including emotions, reactions to comments, and thoughts about possible common themes that I thought might be emerging through the interviews. This on-going process helped me decompress and minimize the possibility of interviewer burnout and distress related to empathizing with emotional responses of participants (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2009).

Qualitative data analysis. Analysis of interviews followed steps suggested for descriptive phenomenology (Colaizzi, 1978; Martins, 2008). Prior to analysis, all audio recordings of interviews were transcribed by me and uploaded to the qualitative analysis

56

software Atlas ti. The steps I used included: reading all transcriptions, extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, developing themes, creating an exhaustive list of themes with descriptions, incorporating exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon, and validating the current findings with participants (Colaizzi, 1978). The sequence and detail of the steps allowed me to review broadly the phenomenon while also going through each interview carefully to uncover common themes that together describe the essence of the phenomenon, students' beliefs about poverty. One additional research associate analyzed the transcriptions in a separate file to ensure that my researcher bias was not influencing themes and interpretations. In addition, this helped uncover additional significant statements and themes that could have been missed if only one researcher reviewed and analyzed the data.

The first step of the analysis involved listening to the recorded interviews and reading through the transcriptions to get a general sense of the information. This step is important because it allowed me to focus on what was being said by the participants without drawing conclusions. Next, I read through the transcriptions again separately "extracting significant statements", phrases that discuss the phenomenon, beliefs about poverty (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 2013). This process is called horizonalization (Creswell, 2013). In addition to identifying significant statement regarding beliefs about poverty, significant statements regarding teacher preparation and experiences with children and families were highlighted. The significant statements were highlighted and tagged in Atlas.ti. As I began to identify significant statements I documented why I felt the statement was significant by attaching a comment onto the significant quote. In

addition, a research associate read through three transcriptions (37%) and documented

significant statements and possible themes. Then we met and discussed significant

statements and emerging themes. Then, as a team, we developed codes.

In the third step, the interviews were coded. The codes were directly related to

the significant statements (Colaizzi, 1978). Coding of the data and the development of

new codes was ongoing as each interview transcript was read and coded. As new quotes

were noted as significant statements, more codes were developed and added to the

codebook. In addition, the definition of the codes and what was considered to be

included in each code changed over the course of analysis as more interviews were

reviewed. The process of coding helped me identify shared experiences of the

participants and was a way to keep track of the significant statements. The research

associate coded an additional three transcriptions.

Fourth, the meanings of significant statements were developed (Colaizzi,

1978). This step was done cautiously making sure that the meaning accurately reflects

what was actually said by referring back to the original transcriptions (Creswell,

2013). Both researchers documented the meaning that we each felt the significant

statement has and then we compared our definitions. Each meaning of significant

statements was discussed until we were both in agreement on the meaning. We met twice

to discuss the meaning and identification of significant statements and codes.

Throughout the analysis, I referred back to the original transcripts to insure no significant

statements were missed.

After formulating the meanings of the significant statements, the fifth step was aggregating the significant statements into themes (Colaizzi, 1978). Theme development was a fluid back and forth process frequently referring back to the original transcripts, significant statements, codes and meanings to insure they are validated. When developing themes it was helpful to view codes across interviews in Atlas.ti to understand what code or group of codes may be aggregated into a theme. Edits to the themes were done throughout the process to insure accuracy. I discussed emerging themes and meanings with the research associate throughout step five.

The final step in the qualitative analysis for the current study was a measure of validation for the themes by comparing against original transcriptions (Colaizzi, 1978). When comparing the themes to the transcriptions it was important for me to ask "is there anything unaccounted for in the original transcription that is not reflected in a theme" if so then was important to explore if additional themes need to be added or if the unaccounted for statements fit into an already existing theme. During this step I developed an exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978). Colaizzi (1978) recommends that the exhaustive description should be then given back to participants for them to express whether the description is an accurate interpretation. I deviated slightly from Colaizzi (1978) final step. Instead of using an exhaustive description in paragraph form to validate with participants, I used a list of identified themes with detailed descriptions of each theme. I made this decision to make it easier and require less time for participants to review. This still provided feedback and validation from participants without putting additional stress on the participants. I sent

emails with the theme and descriptions to all 11 participants on two different occasions. One participant responded and felt the themes accurately captured their views.

Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Data to answer the Research Questions

There are multiple ways that qualitative and quantitative perspectives can be used to answer research questions (Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird & McCormick, 1992). To answer the research questions of the current study, I focus on one mixed method approach. I used qualitative and quantitative results equally in the findings. For research question one, I discuss the themes and then the quantitative results. For research question two, I discuss the quantitative results and then the qualitative results. Below is the analysis plan for each research question.

Data Analyses Plan

The current study is organized around two research questions. Each research question was examined using separate analyses as described below.

To examine research question one regarding students' beliefs about poverty, qualitative and quantitative analysis were used. I first examined qualitative data and then examined quantitative data (Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird, & McCormick, 1992). The qualitative interviews provided participants the ability to freely express their thoughts and beliefs and are the primary focus for answering research question one. In addition, qualitative data provides information about common themes found in interviews related to beliefs about poverty but also provides depth about the nuances of responses, how words were used and specific statements. An exhaustive description of students' beliefs about poverty is included in the answer for research question one. Descriptive

frequency statistics at the item level and for the sub-set of questions from the Beliefs about Poverty Survey were explored. The results from the quantitative analyses were used to build upon the qualitative responses. The quantitative data was used to triangulate or show juxtaposition of the findings of the qualitative work (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). That is, the quantitative data can help corroborate the findings in the qualitative data or identify differences in findings.

To address the second half of research question one regarding whether students' within-person beliefs about poverty vary quantitative methods were used. Students' beliefs about poverty were measured using an aggregate score of the fourteen poverty statements (α= .74). Two independent sample t-tests and one ANOVA were computed. To determine whether there are differences with students' own experiences with poverty an independent samples t-test was computed. Participants were asked whether they have experienced poverty in their lifetime. The second t-test used the same measure of beliefs about poverty and a dichotomous variable of program type: face-to-face or online. Finally, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed to test where beliefs about poverty vary by the course participants are enrolled. The ANOVA contains three groups: final student internship, student teaching, and diversity course. Qualitative data was used where applicable to provide additional depth and understanding about the quantitative finding.

To answer research question two, how prepared do students feel from their teacher preparation program used both quantitative and qualitative data. To fully answer this research question I first explored what types of instructional strategies students

perceived as influencing their learning. Item frequency for the instructional strategy

survey was examined to determine what instructional strategy participants reported as the

least often and most often influential for learning of the specific topic. Items related to

serving children and families in poverty are discussed in terms of perceived strategies for

learning about the topics.

Next, quantitative data from the preparedness survey was examined. Descriptive

statistics such as item level frequencies, means, standard deviation, and range are

discussed. In addition to the preparedness survey, qualitative data was used to identify

themes related to preparedness to serve children and families experiencing poverty.

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS

Preliminary Descriptive Results

Multiple measures in the current study were adapted for use with students.

Therefore, it was important to examine the psychometric properties (mean, standard

deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and range) of items to determine if they were reliable and

appropriate to use with students. Psychometrics for the variables of interest were

examined including: beliefs about poverty (See Table 3), perceptions of instructional

strategies that influenced learning about serving children and families in poverty (Table

4), and perceived preparedness to serve children and families in poverty (Table 5). All

items for beliefs about poverty scale exhibited acceptable ranges, skewness, and kurtosis

indicating this measure was appropriate to be used with students. One item on the

instructional strategies scale "communicating effectively with children" is slightly

skewed and kurtotic, however, I decided to keep the item because it would not

significantly improve reliability if it were dropped and appropriate range, means, and

standard deviations were adequate for the individual item. Although the range is limited

for many of the preparedness items, reliability, item-level means, standard deviations,

skewness, and kurtosis were acceptable indicating the measure is still appropriate to use

with students.

Research Question 1

To address the first research question, qualitative data and quantitative data are used to describe students' beliefs about poverty. Prior to the discussion of themes regarding beliefs about poverty, I describe participants' experiences with people in poverty and their own experiences with poverty. Then, I discuss the themes that emerged from the qualitative data. Finally, I discuss the quantitative results. Two qualitative data sources were used: open-ended responses, from the online survey that asked participants "In your own words please define poverty" and eleven transcribed interviews. Multiple themes were identified throughout the survey responses and interviews related to students' beliefs about poverty. The themes are discussed in two overarching areas: beliefs about what "poverty" means and beliefs about the causes and perpetuation of poverty.

Experiences with people in poverty. Generally, students reported their first encounter with people in poverty occurred when they were young children (52.5%) and youths (35%). However, a small portion of participants reported their first experience was as an adult (12.5%). In addition, participants indicated that work/school (51.2%) is where encounters with people in poverty have been; and public spaces (37.5%) was the second most common place for encounters. The duration of encounters with people in poverty were mixed with 55 percent of students reporting them as being brief and 45 percent reporting encounters for extended lengths of time.

Participants personal experiences with poverty. The online survey asked students if they had ever experienced poverty. If they responded yes then a follow up

question prompted participants to check all developmental periods in which they experienced poverty. Approximately, 44 percent of participants reported having experienced poverty in their lifetime. Of the 44 percent of participants who experienced poverty, 30 percent experienced poverty in childhood, 17.5 percent in adolescence, and 16 percent during adulthood (18 years or older). During some of the interviews participants shared their own experiences with poverty; while other participants explicitly said they had never experienced poverty themselves. Many of the participants discussed specific life experiences of struggling with poverty. Students who expressed never experiencing poverty often mentioned it and then included a comment that emphasized a sense of gratitude that they never had experience poverty while several mentioned their connections with poverty such as knowing a neighbor or school mate that was experiencing poverty. For instance, Christa described the transition from not being poor to living in poverty

> …Dad was diagnosed with clinical depression and anxiety and he actually ended up in the mental hospital and while he was there uhh my mom got laid off of her job [breath] and my other brother—my older brother was also in the hospital with kidney failure. [I: that's a lot] So by this point there wasn't any income coming in uhm my parents you know we lost our house we moved in with my sister…

She continued to describe the moment that she realized she was living in poverty:

> …I remember one night that my Mom comes over and we're going to make dinner and the only thing in the pantry was spaghetti noodles and tomato paste and so we put some water with the tomato paste and we had spaghetti with tomato paste uhm [I: uhm hum]. And that's when I realized you know there are six of us living in a two bedroom house—apartment that's not even our apartment we can't even afford to buy food uhm my Mom doesn't have a job you know and at that point too I was also fourteen/fifteen years old so to me it was like the end of the world…

Similarly, Jane shared

> …we were always poor growing up—my family and I could never understand why because my Mom was the hardest worker I ever knew. I mean she worked three jobs all the time and was always working and we never just spent it on crazy stuff we spent it on the necessities but yet somehow we never managed to you know get out of poverty.

These specific examples illustrate their understanding and experiences living in poverty and provide context into their beliefs about poverty. In addition to specific examples, some participants directly connected their beliefs about poverty to their own experiences with poverty. Michelle explained that she watched family members experiencing poverty mishandle money and spend it on non-essential items such as televisions and new clothes. She continued by explaining that one reason for people being is poverty is a lack of mindset about saving money and that people who are wealthy handle their money more carefully.

Sherry expressed her beliefs that some people are in poverty because of life circumstances out of their control and then shared that others remain in poverty for other reasons.

> …I think some of it too is an excuse because my mother had me when she was 16 and we were homeless and we lived in shelters and she worked her way on up and by the time I was 9 she was a physical therapist and even before then she had made her way in to getting me into Catholic school and I didn't have to go to public school until I was 9 and that was because we moved. So I think it depends on the parent and their determination to not live the same way they were brought up.

Sherry's beliefs that people in poverty needing determination are supported by her own experiences of her mother moving out of poverty through her persistence and hard work. Of the participants who shared their own experiences with poverty, two participants shared that their family's still experience poverty and they were trying to be the first in their families to break the "cycle of poverty".

Several participants expressed that they had not experienced poverty directly such as Anne who expressed that some students at her elementary school received reduced lunch but she didn't know any of them personally. Stephanie expressed the possibility of the invisibility of poverty; "If we were in poverty I didn't see it. We always had snacks and sweets or whatever in the cabinet whenever we wanted to and a good meal every night". Others participants expressed in the interview a sense of privilege, being "fortunate", and "blessed" enough to never have experienced poverty.

Beliefs about what poverty means. Students defined poverty through an open-ended response question on the online survey. Three themes emerged out of their

67

responses in how they defined poverty. One, that poverty is the lack of money. Of the 57 definitions of poverty, income was mentioned over 36 times. It was apparent that low income was a major way that these students defined poverty. Students included statements such as "having little money" and "does not have enough money to sufficiently support themselves or their family".

A second theme that emerged in defining poverty was the lack of having basic living needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. Responses from students included "to be in a state of having little to no resources, food, money, or support of any kind" and "needing assistance for water food and/or shelter". In some instances income and basic living necessities were used together to define poverty. For example, a student said, "not having enough income or resources to provide daily necessities along with additional life situations (i.e., being able to afford car insurance, health insurance, and have groceries, clothes, and a place to live)". And another student defined poverty as "not having enough money to pay bills, keep adequate food on the table, and/or meet basic needs."

In contrast to those students who defined poverty as being related to low income and lack of resources, some students defined poverty using a deficit perspective. For instance, a student defined poverty as "families and children living on a fixed income and not having the opportunities to better themselves".

Within the interviews two themes emerged related to beliefs about what poverty means including the diversity within poverty and labeling families. Diversity within poverty includes students discussing that poverty can vary by how long people experience poverty and the age at which they experience poverty. In addition, some

68

students mentioned that what is considered poverty can vary by location for instance poverty in the United States looks much different than poverty in a third world country. Anne explains temporary poverty "Well I guess it's more at this age that my college age friends say, "oh I'm so poor I can't afford" but you know they are just referring to that because you know they're paying for their college".

Tiffany explains the variation in poverty:

> …Even poverty in the United States because I can't really describe poverty here as opposed to a third world country because of all the things and assistances that we have here…you know poverty doesn't necessarily have…the face of somebody like, you know, living on the streets. A person can still be living in a house and still be in poverty because of the economic climate that we live in now a days.

Although participants were asked to think specifically about poverty in the United States, it seemed important to them to acknowledge variation in poverty. This included awareness of homelessness, food deserts, and situational poverty such as losing a job or a family member getting sick.

In addition to the diversity within poverty, participants used different labels when referring to people, families, and children. Students used a variety of terms to acknowledge individual and family variations in poverty. Some students used the term "poor people" while others used person first language "people in poverty". When discussing poverty students did not discuss the middle class but only poverty and wealth. These labels are important in considering participants' beliefs about what poverty means. Anne describes "privileged families" or "impoverished families" while Jane states "there

are those families who are just wealthy…and some families are poverty stricken".
Quashandea describes "…you know people to be poor….some families have more
resources". Throughout the interviews when providing descriptions and explanations of
poverty students juxtaposed people in poverty with people who are wealthy.

Beliefs about causes and perpetuation of poverty. The second overarching area
entails themes related to beliefs about the causes, and beliefs about what makes poverty
continue. Multiple themes emerged from the interviews about what causes and
perpetuates poverty. Throughout the interviews participants often explained their beliefs
using hypothetical scenarios such as job loss, being a single parent, or being born into
poverty to explain why some people experience poverty. Another way participants
explained beliefs about poverty included using their own personal experiences with
poverty to explain their beliefs. The themes include: systemic reasons, within person
reasons, the role of "luck", and the intersection of race and poverty. Below, each theme
is described in detail with examples.

Systemic and within-person reasons. Two broad types of perspectives that were
used by students to explain poverty are systemic (societal level reasons) and within-
person (individual level reasons). A few students described one or the other as the reason
for poverty but the majority of students expressed both systemic and within-person
reasons for poverty. Because most students talked about both systemic and within-person
reasons for poverty they are discussed in the current study as one set of themes. Within
the systemic reasons for poverty theme, participants acknowledged both the societal and
cyclical nature of poverty. Specific topics discussed throughout the interviews that

70

related to systemic reasons for poverty included: employment (low wages and loss of job), education, opportunity gap, knowledge about resources, the cycle of poverty, and the stressful nature of day-to-day life in poverty. Sherry explains, "I think some of that [reason for poverty] is just life that happens—the economy and then I think some of it [being poor] too is an excuse". Sherry notes the broader context of our economy as a reason for poverty as well as people using poverty as an excuse to not do anything. Marie "I guess one reason is that it could be a cycle." She continues by explaining in more detail "your mom grew up in poverty, your dad grew up in poverty so yes it's not the best thing but that's just what you are used too". Marie and other participants acknowledged the cyclical nature of poverty. That is, when children are born into poverty they are more likely to remain in poverty.

> Sherry: No they [people] don't have the same opportunities to succeed because the way society has curbed a lot things. I feel a lot of people do not realize that if they keep putting themselves out there that they may get a couple of noes but then they will finally get that yes that they need to do whatever they need to do.

Tiffany believes that poverty can be caused by circumstances out of individuals' control. In addition, she emphasizes that it is not within person characteristics that are the reasons people are in poverty. Tiffany explained "I think some people are poor simply because they have uhm fallen on hard times—not because they are uneducated, not because they haven't tried and not because they are lazy".

It is important to underscore that often participants expressed multiple reasons for the causes and perpetuation of poverty such as both systemic and within person reasons

71

for poverty. Participants acknowledged that sometimes they had conflicting views regarding the causes of poverty. For example, Melissa stated, "it's kind of hard though because I have lots of conflicting views". In contrast to systemic level reasons for poverty, individual characteristics, and in some instances the lack of certain characteristics were described as causes of poverty and/or reasons for why some people are poor. For instance, Anne first explains that poverty happens because of a "string of events" however when discussing the causes of poverty in more detail she explains "I do believe that it's choices that the people are making that can push them more into poverty or at least be on that borderline and be impoverished". This statement implies that individuals have choices that may or may not lead into poverty. Christa also shares a similar sentiment:

> they [people in poverty] are crawling their way out of that…hole, and then something happens you know a kid gets sick, a parent gets sick, you know, and they're having to now pay medical bills. So I mostly think it's a situational thing that something happens and they just have to figure out of it uhm but I do sometimes think there are some choices that some people make that get them in that situation too…

Similarly, Stephanie explains, "I can give two reasons why I think some people are poor. I can say some people go through hardships hard times …and then I could also say that there are some people that just doesn't want to work."

Although Quashandea makes it clear that she believes not everyone has the same opportunities in life; she also describes some individual characteristics that some people have or are lacking "some people don't have that opportunity or don't have that extra

72

motivation and may not have the support system to help them be more motivated and more driven". She acknowledges both as systemic reasons for poverty such as lack of opportunity, while also expressing within-person beliefs about motivation that is needed to get out of poverty.

   Role of "luck". Another theme that emerged was the role of "luck" in being in poverty or getting out of poverty. Some participants literally used the term luck while others suggested randomness to whether a given person experiences poverty or not. Anne believes "…people are in scenarios where they can get out of it [poverty] very easily maybe someone gave them money and then just all the stars aligned and just got really lucky". Similarly, after Jane shared her own family struggling with poverty she explains

> … I almost feel like it's just sort of luck sometimes because I feel like there are some people who work really, really, really, really, really hard and just like never can break poverty and then there are those families who are just wealthy and I don't know I think it's really hard and really sad I as a teacher I guess it has affected even more than it ever did before

Tiffany simply states "more often than not it's the luck of the draw" believing that experiencing poverty happens by chance. Based on participants discussion of luck, it seems to indicate that they believe that getting out of—or remaining in poverty may happen from one random positive event or opportunity occurring or not.

   Intersection of race and poverty. The majority of students who participated in the qualitative interviews believe that racial inequity influences the opportunity gap for people experiencing poverty. These students explicitly discussed race and poverty such

73

as a "race barrier" for availability of opportunities, and the existence of white privilege. Some participants described white privilege implicitly through specific examples such as Christa

> Sadly I do think there is still a race barrier. I still feel like as being a white female I mean I have a better opportunity to be able to get a better paying job or a White male but at the same time if I don't try to find that better job then I'm not going to get that better job and if a Black female trying to find that job you know she's going to find it but I do still feel there is a race barrier that sometimes people do choose White over Black or Black over Hispanic or Hispanic over Black you know different things like that that I do still feel there is a side effect still of the race barrier.

Others explicitly defined and explained white privilege. Some participants acknowledge racial inequality and either before or after the statement acknowledge exceptions to the rule or oppositional beliefs. For example, Melissa believes' "unfortunately I don't like to say…this but I do think that in uhm most cases Caucasian people do have more [opportunity]. But I don't think it's always true." Marie first states that everyone in the United States is born equal and then pauses and explains

> …but at the same time I feel it's not really equal because there are certain groups of people who do have more of an advantage. So for an example in terms of race there is such a think as you know let's say like White privilege so I feel like if…you're going to work on certain things just the fact that you have White skin you know you're going to have that advantage. That doesn't mean that a person that has black skin or another ethnicity that doesn't mean they won't be able to do the same thing that a White person does but their—I feel like they'll [People of Color] have to work a little bit harder.

As shown above, there is clear recognition of racial inequity within the opportunity gap, however, participants also describe that by working harder People of Color can obtain the same opportunities as people who are White. Although many students did discuss race and poverty some students did not mention racial barriers in relation to poverty. In some cases, several students explicitly stated that they believe everyone has the same opportunities to get out of poverty.

Quantitative results. Quantitative results are described using three key areas within beliefs about poverty including: general beliefs about poverty, beliefs about the causes of poverty, and beliefs about people who are experiencing poverty.

Overall, most participants (90%) reported that poverty is a big problem in our society today. When asked "Which is the bigger cause of poverty today?", 66.3 percent of participants responded that both a) "people are not doing enough to help themselves out of poverty" and b) "circumstances beyond their control cause them to be poor" were true. Twenty percent reported that the bigger cause of poverty is "circumstances beyond their control", and the remaining 13.7 percent felt that individuals were not doing enough. Table 3 presents means scores on the Beliefs about Poverty measure. On average, participants disagreed that there is open opportunity to succeed, people are poor because of making bad choices or immoral life style, most people are poor because they do not work, people who are on welfare are not poor anymore, and if people on welfare managed their money better, they would not be poor (see Table 3). In addition, 87.5 percent of participants selected $40,000 or less "makes a family of two parents and two children poor"; 13.5 percent of participants selected between $50,000-$80,000.

Participants completed eight items that asked whether specific topics (e.g., drug abuse, low wages) are major, minor, or not at all—causes of poverty (See Table 6). Results suggest that participants believe both within person and systemic reasons are causes of poverty. The following within person causes of poverty were endorsed by more than 80 percent of participants: drug abuse, lacking motivation, and having too many single parent families. In addition, a decline in moral values was also identified as causing poverty by 76 percent of participants. The majority of participants, over 90 percent, identified being paid a low wage and a shortage of jobs as being a major cause of poverty. Alternatively, 55 percent of participants reported having multiple part time jobs was not a cause of poverty. Additionally, 74 percent of participants indicated that public schools were not a cause of poverty.

In the beliefs about poverty measure, on average participants disagreed that "most people on welfare are African American"; however when asked what ethnicity/race they picture when thinking about poverty the majority of participants responded Black (56.3%) and Hispanic (23.8%); this question had the lowest n of the survey, with only 75 participants responding to the question. Participants reported that the group they picture most experiencing poverty are women (37.5%), children (43.8%), and men (17.5%). When defining poverty, participants reported that when they think of people in poverty they associate it with income (88.8%), behavior/social relations (7.5%), intelligence/abilities (1.3%) and knowledge (1.3%). Participants' sources of information about people in poverty varied, 42.5 percent identified personal experiences, 28.7 percent early childhood education program, 15 percent media, and 13.8 percent parents/family.

Variation in beliefs about poverty. To test whether students' reported beliefs about general poverty vary by individualistic beliefs about poverty, two t-tests and one ANOVA were computed using the composite score for individualistic beliefs about poverty subscale (9-item scale). The first t-test examined whether beliefs about poverty varied by format of the course, face-to-face or online, and was not significant (t = .374, p = .71). The second t-test to determine if beliefs about poverty vary by having personally experienced poverty was near trend level (t = 1.606, p = .11). Specifically, students who reported having never personally experienced poverty had statistically higher agreement with individualistic beliefs about poverty.

An ANOVA was conducted to identify whether students' reported beliefs about poverty vary by the course enrolled (Final Internship, Student Teaching, or Diversity course) suggests that there is no statistically significant difference between the three groups ($F_{(2,77)}$ = 0.6, p = .94). It is noteworthy that the sample sizes for the three course groups were not equal and may have impacted the non-significant finding (number of participants from each course: Final Internship 16, Student Teaching 18, and Diversity course 46).

Research Question 2

To address research question two, qualitative data and quantitative data are used to describe students' perceived preparedness to serve children and families in poverty, and which instructional strategies most supported their learning in this area. First, I discuss the quantitative data results and then the qualitative themes that emerged from the qualitative data. The quantitative data provide a foundational understanding of

77

preparedness while the qualitative themes provide detail related to students' perceptions of responsibility and important topics for teachers when serving children and families experiencing poverty.

Perceived influence of instructional strategies. Participants completed a survey about which instructional strategy (lecture, assigned readings, class discussions, and field-based experiences) most influenced their learning about specific topics. Twenty-six of the items focused on serving children and families in poverty (see Table 7). When examining across the 26 items, the most influential instructional strategy was split between class discussions, assigned readings, and field-based experiences, each having eight topic areas with highest perceived influence on learning. Lecture was perceived as the instructional strategies where students learned the most for only one item, ecological and family systems theory. Generally, participants did not all report one instructional strategy to be most influential in their learning in all topics. That is, for each topic, participants had different views of which instructional strategy was most influential in their learning. For instance, for the topic of "effects of limited resources on parenting practices", all the instructional strategies (assigned readings, lectures, class discussions, and field based experiences) had a similar percentage of participants who felt each strategy was influential in their learning. However, a few topic areas that had substantial variation in types of responses such as child health and illness, and assessment of strengths and needs for families experiencing poverty. In addition, one topic area, amount of community resources on child development, had two instructional strategies that were perceived as most influential in learning specifically lecture and class

78

discussions. In addition, class discussions and field based experiences were instructional

strategies were perceived to have high influence on learning for topics including:

empathize with what it is like to manage a family without significant or adequate

resources, how to identify and access social services for families and children, and

teaching children about culture. Several topic areas had a much higher percentage of

participants rate field-based experiences as most influential; these topics included

communicate effectively with adults and children, supporting family problem solving,

and family support.

Perceived preparedness to serve children and families in poverty. The

Preparedness to serve children and families survey had 21 items that were specific to

serving children and families in poverty. Participants could choose from the following

likert scale options: 1 being not at all prepared, 2, 3 being somewhat prepared, 4, 5 being

very prepared. On average, students perceived they were prepared in general to serve

children and families in poverty (M= 4.21, SD= .41) (Table 5). More specifically,

participants felt prepared for interactions with families, supporting family involvement,

and communicating with families about children's development; with no one reporting

being less than somewhat prepared (See Table 8). Although students felt prepared on

average, a few participants reported not being prepared at all in some areas including:

knowledge of contextual factors affecting parents/caregivers, impact of community

violence on adult development, and applying family support strategies to engage hard-to-

reach individuals.

Some participants reported they were less prepared to communicate with families about sensitive topics and the impact of community violence on adult development, and strategies to support children who are hungry.

Qualitative results. In addition to the quantitative data about preparedness to serve children and families in poverty, several themes emerged from the qualitative interviews including: the impact of field experiences, importance of family, differences between teacher preparation or personal upbringing and classroom experiences, awareness of possible experiences in poverty, teachers' responsibilities to help with basic needs, and teaching with empathy related to children's contexts.

The impact of field experiences. Field experiences emerged as an influential part of the learning process specific to serving children and families who are experiencing poverty. Students discussed that having multiple field experiences was important and provided different perspectives about teaching. Stephanie explains that field experiences have helped prepare her to be a teacher "I have done over four field experiences and three different classroom settings so that's a big help." Melissa also shared a similar sentiment that her student teaching in a Head Start program was "very eye opening to know that background" of a particular child. Several other participants also discussed the impact on their development as a teacher through their field experiences, some of which were in classrooms with children experiencing low income and poverty.

Importance of family. Threaded throughout the qualitative themes is an emphasis on building trusting relationships with families of the young children in the classroom,

such as Jane underscoring the importance of the trusting close relationship that her

cooperating teacher had with the families of the children in his classroom.

Tiffany echoes a similar belief about families:

> …once you are able to build those relationships with those families you can be
> that advocate for that family that does live in poverty once you find those things
> out and uhm it's one of those things that you have to sort of kind of it's uhm
> walking a fine line and I have to quote… one of my other professors and she's
> like "uhm you know…it's about finding a balance between understanding and
> then finding what works" so you have to be able to understand the family—
> understand their needs, know where they are coming from and then find out what
> works for that family.

Participants discussed how their teacher preparation program emphasized the importance

of understanding families in early childhood education. Some participants expressed a

sense of preparedness to build relationships with families while others voiced their

uncertainty in being confident interacting with families. For instance, Quashandea

explains how working with children and families with special needs in her teacher

preparation program has helped her gain knowledge about working with families, "it's

helped me develop even greater rapport with my families [the families of children at her

job] it's helped me have a better understanding of what some of my families may be

going through". In contrast, Sherry expresses "I'm still a little hesitant with

some…parent interaction like family interactions".

Awareness of possible experiences in poverty. Participants often acknowledged

possible experiences that children may have who are experiencing poverty such as

hunger/food shortage, homelessness, lack of adequate clothing, higher chance of

81

witnessing violence, and lack of healthy hygiene. For instance, Anne explains "children

could be very hungry and not getting the proper nutrition, they could be tired…it is very

important for a teacher to remember that could affect their behavior in school…". Anne

is taking the context into account when thinking about children's behavior. Quashandea

and Melissa describe the importance of knowing the "background" of the child and

recognizing the possible signs that a child is experiencing poverty.

Differences between teacher preparation or personal upbringing and real life

experiences. Some participants shared comparisons between what they experienced or

believed when they were young and what they learned about teaching and poverty as a

result of their teacher preparation program. Often times, a mismatch was noted between

past and current beliefs. For instance, Tiffany shares "I came from …a background

where education is very structured and all the children do all the same things at all the

same times..." she continues to explain how her practicum placement followed a

Montessori philosophy "I learned uhm being able to uhm do individualized instruction

with children and being able to meet them where they are…children don't [learn] at the

same pace; they can all be in the same classroom". Marie speaks more broadly about

differing views and how the teacher preparation program helped her learn the importance

of understanding families

> you can work with children and families in poverty but if you really don't
> understand where they are coming from, their life style….you don't have to agree
> with everything they do but it's very important to be able to understand how they
> do things. I may be different from yours [views] but that's okay.

Responsibility to provide for children's basic needs. Beyond acknowledgment of

possible experiences that children and families have, many participants expressed a deep

sense of responsibility to provide basic needs for children, using their own money when

necessary. Participants listed specific strategies such as buying and keeping extra snacks

in the classroom, getting donations of clothing, food, etc., and underscoring the

importance that teachers need to be aware of possible experiences. For example,

Quashandea explains

> educators just have to be aware and then…when you realize this [is a child
> experiencing poverty] and then you [teachers] have to seek the means to try and
> help these children…and families. Because you know a child can't even…focus
> in class and even be able to prepare to learn when they have all these other things
> or factors that are hindering them….try to get families help with their needs so we
> can get beyond those needs and you know help a child be ready to learn

Quashandea and other participants consistently discussed the importance of providing

resources and services to families and children experiencing poverty. In addition,

participants discussed specific field and work experiences of early childhood teachers or

programs taking steps to provide for young children and families experiencing poverty.

These hands-on experiences provided participants with meaningful examples of how to

provide resources to children and families. For example, Jane completed her student

teaching in an early childhood classroom with all children with disabilities experiencing

low income. She explains how her cooperating teacher provided shoes for all the

children in the classroom after he noticed they had all grown out of their shoes.

…he brought in 18 new pairs of shoes he put them all in their cubbies and when the parents asked he just said "oh we just got a donation to the classroom and so we decided since we have all the equipment that we needed we would use the donation for the children and we decided to get them all shoes" and that's what he did. And it was his own money but …he helped the children out and in a way that made the families feel like comfortable and it was just a donation that he said that they got and they believed him because they already had that relationship with him…

Teaching with empathy related to children's context. Participants discussed what they have learned in their early childhood teacher preparation program. An overarching theme was being sensitive and understanding about what takes place outside the four walls of the classroom. Participants acknowledged children's context such as neighborhood, home life, family, and lack of resources, and the importance of being empathetic to children's experiences. For example, Jane expressed the importance of acknowledging that

just like the way that we are, every little thing affects them [young children]. Just like when someone says something mean to us and…it affects our mood; it's the same with them. So it's understanding that just because they are young….they still have the same feelings…and go through the same things we do. It's just they don't get to express it and maybe deal with it the way that we do or that we would like for them to.

In addition, Michelle discussed having a child in her classroom with challenging behaviors during a field experience; she learned the student was going through a custody battle. Michelle then described how she adjusted her teaching strategies after learning this information:

84

> I did a lot of one on one work with her throughout my student teaching...so you know we would just do things like eat lunch in the classroom together…I feel like she needed that special time with everything else being so chaotic in her life.

In addition to Michelle, four other participants described similar situations where their teaching strategy shifted to take into account what was going on in children's contexts.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

The overall goal of the current study was to describe early childhood education preservice teachers' beliefs about poverty and their perceived preparedness as teachers to serve children and families experiencing poverty. Within the discussion section, the quantitative and qualitative results from each research question will be triangulated and the overarching themes that emerged will be discussed. These findings are set in the context of students studying to become teachers and developing an understanding of what it means to be a teacher from many experiences, such as their own experiences as a student in a classroom, course content, and field experiences; with development occurring across time and influenced by different aspects of the context (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). I begin with a discussion of students' general experiences with poverty including interactions with people in poverty, personal experiences with poverty, and students' perceptions of what poverty means to help describe the context of the participants. Next, I discuss the results for research question one in terms of the themes about students' beliefs regarding the causes and perpetuation of poverty such as systemic and within-person reasons, the role of luck, and the intersection of race and poverty. Then, I discuss the variation across students in beliefs about poverty.

The discussion of research question two begins with students' perceived influence of instructional strategies on learning about serving children and families experiencing

poverty from their responses on the survey. Then, I discuss students' perceived preparedness to serve children and families in poverty including the themes which emerged: importance of family, possible experiences in poverty and teaching with empathy, responsibility to provide for children's basic needs, and differences between teacher preparation or personal upbringing and real life experiences. Following the discussion of both research questions, I discuss the limitations of the current study, recommendations for future research, and implications for practice based on the current study's findings.

Students' General Experiences with Poverty

In general, students survey responses revealed that their first encounter with people in poverty, when they first interacted or observed those in poverty, occurred during childhood (i.e., as young children or as youths). However, there was some variation in that a few students reported their first experience occurring when they were adults. Students identified these encounters as happening in a range of settings, with the most common places being at work/school and in public places. A little over half of students reported that their encounters with people in poverty were brief, while almost half of students reported their encounters with people in poverty were for extended periods of time. It is possible that some students who reported having encounters with people in poverty for extended periods of time may have experienced poverty of their own and therefore had more interactions with other people who were also experiencing poverty, in their neighborhood, or at food banks, shelters, schools, or public agencies, for example, some of the variation in developmental period, location, and duration of

encounters with people in poverty may exist because of how students self-defined the word encounter. Finally, some variation may exist because of the geographic area that students lived in as children such as rural, suburban, urban, affluent, middle class or working class. For example, if students grew up in a primarily affluent area and attended a private school they may have had less direct experience with people in poverty during childhood; whereas, if students grew up in an urban area they may have been more likely to encounter people in poverty within their school and community context.

Approximately 44 percent of students in the current sample perceived that they are currently experiencing or have experienced poverty in the past. In comparison, at the university where the current data were collected, 56 percent of undergraduate students experience low income (University of North Carolina at Greensboro College Portrait, 2015). Although the term low income may encompass more students than those experiencing poverty, it provides a general comparison of the university population and the students enrolled in the current study. Of the students who reported personal experiences of poverty, a majority identified having this experience in childhood, with some students also reporting experiencing poverty in adolescence and adulthood. Students who experienced poverty often provided context to their response such as a story explaining the reasons for why they were in poverty. In addition, students were candid in their discussion of still experiencing poverty or attempting to "break the cycle of poverty" by attending college. This response is understandable, yet concerning as well, given the current state of early childhood teacher wages being among the lowest in the field of education (Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014). It is possible that students

currently in poverty may continue to have economic hardship or experience poverty

given the median hourly wage for early childhood teachers birth to five prior (not

including Kindergarten) was $10.60 per hour in 2012, which is not sufficient to raise a

family of three or more above the poverty line (Whitebook et al., 2014). In addition,

approximately 46% of childcare employees are enrolled in some form of government

assistance (Whitebook et al., 2014). The implications of teacher education students'

desire to get out of poverty will be discussed further in the implications and future

research sections.

Research Question 1: Students' Beliefs about Poverty

    Defining poverty. Students were asked to define poverty using their own words.

Within their definitions several topics were commonly used within how students defined

poverty including: a lack of income, low income, or not having enough money to pay

bills. Aligning with the qualitative findings of the definitions of poverty, within the

online survey, students reported that when they think of people in poverty they associate

it with income, behavior/social relations, intelligence/abilities, and knowledge. These

findings support that common association with the term poverty and lack of money or

income. Historically, and in many governmental surveys, income level was the primary

indicator or determining if someone was experiencing poverty (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor,

& U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). For example, DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and U.S. Census

Bureau (2015) use only family income (before taxes) in comparison to family size and

composition to determine whether a family is defined as experiencing poverty.

In addition to income, many students included contextual or resource challenges in how they defined poverty; for instance, lack of food, shelter, clothing, and health insurance. These statements align with research suggesting that incorporating family contextual factors may more accurately measure socio-economic status such as wealthy, middle class, and poverty (Oakes & Rossi, 2003). A possible explanation for students including more contextual reasons and examples of lacking basic needs within definitions may reflect the emphasis on sociocultural context within the early childhood teacher preparation program in which they are enrolled as well as the department's overall philosophy where the data were collected. Specific activities throughout the early childhood teacher preparation program are used to support learning about poverty including an online poverty simulation activity within the diversity course that students to complete in their last semester prior to graduation. These types of activities and reflections provide students with opportunities to learn, consider, and process the different influences on and meaning of poverty. Moreover, if some students have previously experienced poverty they may be more likely to associate poverty with additional contextual factors. In contrast, some students did indicate some reasons for poverty being more behavior focuses such as getting involved with gangs or making bad choices or not knowing about specific resources.

Beliefs about Causes and Perpetuation of Poverty

Both the qualitative and quantitative data suggested that students hold more than one type of viewpoint about the causes of poverty. That is, some students simultaneously

hold views that there are systemic reasons for poverty, as well as within person characteristics that cause people to be in poverty or remain in poverty.

Systemic and within person reasons. Systemic beliefs about poverty tend to acknowledge the structural reasons for why poverty exists such as institutionalized racism and the opportunity gap. In contrast, within person reasons focus more on individual deficiencies and poor choices as reasons for poverty. Current research suggests that some adults hold both systemic and within person beliefs about poverty (Hunt, 1996; Merolla, Hunt, & Serpe, 2011; Reutter et al., 2004). Aligning with current research, the majority of students survey responses included both within person reasons such as drug abuse, lacking motivation, and a decline in moral values, and systemic reasons such as being paid a low wage and a shortage of jobs in their responses to the major and minor causes of poverty. Some of the qualitative findings underscore students' systemic beliefs such as when they discussed how multiple circumstances out of people's control such as illness, job loss, and low wages can cause poverty and keep people in poverty. It is possible that some students may have discussed systemic reasons for poverty because the early childhood teacher education program where the data were collected uses strength-based perspectives to discuss child development, families, and the classroom context. The strength-based perspective acknowledges the structural or system-level reasons around inequality (including economic). Alternatively, poverty may be a sensitive topic; some students may have wanted to provide socially desirable responses in regards to beliefs about poverty that reflect the philosophy of the teacher preparation program.

91

Additionally, students used terms that were reflective of a within person (deficit) perspective about poverty. For example, some students explained people experience poverty because of bad choices, participation in gangs or drugs, and people in poverty need "opportunities to better themselves". The statement "opportunities to better themselves" may indicate that some students may believe families in poverty need to improve themselves because they have deficits or are lacking specific characteristics needed to get out of poverty or to be successful. The concept of individual deficits has been used to describe people in poverty since the 1800's (Dworin & Bomer, 2008). In the 1800's terms such as *undeserving, paupers, dregs,* and *feebleminded* were used to describe people in poverty (Dworin & Bomer, 2008). These terms and stereotypes perpetuated the viewpoint that people in poverty have something wrong with them and devalue their knowledge and self-worth and focus on blaming the victim. Although the language may have changed, the deficit perspective has been perpetuated in present day. Notably, some students may not intentionally be coming from a deficit perspective in describing within person reasons why people experience poverty however, it is important to consider the implications of implicit bias that can be embedded within students understanding of what contributes poverty. It is possible that students with implicit bias may treat young children or families in a negative way or make assumptions about particular families' values and character.

The findings of the current study support the concept of 'dual consciousness of poverty', which is described as holding both individualistic (i.e., with-in person) and structural (i.e., systemic) beliefs about poverty simultaneously (Merolla, Hunt, & Serpe,

2011). Merolla and colleagues' findings suggest that dual consciousness of poverty is more common for individuals who have experienced low income or have experiences that make them more empathetic towards people experiencing poverty. In the current study, almost half of the students reported they have personally experienced poverty; it is possible that the students who have experienced poverty understand the complexities and hardships of experiencing poverty and are more likely to view causes of poverty from a larger systemic point of view while also acknowledging there are individuals that are exceptions to the rule. Another possible explanation for these dual belief findings may be that the course content, assignments, and field-based experiences provide opportunities for students to learn more about and consider systemic causes for and perpetuation of poverty.

  Role of "luck". Students used the term luck, lucky, and luck of the draw to explain economic inequality and why some people experience poverty. The role luck, was identified as a common theme from the qualitative interviews. The concept of luck is commonly found in research studies that examine peoples' beliefs about poverty (Hunt, 1996; Sigelman, 2013; Nicholls & Miller, 1985). Findings suggest that as early as three years old children associate the term "luck" with certain events or people (Sigelman, 2013). A possible explanation for the use of the term luck is that it may be difficult for some students to explain why some people experience poverty and others not. Additionally, some students may believe that income status is based on happen stance. This particular type of explanation for economic inequality does not acknowledge of the root systemic causes of poverty.

Intersection of race and poverty. The intersection of race and poverty emerged as a theme in both the interview and the survey responses. Students discussed race and poverty in terms of the impact of white privilege and racial barriers to resources and opportunity. Interestingly, students recognized racial inequity as a contributor of the cycle of poverty, however, for some students the expectation is that People of Color need to do more, work harder, or "pull themselves up by their boot straps". The belief that People of Color need to work harder is prominent within media, politics, and at times within our educational system (Hunt, 2004).

During the interviews, some students brought up White privilege in relation to poverty. First, White privilege was described as a way for people who are White to continue to have higher income, better jobs, and access to more resources. Second, White privilege was used to acknowledge that individuals who are White and experiencing poverty still have White privilege and additional access to resources that People of Color experiencing poverty do not. It is significant that some students explicitly used the term "White privilege" as using the term suggests they are aware of the term and the meaning of it. Moreover, using the term White privilege may reflect their knowledge or experiences while in the teacher preparation program. In contrast to students who discussed the intersection of race and poverty, some students in the interviews did not mention racial inequality in relation to poverty and did expressly explain that everyone has the same opportunities to succeed. These students may not acknowledge or perceive racism or racial disparities as being related to poverty. Alternatively, it is possible they are not comfortable talking about racial issues.

94

Students responded to survey questions about racial groups and poverty. On average students do not perceive that most people on welfare are African American. However, when asked who comes to mind when they think of people in poverty the majority of students responded Black. This aligns with current data that more people who are White experience poverty, but African Americans are at increased likelihood to experience poverty (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). Within the early childhood teacher preparation program where data were collected courses discuss the current demographics of poverty, which may help support students to hear these descriptions and result of this study indicate that students may need additional time to reflect on who is experiencing poverty and why that might be.

Student variation and associations with beliefs about poverty. Findings indicated no statistically significant differences in students' endorsement of individualistic beliefs about poverty according to the course they were currently enrolled in or the semester in which they completed the survey. However, findings indicate at trend level of significance that general individualistic beliefs about poverty are more likely among students who have not personally experienced poverty versus those who have. This finding is partially supported by the qualitative data that suggested students' own experiences with poverty influenced their beliefs about the hardships and structural challenges regarding experiencing poverty. For example, students who have personally experienced poverty were more likely to explain the context surrounding being in poverty and the barriers or lack of access associated with trying to get out of poverty. It is possible that when students personally experience poverty it provides them with a greater

understanding of the daily and ongoing challenges that people in poverty experience. In addition, it may provide them with a more diverse understanding of systemic institutional barriers related to poverty. When students have experienced the challenges of not having basic needs met or a consistent place to live they may be less likely to endorse structural aspects related to poverty rather than have individual deficit beliefs.

Research Question Two: Preparedness to Serve Children and Families in Poverty

Perceived influence of instructional strategies. Research question two examined students' perception of preparedness to serve children and families in poverty including influential instructional strategies for learning about poverty. Students were asked to report on the instructional strategy (lecture, course readings, class discussion, and field-based experiences) that most influenced their learning about specific topics related to serving children and families in poverty. Class discussions, assigned readings, and field experiences were each rated as most influential for eight different items, however many of the items had similar percent ranges across multiple instructional strategies. Students may be more likely to perceive class discussions as influential in their learning because discussions are active and collaborative and can foster critical thinking and perspective taking (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2004; Kilgo, Ezell, & Pascarella, 2015).

In contrast, lecture was only identified as most influential for one topic that focused on ecological theory. The topic of theory may seem more abstract and less familiar to students and therefore students may benefit from getting information about theory through lecture versus readings or class discussion. In addition, theories may be

96

less likely to be "modeled" or discussed within field based experiences. Current literature suggests that problem-based and collaborative learning strategies are more effective for adult learners (Garside, 1996; Hwang & Kim, 2006). Although, there were instructional strategies that were rated as more influential for certain topics, generally findings suggest that students are learning information and skills from more than one instructional strategy. This aligns with current research suggesting that multiple types of instructional strategies can have a positive influence on learning (Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2014). A possible explanation for this finding is that students may have different learning styles. Learning styles such as visual, audio, and tactile are important to consider when providing new knowledge as well as building upon existing knowledge because students may need the same information presented in different formats (Sarasin, 1999). Another consideration is that different instructional strategies may provide different ways of thinking about the specific topic. For example, readings ideally provide students an opportunity to get familiar with the topic prior to class; this may also prompt some students to reflect on the topic and internalize the information. Class discussion allows for perspective taking and critical thinking (Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2014) which may help some students further understand the specific topic. It is likely that there are multiple influences such as learning style, personality, and personal connections to the topic that may impact what type of instructional strategy is perceived to be most influential in students' learning.

There may be specific skills or topics that students perceive they learn the most about through field based experiences such as communicating effectively with children

and adults, family support, and supporting family problem solving. This aligns with current research that underscores within undergraduate programs the importance of field experiences (Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2014; Sagmiller, Marioni, & Kim, 2003). The impact of field based experiences was also evident in the qualitative results that highlighted having multiple field experiences was helpful in feeling prepared to teach children. Moreover, students shared specific examples from field experiences where either they had opportunities to work with children from low income backgrounds or they were able watch their cooperating teacher respond to the needs of families and children experiencing low income or poverty. Taken together, the findings underscore the importance of field placements in programs that facilitate high quality communication with children, families, and other adults and that serve children and families in poverty.

Preparedness to serve children and families in poverty. Students' perceptions about their preparedness to serve children and families in poverty were identified in the quantitative and qualitative results. Overall, students reported being "moderately prepared" to serve children and families in poverty. A possible explanation for students valuing and perceiving preparedness to work with families experiencing poverty may be that courses within the department and teacher preparation program where the data were collected emphasize families.

Importance of families. In the current study students perceived being "moderately prepared" to interact with families, support family involvement, and communicate with families. Similarly, the importance of families and creating trusting relationships with families was emphasized during the qualitative interviews. The dual

program with the specialized education services department requires students to have experiences with children and families with special needs, a group that is often marginalized. These experiences, with families that have children with disabilities, may provide students additional opportunities to gain experience and skills to communicate and serve families and extend their feeling of preparedness to value and serve families experiencing poverty (Jones, 1995). The current study's findings are similar to Sauer and Kasa (2012) findings that undergraduate special education students learned about the wealth of knowledge parents have about their children through interviewing families of children with disabilities. In addition, the students questioned their negative preconceptions of families of children with disabilities (Sauer & Kasa, 2012). Experiential learning, with families and in the community, is considered "high-impact" practice that supports perspective taking and overall learning (Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2014).

Possible experiences in poverty and teaching with empathy. Students perceived being prepared about topics related to the impact of contextual factors on children and families experiencing poverty. Within the qualitative findings, students elaborated on their preparedness to serve children and families in poverty through expressing an awareness of possible experiences that might occur in their lives. Moreover students expressed the importance of being empathetic to possible experiences of children and families in poverty. For example, students discussed that children in poverty may be struggling to have consistent shelter. Some students discussed the emotional impact of poverty such as feeling insecure, being tired or irritable because of

inconsistent shelter. Additionally, students expressed that proximal processes and the relationships they build with children and families experiencing poverty (by such actions as being sensitive to the needs of families or providing additional food or extra clothing) will help provide a context in which children can learn and explore within a safe trusting environment. This adds an additional layer of depth from students not only comprehending the possible impacts of poverty on young children and families but also internalizing what they learned in order to provide sensitivity and care to children and families.

Responsibility to provide children's basic needs. In addition, students expressed a deep sense of responsibility to provide for children's basic needs. Students acknowledged a wide range of basic needs that children experiencing poverty may need while in the classroom context such as food, clothing, shoes, diapers, and sleep. Interestingly, many students discussed using their own resources such as clothing donations from friends or money from their own pocket to make sure the needs of their students experiencing poverty were being met. Considering that about half of students expressed they have personally experienced poverty, it is possible that for some students they may place a higher importance on providing basic needs for the children in their classroom even at the cost of meeting their own basic needs. Some students may view their responsibility to provide basic needs as personally "doing good" or "being a hero" for children in their classroom experiencing poverty. However, given that multiple students spoke about providing basic needs subtly and sensitively; it is likely that some students may view meeting the basic needs of children in their classroom as part of their

role as teacher in order to support children being ready to learn. Taken together, these themes underscore the intrinsic values and commitment that students have towards children and families experiencing poverty and to the larger early childhood education field.

However, a few students perceived that they were not at all prepared in areas related to contextual factors that influence parents in poverty, the impact of community violence on adult development, and providing family support for hard-to-reach individuals. A possible explanation for this may be that specific teaching strategies or discussions may be less likely to take place about the impact of poverty on adults. Possible factors that may be important to discuss in university classes includes stress from non-standard work hours, low wages, level of social support, housing stability, and the challenges of accessing early childhood education programs that are affordable and have flexible hours. Some students may need additional opportunities or course content that connects the significance of adult outcomes to the field of early childhood education including readings, early childhood classroom scenarios, and group discussions about adult outcomes and how they may impact the classroom. For example, having opportunities to participate in poverty simulation exercises may help students process and reflect on the challenges that adults face related to poverty such as unstable transportation and shelter.

Differences between teacher preparation or personal upbringing and real life experiences. At times students expressed during the qualitative interviews that there were differences between their personal upbringing or real life experiences and what they

learned in their teacher preparation program. Family values, cultural norms, and students' own experiences with early childhood and poverty influence their beliefs and once they are exposed to different or possibly contradictory information they may need time to process and reflect on their own perceptions and beliefs about poverty. From a bioecological perspective, a part of learning and understanding is connecting previous knowledge and experiences related to a topic, in this case poverty and early childhood education, with new experiences such as course content and field experiences. As students confront differences between their personal upbringing or real life (work) experiences and their teacher preparation program they may begin to accommodate new knowledge about how to appropriately serve children and families experiencing poverty and in turn perceive they are more prepared.

In addition, some students expressed the challenges of implementing what they have learned in the teacher preparation program into their field placement or place of employment. Although students reported being moderately prepared to serve children and families experiencing poverty; it is possible that implementing what they have learned may be more difficult if their place of employment has a different type of philosophy for child development.

Limitations

Although this study contributes to the field of early childhood teacher preparation in several ways, it is not without limitations. First, the study was designed to be cross-sectional, because of the time constraints and the fact that collecting data at one time point increases the likelihood of participation. This means however that changes in

102

students' beliefs about poverty and perceived preparedness over time and across their degree program could not be examined.

Second, the current study has limited generalizability because data were collected in only one early childhood (EC) teacher preparation program. EC teacher preparation programs vary in terms of curriculum, course content, field placements, and general program requirements. In addition, programs vary on geographic location meaning some universities my serve more or less students who have experienced poverty, or the communities in which they are located may have higher or lower levels of poverty with implications for the demographics of the children in early childhood field placements. Having participants from multiple EC teacher preparation program would provide a broader understanding of how EC teacher preparation programs prepare students' to serve children and families in poverty.

Third, there are several potential limitations related to measurement. The current study was the first time the adapted *Beliefs about Poverty* (Cox, Watts, & Horton, 2012; Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Kennedy School of Government, 2001) and *Preparedness to Serve Children and Families in Poverty Surveys* (Hallam et al., 2003) have been used with preservice teachers. These measures and their psychometrics should be further evaluated with additional samples of teacher education students. In addition, the open-ended question on the survey that asked students to "define poverty in their own words" was only included in data collection during the spring semester. It would have been helpful to have definitions of poverty from all participants. It is possible some additional topics or words would have been included in how students' define poverty if

the participants from the fall semester had received this question. In addition, this study asked students to reflect on past experiences and relies on students' memories to be fairly accurate, considering additional measures to validate students' measures may be useful in future studies.

Finally, although the sample size was adequate to use as one group, the sample sizes for subgroups limited the types of statistical analyses that could be conducted. For example, the sample size was too small to compare whether students' level of preparedness varied by the type of field experiences (public, private, Head Start) they had. Additionally, differences in individualistic beliefs about the causes of poverty between students who have or have not experienced poverty were at trend level significance; given a larger sample size the variation between these two groups may have become significant. Despite these limitations, the current study provides support for future research and practice within preparing early childhood students to serve children and families in poverty.

Future Directions

Limited research has examined early childhood teacher preparation students' beliefs specifically about poverty and preparedness to serve children and families in poverty, from the student perspective. Given the current economic climate in the United States, poverty will remain a core struggle for many Americans for years to come. Therefore, it is vital that we ensure early childhood educators are prepared to serve children and families in poverty. Future research needs to examine existing early childhood teacher preparation programs, how they prepare their students to understand

the structural causes of poverty as well as how to serve and support children and families experiencing poverty, and outcomes for preservice teachers in their role as a lead teacher in different settings.

Future research. Early childhood teacher preparation programs vary in program focus, courses, types of field experiences, and preparedness for diverse populations of young children and their families (children with or without special needs or families experiencing low income). Therefore, future research should replicate this study in the context of additional EC teacher preparation programs that vary in size, geographic region, and student demographic to further our understanding of students' beliefs about poverty and preparedness to serve children and families in poverty; these findings could potentially have implications for the field regarding specific types of content or assignments that support student learning and preparedness to serve children and families in poverty.

In addition to replication, future studies should collect data from EC teacher preparation programs related to the types of classroom-based field experiences and service learning experiences (also referred to as community-based field experiences) they provide specific to serving children and families experiencing poverty. Examples of community-based field experiences include locations such as food banks, homeless shelters, donation centers, and community centers in low-income neighborhoods. Community-based field experiences are in addition to classroom-based field experiences. Community-based field experiences have been studied in K-12 literature and suggest that they provide opportunities for students to gain a better understanding of contextual

influences outside of school that may impact learning and development within the classroom context (McDonald, Tyson, Brayko, Bowman, Delport, & Shimomura, 2011). As recommended in current literature (Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Sauer & Kasa, 2012), data collection on EC teacher preparation programs that have implemented community-based field experiences could help us understand how these experiences support EC students' preparedness to serve children and families in poverty and has been recommended in the field of education.

Future research should consider collecting longitudinal data beginning when students are admitted into their EC teacher preparation program through their first two years of teaching. These data could be collected throughout their teacher preparation program but particularly at the beginning of the program and at the end of their final semester and during the induction period of teaching. Additionally, longitudinal data could assess changes in beliefs about poverty, such as systemic and within person, across the course of the EC teacher preparation program and in the context of being a lead teacher.

A mixed method approach to this work would allow for a deeper understanding of how their beliefs about poverty and preparedness to serve children and families in poverty evolve over time and across experiences. Additional constructs to consider would be the geographic location of the jobs students have after graduation (e.g., rural, urban, suburban and public, private, center or home care) and the types of families that they serve. For instance, following students into their teaching career could provide an opportunity to examine how students and if students are able to adapt their own

philosophy or what they know from their teacher preparation programs in schools and program that may or may not align with their philosophy. In addition, given that constructs such as teacher efficacy tend to decline in the first few years of teaching (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke–Spero, 2005), examining students perceived preparedness to serve children and families in poverty in the initial years of teaching post-graduation may provide insight about areas where students could use additional support.

The current study findings suggest that some students who are currently experiencing poverty as college students desire to move out of poverty once they graduate and get a job as an early childhood educator. However, many current early childhood teachers make low wages and struggle to make ends meet (Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014). Future longitudinal research needs to include data on students' financial well-being (i.e., income, government assistance, ability to make ends meet, and getting basic needs) throughout the teacher preparation program and examine whether their financial well-being increases once they are employed.

Future research should consider probing about the meaning of "luck" when discussing the likelihood of experiencing poverty. Questions to consider include: What does luck mean in this context? Is it that students do not know how to discuss institutionalized inequality that perpetuates poverty? What messages is the term "luck" really communicating about people in poverty or how to get out of poverty? Future research should use qualitative interviews or focus groups to further extrapolate the meaning behind the concept of "luck" in regards to economic inequalities.

The current study identified the intersection of race and poverty as a key theme that students discussed. Future research should examine in depth how EC teacher preparation programs support students learning about economic inequality, racism, bias, and their own racial and ethnic identity. Particularly because research suggests that children are aware of racial differences and develop bias at an early age (Winkler, 2009) it is important for EC teachers to be aware of their own biases as well as how to support young children learning about race, ethnicity, culture, and inequities related to income and race. Moreover, understanding how EC teacher preparation programs assess student growth in these areas of understanding systemic poverty, racial and economic inequality, and how they relate to early childhood education can be challenging. Therefore, future research should also examine what processes EC teacher preparation programs use to ensure students have awareness of these social justice issues and their impact within early childhood education. Possible constructs to include are specific specialization courses about race, culture, class, and poverty and the philosophy that programs use to discuss social justice issues such as critical race theory, strengths approach, and or the social justice approach (Fennimore, 2015).

Implications for practice. The findings of the current study have multiple implications for practice. First, instructors and EC teacher preparation programs may want to consider the different types of instructional strategies used for students to learn about serving children and families in poverty; that is, incorporating the same topic in readings, class discussion, interactive activities, projects, and lectures can support students' different learning styles. Using multiple instructional strategies regarding the

same topic also aligns with the concept of proximal processes (Brofenbrenner, 2001) in that interactions and information need to be provided in multiple ways, consistently over a long period of time. Therefore, to provide consistent interactions over an extended period of time, EC teacher preparation programs could ensure that strategies and information about serving children and families in poverty are infused in courses throughout the program.

Early childhood teacher preparation programs should consider the amount and types of field experiences for students. Students expressed the impact and importance of having more than one field placement and having field experiences in classrooms that serve children and families in poverty. Further, given that field-based experiences were perceived as influential in students' preparedness to serve children and families in poverty, EC teacher preparation programs may want to consider having a community-based field experience given they have been found to be positively associated with cultural competence, openness to diversity, and perspective-taking (Jones & Abes, 2004; Engberg & Fox, 2011). It is widely acknowledged in the field of ECE that finding high quality field placements can be difficult, especially in programs that serve primarily children and families in poverty (La Paro, 2015). However, it is vital that students have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and hardships related to poverty as well as the strengths that families experiencing poverty bring to the classroom. In addition, applied experiences provide opportunities for students to think critically about their perceptions of people in poverty and observe first hand the challenges faced when experiencing poverty. In particular, early childhood teacher preparation programs

that serve primarily affluent students with limited ECE programs serving children in poverty should consider service learning community-based opportunities such as serving meals at a homeless shelter, volunteering with the big brother big sister program, or poverty simulations to promote learning about the structural barriers to getting out of poverty and the hardships of living in poverty (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Kim, 2013).

Kim (2013) examined early childhood preservice teachers who had a community-based field experience working with children at a homeless shelter. Findings suggest that having direct interaction with children in homeless shelters challenged the bias of homelessness only impacting adults and negative stereotypes of individuals who are homeless such as being dirty, bad, or abnormal (Kim, 2013). Extending EC teacher preparation field experiences to outside the classroom provides opportunities for some students to face their fears about working with a group of people who may or may not be similar to them. Then, university class meetings can provide opportunities to share experiences with peers and gain additional perspectives.

In areas that have early childhood education programs that serve children and families experiencing poverty it is important to establish meaningful relationships with programs that are mutually beneficial for the programs, students, and teacher preparation programs (Kim, 2013). Meaningful relationships require teacher preparation programs to communicate regularly and invest time into to learning about and understanding the strengths and needs of ECE programs that primarily serve children and families in poverty. This requires reciprocal opportunities where ECE programs serving children

110

and families in poverty are not just serving as a placement site for undergraduate students but these programs have opportunities to continue to improve their teaching practices and or leadership skills through professional development that meets the needs of that particular center (McDonald, 2006).

The findings that students currently experiencing poverty hope to move out of poverty once they graduate and are in early childhood teaching positions, paired with the staggering statistics that some current early childhood teachers are earning less than $17, 000 and the average EC teachers' annual wage is between $21, 490 and $31, 420 per annually (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013) creates some interesting considerations for teacher preparation programs. Although, I do not argue that an implication of this research is that teacher preparation programs can solve the problem of teachers' low wages; I do argue that we contemplate whether we are preparing teachers to be advocates not only for children and families but also for themselves about issues that directly impact their career and livelihood. Questions such as: Do students know how to advocate for their own rights as a teacher from their EC teacher preparation programs? Are students aware of already existing organizations that support teachers' rights? How are EC teacher preparation programs encouraging and supporting student growth as advocates?

Finally, the current findings suggest there is interplay between the previous experiences of students and what they are learning in their courses and field experiences in regards to poverty. Programs should consider having built in reflective activities and discussions that promote students to think about their previous experiences and how they

may confirm or contradict what they are learning in their courses and field experiences; with particular emphasis on processing and working through the areas of discontinuity. Professional standards and research have documented the importance of reflective practices on teacher development (NAEYC, 2009; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Loughran, 2002; Sauer & Kasa, 2012). It may be important to have instructors and students consistently reflect back on previous journal entries or reflective papers across the course of their preparation in order for students and instructors to see the evolution and growth of their economic, racial, ethnic, and cultural beliefs and identity.

Conclusion

Teacher development occurs across time and consistently influences and is influenced by different aspects of the context (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). The current findings suggest topics about poverty and serving children and families in poverty need to be infused within course content using multiple types of instructional strategies. Moreover, these topics should be present in courses from the time students begin their early childhood teacher preparation program to when they complete their degree. In addition, students may benefit from service learning field experiences working directly with children and families experiencing poverty.

Given the large number of young children experiencing poverty it is vital that we continue to examine how early childhood teacher preparation programs are preparing future teachers to serve children and families in poverty. This study takes the unique approach of examining from the student perspective, their beliefs about poverty and perceptions of how prepared they feel to serve children and families in poverty. The

findings from the current study contribute to the limited body of research regarding early

childhood teacher preparation students' preparedness to serve children and families in

poverty.

REFERENCES

Adair, J. K. (2014). Examining whiteness as an obstacle to positively approaching immigrant families in US early childhood educational settings. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *17*(5), 643-666. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2012.759925

Ahlquist, R., Gorski, P., & Montaño, T. (2011). *Assault on kids: How hyper-accountability, corporatization, deficit ideologies, and Ruby Payne are destroying our schools*. New York: Peter Lang. (177-236)

American Psychological Association (2016). *Effects of Poverty, Hunger, and Homelessness on Children and Youth*. Retrieved from: http://www.apa.org/pi/families/poverty.aspx

Aratani, Y. (2009). Homeless children and youth causes and consequences. National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. Retrieved from: http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_888.pdf.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review Psychology*, *52*, 1-26.

Brookfield, S. D., & Preskill, S. (1999). Discussion as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques for democratic classrooms. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1989). Ecological systems theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Annals of child development, Vol 6* (pp. 187–249). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. In T. Husen & T.

    N. Postlethwaite (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education: 2nd Ed., Vol. 3*,

    pp. 1643--1647. Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (2001). The bioecological theory of human development. In U.

    Bronfenbrenner (Ed.), *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives*

    on human development (pp. 3-15). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bronfenbrenner & Ceci (1994). Nature-nurture reconceptualized in developmental

    perspective: A bioecological model. *Psychological Review, 101*(4), 568-586.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Evans, G. W. (2000). Developmental science in the 21st century:

    Emerging questions, theoretical models, research designs and empirical findings.

    Social Development, 9(1), 115-125.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human

    development. In W. Damon (Series Ed.) & R. M. Lerner (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of*

    child psychology: Vol. 1. Theoretical models of human development (6th ed., pp.

    793-828). New York: John Wiley.

Buckner, J. C., Beardslee, W. R., & Bassuk, E. L. (2004). Exposure to violence and low-

    income children's mental health: Direct, moderated, and mediated relations.

    American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 74(4), 413-423. doi: 10.1037/0002-

    9432.74.4.413

Buka, S. L., Stichick, T. L., Birdthistle, I., & Earls, F. J. (2001). Youth exposure to

    violence: prevalence, risk, and consequences. *American Journal of*

    Orthopsychiatry 71(3), 298-310.

Bullock, H. (2006). *Justifying inequality: A social psychological analysis to beliefs about poverty and the poor*. National Poverty Center Working Paper Series #06-08. Retrieved from: http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/working_papers/

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014). *Occupational outlook handbook*. Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/kindergar ten-and-elementary-school-teachers.html

Carter, P. L., Welner, K. G., Ladson-Billings, G. (Eds.). (2013). *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Causey, V. E., Thomas, C. D., & Armento, B. J. (2000). Cultural diversity is basically a foreign term to me: The challenges of diversity for preservice teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 16,* 33–45. doi:10.1016/S0742-051X(99)00039-6

Child Trends (2013). *Children's exposure to violence indicators on children and youth*. Retrieved from: http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=childrens-exposure-to-violence

Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (2013). CAEP accreditation standards. Retrieved from: http://caepnet.org/standards/introduction

Colaizzi, P.F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. *Existential-phenomenological Alternatives for Psychology,* 48-71.

Coleman-Jensen, A., Nord, M., Andrews, M., & Carlson, S. (2012). *Household food security in the United States in 2011.* Economic Research Report No. (ERR-141).

Retrieved from http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err141.aspx

Corbin, J., & Morse, J. M. (2003). The unstructured interactive interview: Issues of reciprocity and risks when dealing with sensitive topics. *Qualitative Inquiry, 9*(3), 335-354.

Cox, B. J., Watts, C., & Horton, M. (2012). Poverty perceptions of pre-service teachers and social work candidates. *Journal of Studies in Education, 2*(1), 131-148.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Tashakkori, A. (2007). Editorial: Differing perspectives on mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(4), 303-308.

Dallimore, E. J., Hertenstein, J. H., & Platt, M. B. (2004). Classroom participation and discussion effectiveness: student-generated strategies. *Communication Education, 53*(1), 103-115.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-Century Teacher Education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 57*(3), 300-314.

Day, C., Sammons, P., & Gu, Q. (2008). Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies in Research on Teachers' Lives, Work, and Effectiveness: From Integration to Synergy. *Educational Researcher, 37*(6), 330–342. doi: 10.3102/0013189X08324091

DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., & U.S. Census Bureau (2015). *Current Population Reports, P60-252, Income and Poverty in the United States: 2014*. U.S.

Government Printing Office: Washington, DC. Retrieved from:

http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p60-

252.pdf

Dickson-Swift, V., James, E., L., Kippen S., & Liamputtong, P. (2009). Researching

sensitive topics: qualitative research as emotion work. *Qualitative Research, 9*(1),

61-79. doi: 10.1177/1468794108098031

Dixon, A. D. & Rousseau, C. K. (2006). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory

in education ten years later. *Race, Ethnicity & Education, 8*(1), 7–27.

Dworin, J. E., & Bomer, R. (2008). What we all (supposedly) know about the poor: A

critical discourse analysis of Ruby Payne's ``Framework''. *English Education,*

40(2), 101-121.

Eamon, M. K. (2001). The effects of poverty on children's socioemotional development:

An ecological systems analysis. *Social Work, 46*(3), 256-266.

Elam, G., & Fenton, K. (2003). Researching sensitive issues and ethnicity: lessons from

sexual health. *Ethnicity & Health*, *8*(1), 15.

Elmir, R., Shmied, V., Jackson, D., & Wilkes, L. (2011). Interviewing people about

potentially sensitive topics. *Nurse Researcher, 19*(1)*,* 12-16.

Engberg, M. E., & Fox, K. (2011). Exploring the relationship between undergraduate

service-learning experiences and global perspective-taking. *Journal of Student*

Affairs Research and Practice, 48(1), 85-105.

Fennimore, B. S., (2015) A social justice approach to diverse families. In Couse, L. J. & Recchia, S. L. (Eds.), Handbook of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 304-312. Routledge.

Fenton, A., & McFarland-Piazza, L. (2014). Supporting early childhood preservice teachers in their work with children and families with complex needs: A strengths approach. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 35(1), 22-38. doi: 10.1080/10901027.2013.874384

Fisher, W. P., Jr., & Stenner, A. J. (2011). Integrating qualitative and quantitative research approaches via the phenomenological method. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, *5*(1), 89-103.

Fox, J., Murray, C., & Warm, A. (2003). Conducting research using web-based questionnaires: Practical, methodological, and ethical considerations. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *6(2)*, 167-180. doi: 10.1080/13645570210142883

Garner, A. S. (2013). Home visiting and the biology of toxic stress: Opportunities to address early childhood adversity. *Pediatrics, 132*(2), S65-S73.

Garside, C. (1996). Look who's talking: A comparison of lecture and group discussion teaching strategies in developing critical thinking skills. *Communication Education, 45*(3), 212-227.

Gearing, R. E., (2004). Bracketing in research: A typology. *Qualitative Health Research, 14,* 1429- 1451. doi: 10.1177/1049732304270394

Gorski, P. C. (2008b) Peddling poverty for profit: Elements of oppression in Ruby

Payne's framework. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 41*(1), 130-148. doi:

10.1080/10665680701761854

Gorski, P. (2013). *Reaching and teaching students in poverty: Strategies for erasing the*

opportunity gap. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hallam, R., A., Buell, M., J., & Ridgley, R. (2003). Preparing early childhood educators

to serve children and families living in poverty: A national survey of

undergraduate programs. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 18*(2),

115-124. doi: 10.1080/02568540409595027

Hallam, R. A., Ridgley R., & Buell, M. J. (2003) Preservice preparation in home visiting:

A national survey of early childhood undergraduate programs. *Journal of Early*

Childhood Teacher Education, *24*(1), 19-26. doi: 10.1080/1090102030240105

Hatton, N. & Smith, D. (1995) Reflection in teacher education: Towards definition and

implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 11*(1), 33-49.

Hermes, M. (2005). Complicating Discontinuity: What about poverty? *Curriculum*

Inquiry, 35(1), 9-26.

Hill, H. D., Morris, P. A., Castells, N., & Walker, J. T. (2011). Getting a job is only half

the battle: Maternal job loss and child classroom behavior in low-income families.

Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 30(2), 310-333.

Howard, L. L. (2011). Does food insecurity at home affect non-cognitive performance at

school? A longitudinal analysis of elementary student classroom

behavior. *Economics of Education Review, 30*(1), 157-176.

Hunt, M. O. (1996). The individual, society, or both? A comparison of Black, Latino, and

 White beliefs about the causes of poverty. *Social Forces, 75*(1), 293-322.

Hunt, M. O. (2004). Race/ethnicity and beliefs about wealth and poverty. *Social Science*

 Quarterly, 85(3), 827-853.

Hwang, S. Y., & Kim, M. J. (2006). A comparison of problem-based learning and

 lecture-based learning in an adult health nursing course. *Nurse Education Today*,

 26(4), 315-321.

Jiang, Y., Ekono, M., Skinner, C. (2015). *Basic facts about low-income children:*

 Children under 6 years, 2013. New York: National Center for Children in

 Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health: Columbia University.

Johnson, R., B., & Onwuegbuzie, A., J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research

 paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 33*(14), 14-26. doi:

 10.3102/0013189X033007014

Joinson, A. (1999). Social desirability, anonymity, and internet-based questionnaires.

 Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers: a Journal of the

 Psychonomic Society, 31(3), 433-438.

Jones, H. A. (1995). Issues in early childhood education: Implications and directions for

 higher education. *Peabody Journal of Education, 70*(3), 112-24.

Jones, S. R., & Abes, E. S. (2004). Enduring influences of service-learning on college

 students' identity development. *Journal of College Student Development, 45*(2),

 149–166.

Kaiser Family Foundation & The Kennedy School of Government (2001). National

    Survey on Poverty in America. Menlo Park, CA. Retrieved from:

    http://kff.org/medicaid/poll-finding/national-survey-on-poverty-in-america/

Kilgo, C. A., Ezell, S. J. K., & Pascarella, E. T. (2015). The link between high-impact

    practices and student learning: some longitudinal evidence. *Higher Education: the*

    International Journal of Higher Education Research, 69(4), 509-525.

Kim, J. (2013). Against the unchallenged discourse of homelessness: Examining the

    views of early childhood preservice teachers. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher*

    Education, 34(4), 291-307. doi: 10.1080/10901027.2013.845631

Koc, I. (2012). Preservice science teachers reflect on their practicum experiences.

    Educational Studies, *38*(1), 31-38.

La Paro, K. M. (2015). Field experiences in the preparation of early childhood teachers.

    In Couse, L. J. & Recchia, S. L. (Eds.), Handbook of Early Childhood Teacher

    Education, 209-219. Routledge.

Ladd, H. F. (2012). Education and poverty: Confronting the evidence. *Journal of Policy*

    Analysis and Management, 31(2), 203-227.

Laughlin, L. (2010). Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2005

    and Summer 2006. *Current Population Reports, P70-121*. U.S. Census Bureau,

    Washington, DC.

Leader-Janssen E. M., & Rankin-Erickson, J. L. (2013). Preservice teachers' content

    knowledge and self-efficacy for teaching reading. *Literacy Research and*

    Instruction, *52*(3), 204-229. doi: 10.1080/19388071.2013.781253

Lim, C., Maxwell, K. L., Able-Boone, H., & Zimmer, C. R. (2009). Cultural and

linguistic diversity in early childhood teacher preparation: The impact of

contextual characteristics on coursework and practica. *Early Childhood Research*

Quarterly, 24, 64-76.

Loughran, J. J. (2002). Effective reflective practice in search of meaning in learning

about teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*(1), 33-43.

Martins, D.C. (2008). Experiences of homeless people in the health care delivery system:

A descriptive phenomenological study. *Public Health Nursing, 25*(5)*,* 420-430.

Maxwell, K. L., McWilliams, R. A., Hemmeter, M. L., Ault, M. J., & Schuster, J. W.

(2001). Predictors of developmentally appropriate classroom practices in

kindergarten through third grade. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 16,* 431-

452.

Maynard, C., King, E., La Paro, K., & Johnson, A. V. (Under Review). Early practicum

experiences in early childhood education: Student learning and coursework

relevance.

Mayoh, J., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2013). Toward a conceptualization of mixed methods

phenomenological research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. doi:

10.1177/1558689813505358

McDonald, M. A., Tyson, K., Brayko, K., Bowman, M., Delport, J., & Shimomura, F.

(2011). Innovation and impact in teacher education: Community-based

organizations as field placements for preservice teachers. *Teachers College*

Record, 113(8), 1668-1700.

Merolla, D. M., Hunt, M. O., & Serpe, R. T. (2011). Concentrated disadvantage and

    beliefs about the causes of poverty: A multi-level analysis. *Sociological*

    Perspectives, 54(2), 205-228.

Milner, H. R., & Laughter, J. C. (2015). But good intentions are not enough: Preparing

    teachers to center race and poverty. *The Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public*

    Education, 47(2), 341-363.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009). NAEYC Standards

    for early childhood professional preparation, Position Statement.

National Center for Children in Poverty (2006). Child Poverty. New York: Columbia

    University. Retrieved from: http://www.nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html

National Center for Education Statistics (2000). *Low-Income Students: Who are They and*

    How Do They Pay for Their Education? NCES 2000-169. Washington, D.C.:

    NCES (March). Retrieved from: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/2000169.pdf

Nicholls, J. G., & Miller, A. T. (1985). Differentiation of the concepts of luck and skill.

    Developmental Psychology, *21*, 76–82.

Oakes, J. M., & Rossi, P. H. (2003). The measurement of SES in health research: Current

    practice and steps toward a new approach. *Social Science & Medicine,* 56(4), 769-

    784.

Onchwari, J. (2010). Early childhood inservice and preservice teachers' perceived levels

    of preparedness to handle stress in their students. *Early Childhood Education*

    Journal, 37(5), 391-400.

Onwuegbuzie, A., J., & Leech, N., L. (2006). Linking research questions to mixed

    methods data analysis procedures. *The Qualitative Report, 11(3),* 474-498.

    Retrieved from: http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR11-3/onwuegbuzie.pdf

Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy

    construct. *Review of Educational Research, 62*(3), 307-332.

Patton, M. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Ready, D. D., & Wright, D. L. (2011). Accuracy and inaccuracy in teachers' perceptions

    of young children's cognitive abilities: The role of child background and

    classroom context. *American Educational Research Journal, 48*(2), 335-360.

Reutter, LI., Sword, W., Meagher-Stewart, D., & Rideout, E. (2004). Nursing students'

    beliefs about poverty and health. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 48*(3), 299-309.

Ritblatt, S. N. , Garrity, S. , Longstreth, A. , Hokoda, A. , & Potter, N. (2013). Early care

    and education matters: A conceptual model for early childhood teacher

    preparation integrating the key constructs of knowledge, reflection, and practice.

    Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, *34*, 46–62.

Roberts, J. C., & Roberts, K. A. (2008). Deep reading, cost/benefit, and the construction

    of meaning: Enhancing reading comprehension and deep learning in sociology

    Courses. *Teaching Sociology, 36*(2), 125-140.

Sagmiller, K. M., Marioni, J., & Kim, Y. M. (2003). Self-entering and exiting a teacher

    preparation program: What happens in between? How do we know our graduates

    are prepared to reach? *Asia Pacific Education Review, 4*(1), 51-66.

Sarasin, C. L. M. (1999). *Learning style perspectives: Impact in the classroom*. Madison, WI: Atwood Pub.

Sato, M., & Lensmire, T. J. (2009). Poverty and Payne: Supporting Teachers to Work with Children of Poverty. *Phi Delta Kappan, 90,* 5, 365-370.

Sauer, J. S., & Kasa, C. (2012). Preservice teachers listen to families of students with disabilities and learn a disability studies stance. *Issues in Teacher Education, 21*(2), 165-183.

Schmit, S., Matthews H., Smith, S., & Robbins, T. (2013). *Investing in Young Children A Fact Sheet on Early Care and Education Participation, Access, and Quality.* National Center for Children in Poverty. Retrieved from: http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1085.pdf

Schwartz, S., & Robinson, M. M. (1991). Attitudes toward poverty during undergraduate education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 27*(3), 290-296.

Shonkoff, J. P. & Garner, A. S., (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics, 129*(1), 232-46.

Sigelman, C. K. (2013). Age differences in perceptions of rich and poor people: Is it skill or luck?. *Social Development,* 22(1), 1-18.

Steckler, A., McLeroy, K. R., Goodman, R. M., Bird, S. T., & McCormick, L. (1992). Toward integrating qualitative and quantitative methods: an introduction. *Health Education Quarterly, 19*(1), 1-8.

Stipek, D. J. & Byler, P. (1997). Early childhood education teachers: Do they practice what they preach? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 12*, 305-325.

Siwatu, K. O. (2011). Preservice teachers' sense of preparedness and self efficacy to

 teach in America's urban and suburban schools: Does context matter?. *Teaching*

 and Teacher Education, 27, 357-365. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2010.09.004

Sullivan, D. M. (2014). From food desert to food mirage: Race, social class, and food

 shopping in a gentrifying neighborhood. *Advances in Applied Sociology, 4*(1), 30-

 35.

Swick, K. J., & Williams, R. D. (2006). An Analysis of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological

 Perspective for Early Childhood Educators: Implications for Working with

 Families Experiencing Stress. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 33*(5), 371-

 378.

Terenzini, P. T., Cabrera, A. F., Colbeck, C. L., Parente, J. M., & Bjorklund, S. A.

 (2001). Collaborative Learning vs. Lecture/Discussion: Students' Reported

 Learning Gains, *Journal of Engineering Education, 90*(1), 123-130.

The Annie C. Casey Foundation & Kids Count (2013). The first eight years giving kids a

 foundation for lifetime success. Baltimore, Maryland. Retrieved from:

 http://www.aecf.org/resources/the-first-eight-years-giving-kids-a-foundation-for-

 lifetime-success/

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (2001). Poverty in America. Washington, DC.

 Retrieved from:

 https://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2001/04/3118-t-poverty-in-

 america-survey.pdf

The Schott Foundation, (2016). Opportunity Gap- Talking Points. Retrieved from:

    http://schottfoundation.org/issues/opportunity-gap/talking-points

Tidwell, M. & Thompson, C. (2008). Infusing multicultural principles in urban teacher

    preparation, *Childhood Education*, *85*(2), 86-90. doi:

    10.1080/00094056.2009.10523069

Tudge, J. R. H., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B., & Karnik, R. B. (2009). Uses and misuses of

    Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *Journal of Family*

    Theory and Review, 1(4), 198-210.

University of North Carolina at Greensboro College Portrait (2015). Retrieved

    from: http://www.collegeportraits.org/NC/UNCG/characteristics

U.S. Department of Education (1999). Teachers' feelings of preparedness, National

    Center for Education Statistics, NCES 2000-003, Washington, DC: U.S.

    Government Printing Office.

U. S. Department of Justice. (2006). *Criminal Victimization in the United States—*

    Statistical Tables, 2005. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Tables 3,

    4, 9, 10. Retrieved from: http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=765

Vartuli, S. & Rohs, J. (2009). Early childhood prospective teacher pedagogical belief

    shifts over time. *Journal of Early Childhood teacher education*, *30*(4), 310-327.

Vartuli, S. (1999). How early childhood teacher beliefs vary across grade level. *Early*

    Childhood Research Quarterly, 14(4), 489-514.

Wedman J., Espinosa, L. M., & Laffey, J. M. (1999) A process for understanding how a field-based course influences teachers' beliefs and practices. *The Teacher Educator, 34*(3), 189-214, doi: 10.1080/08878739909555199

Wenger, K. J., & Dinsmore, J. (2005). Preparing rural preservice teachers for diversity. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *20*(10) 1-15.

White, E., Mistry, R., S., & Chow, K., A. (2013). How do teachers talk about economic inequality? The complexity of teaching at a Socioeconomically integrated elementary school. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, 13*(1). doi:10.1111/asap.12024

Whitebook, M. Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014). *Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study.* Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from: http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/wpcontent/uploads/2014/11/ReportFINAL.pdf

Winkler, E. N. (2009). Children are not colorblind: How young children learn race. *Pace, 3*(3), 1-8).

Woolfolk Hoy, A. E. & Burke–Spero, R. (2005). Changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching: A comparison of four measures. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(4) 343–356. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2005.01.007a

Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college-and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *61*(1–2), 89–99.

Table 1. Demographics of Sample (n=80)

Preservice Teacher Characteristics	n (%)
Course Format	
Online	29
Face-to-Face	51
Course Enrolled	
Final Professional Internship	16
Student Teaching	18
Diversity Course	46
Degree Program	
Birth - Kindergarten Licensure	46
Early Care and Education	34
Type of classroom completed Final Field Experience	
Head Start	3
Public Pre-K	18
Public K	13
Private Pre-K	19
Community Based Child Care	27
Racial or Ethnic Background (check all that apply)[a]	
American Indian or Alaska Native	4%
African American/ Black	50%
Asian	15%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0%
Latino or Hispanic	19%
White	64%
Age	
(21-55 years)	
33 years or younger	74%
34 or older	36%
Female	95%
Currently work in a paid position directly with young children	65%
Parent/Guardian of children	35%
Experienced poverty in lifetime	45%

[a] n = 79

Table 2. Demographics of Participants who Completed Interview (n=11)

Characteristics of Interview Participants	n (%)
Course Format	
Online	5
Face-to-Face	6
Course Enrolled	
Final Professional Internship	2
Student Teaching	2
Diversity Course	7
Degree Program	
Birth - Kindergarten Licensure	8
Early Care and Education	3
Type of classroom completed Final Field Experience	
Head Start	0
Public Pre-K	4
Public K	0
Private Pre-K	3
Community Based Child Care	4
Racial or Ethnic Background (check all that apply)[a]	
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%
African American/ Black	64%
Asian	9%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0%
Latino or Hispanic	9%
White	36.4%
Age	
(22-49 years)	
25 years or younger	55%
29 or older	45%
Female	100%
Currently work in a paid position directly with young children	55%
Parent/Guardian of children	27%
Experienced poverty in lifetime	55%

Table 3. Descriptives of General Beliefs about Poverty

Item	N	M	SD	Skew-ness	Kurtosis	Min	Max
1. Very few people in the United States are ever poor because there is open opportunity to succeed	80	1.65	0.81	1.17	0.82	1	4
2. People become poor by making bad choices and/or having an immoral lifestyle	80	1.86	0.99	1.17	0.77	1	5
3. Most people are poor because they do not work	80	1.95	0.90	0.96	0.44	1	4
4. A major cause of poverty in the United States is that policies and institutions favor the rich	80	3.61	1.03	-1.04	0.81	1	5
5. Most people are poor because they do not want to work	79	1.99	0.93	0.92	0.67	1	5
6. Most people who are poor get welfare, and so they are not poor anymore	80	1.83	0.81	0.78	0.17	1	4
7. Most people on welfare are African-American	79	2.05	1.04	0.82	-0.14	1	5
8. Our government does more for people in poverty than it does for the rest of us	79	2.53	1.18	1.38	-0.99	1	5
9. People on food stamps eat better than many people with higher incomes	80	2.54	1.17	0.30	-0.81	1	5
10. Many people who are poor work multiple jobs but do not earn enough money to make ends meet	80	3.76	0.93	-0.95	1.34	1	5
11. If people on welfare managed their money better, they would not be poor	79	2.28	0.95	0.43	-0.64	1	4
12. The welfare system does not work; instead of curing poverty, it makes people in poverty dependent on handouts	79	3.39	1.10	-0.31	-0.58	1	5
13. Private organizations can do a better job providing help to the truly needy than the government can	80	3.39	0.88	-0.05	-0.179	1	5
14. The welfare system provides support for families in poverty such as financial assistance to help access resources (e.g., food) that are necessary to live	80	3.63	0.92	-0.88	0.576	1	5

Table 4. Descriptives of Instructional Strategies Influential in Learning about Poverty

Item	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Min	Max
1. Effects of parent reading level on child development	1.006	0.111	-1.048	1	4
2. Ecological and family systems theory	0.949	0.251	-1.081	1	4
3. Effects of low parent education levels on child development	0.981	0.036	-0.976	1	4
4. Impact of inadequate health care on child development	1.041	0.206	-1.118	1	4
5. Impact of chronic hunger on child development	0.953	0.093	-0.88	1	4
6. Empathize with what it is like to manage a family without significant or adequate resources	1.026	-0.588	-0.76	1	4
7. Effects of limited economic resources on parenting practices	1.078	-0.132	-1.234	1	4
8. How to identify and access social services for families and children	1.095	-0.262	-1.236	1	4
9. Assess family strengths and needs of families experiencing poverty	1.073	-0.237	-1.179	1	4
10. Current societal views on poverty and how these views relate to policy and practice	0.92	0.162	-0.794	1	4
11. How to assess family strengths in the context of poverty	1.006	-0.159	-1.071	1	4
12. Effects of neighborhood contexts on child development	1.067	-0.001	-1.224	1	4
13. Family support strategies to engage hard-to-reach individuals*	1.048	-0.051	-1.177	1	4
14. Impact of community violence on child development	0.948	0.241	-0.805	1	4
15. Contextual factors affecting parents/caregivers	0.94	0.008	-0.86	1	4
16. Effect of amt. of community resources on child development	1.08	0.121	-1.267	1	4
17. Knowledge of rural poverty	1.076	0.233	-1.193	1	4
18. Knowledge of city poverty	1.046	0.376	-1.028	1	4
19. Teaching children about class and economic differences	0.982	-0.351	-0.891	1	4
20. Teaching children about culture	1.055	-0.499	-0.982	1	4
21. Child health and illness	1.195	-0.144	-1.516	1	4
22. Communicating Effectively with adults	0.966	-1.591	1.257	1	4
23. Communicating Effectively with children	0.885	-1.858	2.321	1	4
24. Support family problem solving	1.076	-0.532	-0.974	1	4
25. Family support	1.134	-0.651	-0.996	1	4
26. Identify and access resources	1.125	-0.361	-1.259	1	4

n = 80, *n = 79

Table 5. Descriptives of Preparedness to Serve Children in Poverty Survey

Items	n	Mean	SD	Skew-ness	Kurtosis	Min	Max
1. Interactions with families	80	4.43	0.652	-0.7	-0.513	3	5
2. Addressing Child health and illness	80	4.24	0.716	-0.599	-0.044	2	5
3. Supporting family involvement	80	4.48	0.616	-0.737	-0.403	3	5
4. Provide Family support	80	4.29	0.766	-0.719	-0.341	2	5
5. Identify and access resources	80	4.23	0.927	-0.859	-0.41	2	5
6. Communicate effectively with children	80	4.23	0.477	0.596	0.022	3	5
7. Communicate with families about child's development	79	4.32	0.589	-0.207	-0.592	3	5
8. Communicate with families about sensitive topics	79	4.2	0.838	-0.535	-0.99	2	5
9. Teaching children about Class and economic differences	79	4.2	0.883	-0.528	-1.219	2	5
10. Strategies to support children who are hungry	80	4.03	0.927	-0.441	-0.931	2	5
11. Empathize with what it is like to manage a family without significant or adequate resources	80	4.24	0.783	-0.611	-0.586	2	5
12. Identify and access social services for families and children	78	4.18	0.922	-0.675	-0.796	2	5
13. Assess family strengths and needs of families experiencing poverty	80	4.18	0.883	-0.58	-0.909	2	5
14. Ability to identify factors shaping and challenging caregivers	80	4.31	0.894	-0.992	-0.181	2	5
15. Impact of community violence on adult development	80	3.81	1.17	-0.548	-0.661	1	5
16. Knowledge of contextual factors affecting parents/caregivers	79	4.14	0.957	-0.826	0.036	1	5
17. Communicate effectively with adults	80	4.31	0.587	-0.188	-0.584	3	5
18. Teaching children about Race	80	4.13	0.786	-0.226	-1.337	3	5
19. Teaching children about culture	80	4.28	0.763	-0.69	-0.347	2	5
20. Assess family strengths who are experiencing poverty	80	4.16	0.863	-0.566	-0.811	2	5
21. Apply family support strategies to engage hard-to-reach individuals	80	4.16	1.012	-0.862	-0.214	1	5

Table 6. Causes of Poverty

	Percent		
Items	A major cause of poverty	A minor cause of poverty	Not a cause of poverty
1. Drug abuse	55%	34%	11%
2. Having multiple part time jobs	9%	36%	55%
3. Being paid a low wage	79%	20%	0%
4. People who are poor lacking motivation	29%	53%	19%
5. Having to many single parent families	39%	43%	19%
6. Shortage of jobs	83%	16%	1%
7. Decline in moral values	36%	41%	23%
8. Public schools	6%	20%	74%

Table 7. Percentage of Perceived Influential Instructional Strategies

Items	Lecture	Assigned Readings	Class Discussions	Field-Based Experiences
1. Effects of parent reading level on child development	18%	36%	26%	20%
2. Ecological and family systems theory	34%	29%	31%	6%
3. Effects of low parent education levels on child development	18%	34%	31%	18%
4. Impact of inadequate health care on child development	26%	31%	26%	16%
5. Impact of chronic hunger on child development	18%	36%	31%	15%
6. Empathize with what it is like to manage a family without significant or adequate resources	14%	16%	36%	34%
7. Effects of limited economic resources on parenting practices	23%	23%	33%	22%
8. How to identify and access social services for families and children	19%	23%	29%	30%
9. Assess family strengths and needs of families experiencing poverty	21%	20%	35%	24%
10. Current societal views on poverty and how these views relate to policy and practice	21%	38%	31%	10%
11. How to assess family strengths in the context of poverty	23%	23%	40%	15%
12. Effects of neighborhood contexts on child development	22%	27%	28%	23%
13. Family support strategies to engage hard-to-reach individuals	23%	25%	33%	19%
14. Impact of community violence on child development	18%	41%	26%	15%
15. Contextual factors affecting parents/caregivers	18%	34%	35%	14%
16. Effect of amount of community resources on child development	29%	25%	29%	18%
17. Knowledge of rural poverty	23%	36%	19%	23%
18. Knowledge of city poverty	21%	43%	15%	21%
19. Teaching children about class and economic differences	11%	25%	35%	29%
20. Teaching children about culture	14%	20%	30%	36%
21. Child health and illness	25%	21%	20%	34%
22. Communicating Effectively with adults	9%	8%	15%	69%
23. Communicating Effectively with children	6%	8%	13%	74%
24. Support family problem solving	16%	16%	33%	35%
25. Family support	19%	11%	29%	41%
26. Identify and access resources	19%	20%	26%	35%

Table 8. Percent of Perceived Preparedness to Serve Children and Families in Poverty

Items	Not At All 1	2	Some-what 3	4	Very 5
1. Interactions with families			8.8%	40%	51.2%
2. Addressing Child health and illness		1.3%	12.5%	47.5%	38.8%
3. Supporting family involvement			6.3%	40%	53.8%
4. Provide Family support		1.3%	15%	46.3%	37.5%
5. Identify and access resources		5%	18.8%	51.2%	25%
6. Communicate effectively with children			2.5%	25%	72.5%
7. Communicate with families about child's development			6.3%	38%	55.7%
8. Communicate with families about sensitive topics		1.3%	22.8%	45.6%	30.4%
9. Teaching children about Class and economic differences		1.3%	26.6%	49.4%	22.8%
10. Strategies to support children who are hungry		5%	26.3%	38.8%	30%
11. Empathize with what it is like to manage a family without significant or adequate resources		1.3%	17.5%	43.8%	37.5%
12. Identify and access social services for families and children		3.8%	23.1%	48.7%	24.4%
13. Assess family strengths and needs of families experiencing poverty		2.5%	23.8%	46.3%	27.5%
14. Ability to identify factors shaping and challenging caregivers		3.8%	17.5%	56.3%	22.5%
15. Impact of community violence on adult development	3.8%	8.8%	30%	17.5%	40%
16. Knowledge of contextual factors affecting parents/caregivers	1.3%	2.5%	24.1%	46.8%	25.3%
17. Communicate effectively with adults			6.3%	56.3%	37.5%
18. Teaching children about Race			25%	37.5%	37.5%
19. Teaching children about culture		1.3%	15%	45%	38.8%
20. Assess family strengths who are experiencing poverty		2.5%	22.5%	43.8%	31.3%
21. Apply family support strategies to engage hard-to-reach individuals	1.3%	3.8%	25%	52.5%	17.5%