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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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An Exploration of Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences Serving Students
of Incarcerated Parents in a Rural Setting

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Melissa P. Phelan

December 2021

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Bo Phelan. Your steadfast support and dedication to me during this long journey has been immeasurable. I could not have completed this work without you. I thank God every day that He gave me you. The love and respect I have for you are beyond words. Thank you; I love you.

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Completing this educational journey would not have been possible without the strength, mercy, and perseverance granted to me by Jesus Christ. There have been many tough times as I chased my dreams and without Him, I could never have completed this dissertation. I have been blessed with many things, and during this journey I was blessed with a team of people who guided me and supported me.

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Abstract

The increase in the United States prison population over the past several years has precipitated a record number of children in the public school system with incarcerated parents. Consequences of this trend have recently been given significant attention by researchers due to the myriad of difficulties noted to be associated with parental incarceration. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions, experiences, and insights of educators in a small rural district in Texas as they serve students experiencing parental incarceration. Presentation of an educator in context schema was provided by the application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This environmental systems theory allowed the researcher to explore the perceptions educators have of the environment surrounding students experiencing parental incarceration, the resources or lack of resources within this environment, and the barriers perceived by these educators to exist in their pursuit to educate this specific population of students. Following a case study protocol, semistructured interviews were performed with 10 educator participants. The findings revealed that educators perceived the immediate school environment as supportive and understanding, the community environment as lacking in resources, the need for education and professional development regarding parental incarceration as desirable, and the cultural blueprint present within the district as accepting of incarceration due to its commonality there, yet, stigmatized due to the popularity of negative connotations associated with it.

Keywords: parental incarceration, teacher perceptions, ecological systems theory, environmental surroundings

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (2016) reported that on any given day in the United States, one in every 40 minor children, or 2.7 million minor children, are affected by parental incarceration. Researchers affirmed that many of the children and adolescents with an incarcerated parent suffer from an array of negative outcomes, including poor mental health and trauma reactive behaviors (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Davis & Shlafer, 2017; Mears & Siennick, 2016; Murray et al., 2012), truancy and school failure (Nichols et al., 2016; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013), dysfunctional relationships and stigmatization (Davis & Shlafer, 2017; Foster & Hagan, 2015; Wildeman et al., 2017), delinquency and involvement with the criminal justice system themselves (Mears & Siennick, 2016; Murray & Farrington, 2005). Within the school system, these children are frequently identified as at-risk students due to their elevated school drop-out rates and poor academic outcomes (Nichols et al., 2016; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013).

Chute (2017) explained that “one of the challenges for schools is identifying the children affected by parental incarceration, because no one is required to tell school officials that a parent has been jailed and families may not feel comfortable sharing the information” (p. 4). Rossen (2011), a school psychologist and director of professional development standards at the National Association of School Psychologists, explained that in most cases, information about parental incarceration is not shared with the school due to shame and embarrassment, or a lack of trust, or fear that the school will somehow treat the student differently or judge them. Rossen (2011) stated that “adolescents whose parents are currently incarcerated may feel significant shame and embarrassment, engage in risk-taking or criminal behavior, and be less likely to adhere to boundaries set within classrooms, the school, or the community at large” (p. 13). Nichols et al.

(2016) reported that youth with incarcerated parents have poorer outcomes than other youth and that these findings indicate the significance of knowing who these youth are and then providing the necessary service and support using the required tools and knowledge that the school has for connecting with the students.

Raible and Irizarry (2010) argued that the American teacher education programs had created curricula and experiences that reinforce mainstream identities. Raible and Irizarry noted that teacher education programs have failed to help preservice teachers develop more critical stances regarding education, especially for student populations found within the public-school system that have been traditionally underserved by schools. Gay and Kirkland (2003) argued that preservice teacher education should develop personal and professional critical consciousness about racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity encountered in the classroom. Gay and Kirkland noted that culturally responsive teaching (CRT) “should be a fundamental feature of teacher preparation and classroom practice” (p. 181).

Brown and Mowry (2017) presented research that underscores the importance of teacher educators, their students, and practicing teachers to teach, learn, use, and develop culturally relevant learning opportunities that reflect children’s lives in and out of school. Their research study examined how incorporating the sociocultural worlds of students into culturally relevant pedagogical practices within the classroom affects students’ “academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness” (p. 171). Results of the study indicated that when students are engaged in learning experiences that reflect their sociocultural worlds, they are allowed to experience the benefits of their teachers listening and collaborating with them, which had a positive impact on their commitment, enthusiasm, and personal growth.

Pedro et al. (2012) noted the importance of 21st-century educators acquiring the essential knowledge and skills to meet existing challenges in their work with diverse students and their families. In addition, Pedro et al. asserted that teachers should need to “draw upon the knowledge and strengths of families to make the classroom education students receive relevant” (p. 2).

Statement of the Problem

Parental incarceration involves more than just the incarcerated individual and may have extensive consequences for families (Hyppolite, 2017). For minor school-aged children, parental incarceration has been associated with a lack of school connectedness, influencing truancy, academic achievement, and lifetime educational attainment (Nichols et al., 2016). Wildeman et al. (2017) concluded that teachers’ expectations of behavioral problems and poor behavioral competencies could be driven by paternal incarceration. Dallaire et al. (2010) noted the potential for negative repercussions of revealing parental incarceration status to certain teachers. Though these students have been identified as a discrete classification (Glaze, 2010), they are not systematically identified within the school system.

The problem is that there are students within our public-school systems who are affected by parental incarceration (Dallaire et al., 2010). Many of them are identified as at-risk students, but research is limited in exploring the experiences and insights of teachers regarding students affected by parental incarceration (Dallaire et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2016). Research is lacking regarding the perceptions, experiences, training, or teaching practices utilized by teachers within Texas when they are tasked with working with and teaching a student experiencing parental incarceration within the context of their classroom, the school, and the broader community. Many studies have shown that students perform in the manner that their teachers expected them to perform and one of the central aspects of teachers that affected the success of students’

educational endeavors was teacher perceptions and attitudes (Jacobs & Harvey, 2010; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

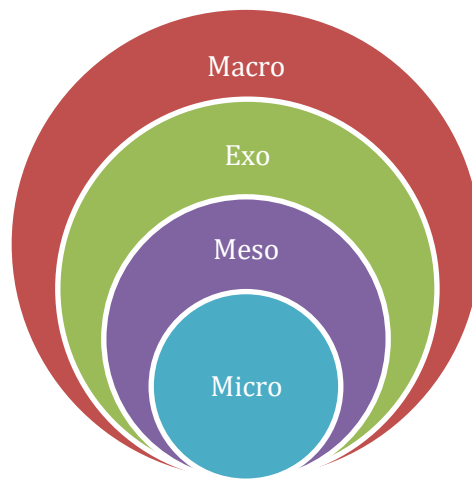
The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions, insights, experiences, and pedagogical practices with the population of students that have or have had a parent incarcerated. This qualitative exploratory case study examined the perceptions of, insights of, experiences with, and the resources and pedagogical practices utilized by teachers within their classrooms, the school, and the broader community when they encounter a student who has or has had a parent incarcerated. The intentions of the study are to inform practice, assess professional development needs, and assist in bringing the importance of culturally responsive teaching to the attention of educators and administrators.

Theoretical Framework Conceptualized for This Study

Uri Bronfenbrenner (1994) first introduced ecological systems theory (EST) in 1974. His theory identified four contextual layers that surround all individuals. He labeled these layers as the Microsystem, the Mesosystem, the Exosystem, and the Macrosystem. These four layers, or contexts, surrounding an individual contain unique dimensions and processes specific to each layer. Bronfenbrenner proposed that it is within these contexts of functioning that interactions occur that affect an individual's developmental pathways and growth. Refer to Figure 1 for a depiction of Bronfenbrenner's EST layers.

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Uri Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Bronfenbrenner (1994) explained the microsystem as the immediate setting of the individual. The individual is centered in this layer. Within this layer, according to Bronfenbrenner, is the individual's home, church, school, workplace, and community in which the individual functions. The mesosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner, is where the interactions between two microsystem variables occur. The individual is a member within both of the variables of their microsystem that are interacting, and the interaction of the variables affects the individual (e.g., the communication between the individual's school and the individual's parent). Bronfenbrenner described the exosystem is the interaction between two contexts in which the individual is a member of one and is indirectly affected by the other. For example, the individual's spouse is stressed due to their work, and they come home and take those frustrations out on the individual. The macrosystem was documented by Bronfenbrenner as the cultural blueprint that provides the overarching pattern and characteristics of a specific culture. The macrosystem contains the social and psychological features that influence the conditions and processes within the other three layers. It contains features such as the governing laws, belief

systems, customs, knowledge, resources, opportunity structures, and hazards that are embedded in and have an influence on the other three layers.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do teachers perceive the influence of the microsystem for students of incarcerated parents in regard to their educational development?

RQ2. How do teachers apply the mesosystem to students whose parents are incarcerated?

RQ3. How do teachers perceive the influence of the resources within the exosystem in regard to the educational development of students whose parents are incarcerated?

RQ4. What barriers within the macrosystem do teachers feel they encounter in educating students whose parents are incarcerated?

Definition of Key Terms

Alternative certification. Any systematic teacher preparation program that departs from the traditional foundations-pedagogy-student teaching model (Woods, 2016).

Alternatively certified teacher. A person who holds a college degree in a field other than education, and gains certification through an alternative certification program (Feistritzer, 1999).

At-risk student. The Texas Educational Agency (2019) defined an at-risk student as those students that meet criteria that may predispose them to drop out of school.

Culturally responsive teaching. Including social and cultural aspects of minority groups or immigrant students' contexts within the curriculum and instructional practices presented within the classroom (Ladson-Billing, 1995).

Exosystem. The layer within the ecological system theory where the interaction between two contexts occurs, the individual is a member of one and is indirectly affected by the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Macrosystem. The layer within the ecological system theory contains a cultural blueprint that provides the overarching pattern and characteristics of a specific culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Mesosystem. The layer within the ecological system theory is where the interactions between two microsystem variables occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Microsystem. The immediate setting of the individual within ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Parental incarceration. Any kind of custodial confinement of a parent by the criminal justice system, except being held overnight in police cells (Murray et al., 2012).

Pedagogical practices. Broad principles and strategies of classroom management and organization appear to transcend subject matter (Shulman, 1987).

Summary and Preview of Chapter 2

Chapter 1 introduced the study and provided the statement of the problem, the purpose statement, research method, research questions, and key terms. Chapter 2 will be comprised of the literature review, which will examine parental incarceration, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework, students affected by parental incarceration, student-teacher relationships, and teacher training in greater depth.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teachers' insights, experiences, and teaching practices with the population of students that have or have had a parent incarcerated. The aim of this literature review was to examine scholarly studies that pertain to minor children affected by parental incarceration. An overview of research literature regarding the life changes, stigma, problematic behaviors, and academic outcomes associated with parental incarceration was presented. The importance of student-teacher relationships and the role teachers may occupy as attachment figures for this population of students was reported. Uri Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems perspective is described and applied to this study.

This study used online and traditional approaches to collect data from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and research documents through the library internet search engines: EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and Sage Full Text Collections available through the library at Abilene Christian University. Further literature searches included bibliographic and reference listing searches and the use of the keywords: *person-in-context approaches*, *Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach*, *parental incarceration*, *teachers and parental incarceration*, *the impact of parental incarceration on minor children*, and *parents in prison*.

As noted in Chapter 1, over the past several years, the increase in the United States prison population has precipitated a record number of children in the school system with incarcerated parents (Nichols et al., 2016). On any given day, one in every 40 minor children, or 2.7 million minor children, are affected by parental incarceration (The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, 2016). These are staggering statistics especially considering that these statistics are conservative estimates since the criminal justice system, both on the state and federal levels, has no standardized way to track the actual number of minor

children affected by parental incarceration (Osborne Association, 2018). It has also been suggested by Schirmir et al. (2009) that an additional 10 million children have a parent that has been or is involved in the criminal justice system.

Ecological Systems Theory

The ecological systems theory (EST) proposed by Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979) provided the theoretical framework for this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979) described how social and physical environments form layers of influence upon the developing child. Bronfenbrenner (1994) perceived the ecological environment as “a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). Miller (2002) noted that “these structures range from the immediate face-to-face interaction with another person to very general cultural belief systems” (p. 438). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory presented four structures, or environments, that surround the developing person: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) contended that the individual is located at the center of the system, and the ever-changing social and physical environments surrounding the individual form layers of influence upon them. Miller (2002) explained this system as multiple levels of contexts in which developing children are embedded. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1999) emphasized the processes by which child and context affect each other during frequently occurring interactions and explained that these interactions are bidirectional. Miller (2002) noted that the particular nature of these processes depends on the developing person’s individual characteristics and on the environment surrounding the person. Bronfenbrenner (1979) pointed out that within a given society, the structures or environments that surround the individual reflect the unstated beliefs of the society.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that EST is a four-element model (i.e., micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-) that involves an interchange between systems labeled proximal processes. Proximal processes are defined by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1999) as complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving, biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its surrounding environments. For this study, the proximal processes between the teacher, the student who has or has had an incarcerated parent, and the environment in which they are nestled will be explored. Way (2001) of The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University argued that an important predictor of student success, especially for students at risk, is a school culture that strives to measure safety, cultural identification, and personalization. This fact encourages this research to explore reciprocal processes occurring within the environments encircling those students who have or have had a parent incarcerated from the educators' perspective.

Microsystem

The microsystem is the immediate setting that surrounds an individual. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1999) explained that the microsystem occurs in a face-to-face setting and consists of the activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by the developing person. These settings include specific physical and material features and other individuals. The environmental setting affects the individual and vice versa. An individual's home, school, and peer group are within this system.

Aaron and Dallaire (2010) noted that school-aged children "with incarcerated parents may be exposed to more proximal risk factors in key microsystem contexts, including more harsh, unresponsive parenting practices in the familial context, teacher stigmatization in the academic context, and risk for association with delinquent peers in the peer context" (p. 102).

Dallaire et al. (2010) also reported that within the microsystem, where interactions between teachers and students occur (e.g., classrooms/schools), teacher stigmatization and lowered student expectations further harm the educational success of children whose parent has been incarcerated.

Mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1989) presented the mesosystem as the linkages and processes between two or more settings containing the developing person. For example, the communication process that occurs between the school and a parent. Miller (2002) described the mesosystem as a system of microsystems. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that the linkages or proximal processes between systems affect the developing person (e.g., the communication or lack of communication between a teacher and a parent). For children that have a parent incarcerated, the mesosystem of the home-school connection is frequently found to have minimal communication between the two systems (Nichols & Loper, 2012).

Exosystem

Within this dimension of an individual's ecological environment, Bronfenbrenner (1979) included the specific systems encompassing and surrounding the individual. These systems include all the major institutions of the given society in which the individual is located. Miller (2002) presented the economic system, transportation system, local government, and mass media outlets as components within this dimension of the individual's ecological environment. Bronfenbrenner (1994) explained that the exosystem comprises the linkages and processes between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person. Events within this system can influence an individual's immediate setting without the individual's participation in the process that affects their personal setting. Miller (2002) offered

the example of the relationship between the home and the parent's workplace, where a stressful work environment may increase a parent's irritability at home, leading to anger or impatience toward the child. Along these same lines, school district or school board policies and educational laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) enacted in 2004 or Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) enacted in 2016, exist within the exosystem, yet they may have, through proximal processes, affect the microsystem of those within a school system.

Macrosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained this system as the cultural blueprint that interconnects and organizes the micro, meso, and exosystems. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1999) explained that it is the belief systems, patterns of social interchange, knowledge, resources, and customs that are embedded within the macrosystem of a given society that determines how the micro, meso, and exosystems of a given society are interconnected and organized.

Bronfenbrenner's Model Conceptualized for This Study

Bronfenbrenner (1994) argued that it is within the immediate environment of the microsystem that proximal processes operate to produce and sustain development, but the extent of this system to promote development depends on the content and structure of the other three systems. Johnson (2008) noted that social-emotional, academic, and behavioral outcomes could all be improved if students are made to feel connected to others at school. Brown and Mowry (2017) presented the results of addressing students' socio-cultural worlds into a standardized teaching environment. The topic introduced within the classroom teaching environment was parental incarceration. They reported that the learning experiences that reflected the socio-cultural worlds of students allowed the students to see and feel the benefit of their teachers

listening to them and collaborating with them, which had a positive impact on student engagement, motivation, and personal development.

Bronfenbrenner (1994) identified the school and a peer group as functioning as a microsystem because the school and its classrooms offer students a face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interactions with, and activity in, the immediate environment. Nichols et al. (2016) recommended that future researchers explore characteristics of schools, communities, and individuals that help students with incarcerated parents achieve academic success.

Children Experiencing Parental Incarceration

Repetitive topics encountered while reviewing the research on children experiencing parental incarceration was, the living arrangements, the stigma and secrecy that invariably surround them, and the problematic and maladaptive behaviors they frequently exhibit. Nichols and Loper (2012) reported that youth experiencing incarceration within the family face many household disruptions and “chaos” that has long-term effects on their academic outcomes, as well as their risk for adverse behaviors and mental stress.

Living Arrangements

Living arrangements for children with an incarcerated parent are usually affected when a parent is incarcerated. Children who live with their parent(s) at the time of arrest or incarceration are frequently placed with a nonparent adult for their care and support (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). The most current, official data by Glaze and Maruschak (2008) gathered for the U.S. Department of Justice detailed the living arrangements, as reported by the incarcerated parent(s). According to Glaze and Maruschak (2008), 88% of fathers reported that at least one of their

children was in the care of the child's mother, compared to 37% of mothers who reported the father as the child's caregiver.

Mothers in state prison most commonly identified the child's grandmother (42%) as the current caregiver, and 23% of mothers identified other relatives as the current caregiver (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). On the other hand, fathers in prison reported that their children were in the care of a grandmother (12%) or other relatives (5%). Additionally, mothers (11%) were five times more likely to report that their children were in the care of a foster home, agency, or institution than fathers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Glaze and Maruschak also noted that children of incarcerated mothers experienced more living arrangement disruptions than children with incarcerated fathers. Dallaire (2007) suggested that a mother's incarceration, due to the higher percentage of disruptions in living arrangements for these children, would trigger more frequent emotional and behavioral problems than a father's incarceration. Dallaire reported that "because they are more likely to be in nonfamilial care situations, children with incarcerated mothers, more so than children of incarcerated fathers, might be suffering from the anxiety and trauma often associated with disruptions in attachment relationships" (p. 22).

Stigma and Secrecy

Within their daily lives, children of incarcerated parents are often faced with the stigma that society has attached to incarceration (Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Dallaire et al., 2010). Stigma is defined by Link and Phelan (2001) as the labeling, stereotyping, separating, or discriminating of people. Link and Phelan argued that stigma can affect multiple domains of people's lives and has a dramatic bearing on the distribution of life chances in such areas as earnings, housing, criminal involvement, health, and life itself. Adalist-Estrin (2006) explained that even in communities heavily affected by incarceration, families of prisoners fear judgment by others.

Young and Smith (2000) emphasized that the social stigma of having a parent incarcerated exacerbates the psychological and emotional difficulties children naturally experience when they are separated from a parent. Wildeman et al. (2017) reported their study, which examined teachers' expectations of students secondary to paternal incarceration, revealed that the stigma associated with paternal incarceration shapes teachers' expectations of students, leading to a 10 to 40% increase in teachers' expectations of children's behavioral problems. Benaquisto and Coulthard's (2008) found that the fear of shame and stigma is a much more gripping obstacle than the actual stigma itself. Boswell and Wedge (2002) noted that students affected by parental incarceration not only experienced stigma, but they also experienced bullying, verbal abuse, and teasing, and the caregivers interviewed for this study reported that the pressure was so great that the children did not want to go to school. Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) discovered that teachers, as well as caregivers, attributed many of the behavior problems exhibited by students of the incarcerated to the social stigma experienced by these children. This type of stigma was precisely summed up by a 16-year-old student of an incarcerated parent in the Adalist-Estrin (2006) article when she reported that if anything was stolen from a desk or a locker, "those of us with parents in jail get blamed" (p. 8).

Poehlmann (2005) reported that 20% of the caregivers in her study reported they had lied to their children about the location of incarcerated parents to avoid stigma. Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) reported that some children reported secrecy regarding their relationship with the parent and their incarceration. Poehlmann also noted that some of the children seemed uncomfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings about the incarcerated parent during interviews and the children revealed information about the incarcerated parent, which they were

told by their caregivers not to share to avoid the stigma and embarrassment associated with parental incarceration.

Link and Phelan (2001) stated that stigma associated with an individual could impact the perceptions and understandings that others have about stigmatizing. Dallaire et al. (2010) reported in their study that 10 out of 30 teachers surveyed noted that they have witnessed colleagues being unsupportive, unprofessional, and expecting less from children with incarcerated parents. Dallaire et al. shared that one teacher noted that for some of her colleagues, knowing that a parent was incarcerated would play a role in how they treated the student. In the same study, another teacher noted that knowledge of a parent's incarceration often translated into lower teacher expectations, stating that some teachers would not expect as much because the incarceration explained it (i.e., the child's behavior).

Problematic and Maladaptive Behaviors

According to Murray and Murray (2010), the social isolation children experience due to their parents' incarceration may contribute to maladaptive and contumacious behaviors such as withdrawing emotionally in school, truancy, pregnancy, drug abuse, diminished academic performance, and disruptive behavior. In a frequently cited and referenced longitudinal cohort study, known as the Cambridge Study, Murray et al. (2007) found that parental incarceration predicted severe anti-social delinquent outcomes in the form of intergenerational incarceration. These findings are not new as Baunach (1985) found that 70% of the children in her study exhibited social and psychological disorders, such as aggression, hostility, and withdrawal.

Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) noted the behavior problems exhibited by students with an incarcerated parent at school were a critical issue. Shlafer and Poehlmann also asserted that teachers reported fighting, bullying, arguing, and defiance as common behaviors at school. These

identified problem behaviors, associated with this population of students, can have a significant impact on their development, social skills, and ability to learn and remain in school (Mears & Siennick, 2016). In addition, many of these students have difficulty forming and maintaining relationships (Murray & Murray, 2010), experience a chaotic and disruptive home environment, and have high rates of economic strain (Nichols & Loper, 2012).

Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) presented qualitative data through interviews and teachers' written responses that the behavior problems observed in students of incarcerated parents were a critical issue. These teachers reported fighting, bullying, arguing, and defiance as common behaviors of this population of students at school. One study participant wrote, "He blows up and gets mad. He is defiant, smoking cigarettes and pot. He's sexually active and stays out late running the streets." Another wrote, "Interactions with peers and adults have been very problematic-rude, dangerous, poor attitude, uncooperative" (p. 8).

Additionally, Shlafer and Poehlmann reported teachers and caregivers of children involved with parental incarceration voiced concerns about the challenges observed about the friendships and peer relationships that these children attempted to forge. These youth appear "needy, distrustful, sad, anxious and moody," and these characteristics often interfere with friendship and relationship building (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010, p. 408). In Poehlmann's (2005) study, children with an incarcerated parent (mother) had significantly lower Stanford-Binet IQ scores when compared to published norms.

Phillips and O'Brien (2012) reported that children with an incarcerated parent who entered a program to receive mental health treatment had considerably higher rates of conduct disorder (39.8% vs. 26%), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (22% vs. 11.3%), and problems with role performance ($M=21.1$, $SD=5.89$ vs. $M=19.2$, $SD=5.61$). They also

experienced a significantly higher number of school expulsions/suspensions, arrests, or incarceration between intake and follow-up. The results from this study indicated that parental incarceration is not simply a proxy for a host of other risk factors but that it may have a discrete effect on the course of certain emotional and behavioral problems. In a review of research performed by Murray and Farrington (2005), the researchers concluded that children affected by parental incarceration have about three times the risk for antisocial behavior compared to their peers, not five to six times the risk that other researchers report (Petersilia, 2005).

The Public-School System

Educators are able to play a key role in the social-emotional and academic development of all children whom they serve; however, research by Chute (2017) established that there is virtually no information, training, or educational strategies provided to in-service or preservice teachers concerning this student population. Chute reported that Alisha Murdock, program director for Project WHAT, which partners with the San Francisco Unified School District to support students of incarcerated parents, reveals that more than 10 years ago when she was in sixth grade and her mother was incarcerated, she “skipped classes, fought with other students, got suspended and missed so much school she had to repeat the grade” (p. 7). Chute (2017) noted that Murdock stated that “no one at school reached out to help” and that “it would have made a difference if a teacher or someone else in the school had said, “Are you OK?,” “Do you want to talk?” “I know something has changed,” and I’m here if you want to talk,” but no one did (pp. 2-3).

Chute (2017) reported that Sybil Knight-Burney, Superintendent of the Harrisburg School District in Pennsylvania, when questioned about interventions in place for students affected by parental incarceration, stated, “If schools are not engaged, they soon will be

engaged,” because parental incarceration “is something that is impacting many of our homes” and “whatever is impacting outside our schools always finds its way inside” (p. 3). Additionally, the negative effects of parental incarceration can also impact the entire school system. Foster and Hagan (2015) found that the concentration of paternal incarceration in the school negatively impacted the educational attainment of all the students within the school.

At-Risk Students

Students affected by parental incarceration are often associated with one or more of the TEC 29.081 indicators identifying an at-risk student (Nichols et al., 2016). On May 30, 1995, the TEA, the governing body that oversees and establishes the educational system for the state of Texas, passed the TEC 29.081 (TEA, 2019). This was a regulation that consisted of 13 indicators to be used to identify students within the school system who were at risk for dropping out of school. Students were given the label of an at-risk student if they fell within the parameters of any one of the 13 indicators. For example, if a student is homeless, is in custody or care of the Department of Family and Protective Services, or has been expelled from school, they would meet the criteria of TEA regulations as being identified as an at-risk student (TEA, 2019). Parker and Griffith (2016) explained that an at-risk student is a term used in the United States to describe a student who requires temporary or ongoing intervention to succeed academically.

Moses (2010) explained that what makes students affected by parental incarceration different from others identified as at-risk is their cumulative risks. Moses noted that the parent's incarceration is likely to be one of a long list of adverse childhood experiences and environmental circumstances that have been deposited into a student's life. It was noted that students affected by parental incarceration experienced multiple suspensions, poor grades,

chronic absenteeism, and grade failure, all of which would identify them as at-risk students (Hairston, 2007).

Dotterer and Lowe (2015) noted that interventions for at-risk students “should not only address behaviors such as paying attention and time on task” but should also “address psychological engagement by incorporating strategies to improve feelings of belonging/support and competence, which are important for academic achievement” (p. 1658). Slade and Griffith (2013) reported that a whole child approach focuses attention on the social, emotional, mental, physical as well as cognitive development of a student. A whole child approach understands that children’s growth and development, including academic development, cannot be fully realized without providing a system of supports for their nonacademic needs (Slade & Griffith, 2013). Nichols et al. (2016) noted that children with incarcerated parents have poorer outcomes than other youth and that these findings indicate the importance of knowing who these youth are and then ensuring that they receive the services and support using the tools and knowledge that the school has for forging connectedness with this student.

Problems in School

Children and adolescents with an incarcerated parent have been identified as having a decrease in school performance and behavior, truancy, trauma-reactive behaviors, dysfunctional relationships, and stigmatization (Davis & Shlafer, 2017; Nichols et al., 2016; Wildeman et al., 2017). These identified problems associated with this population of students can significantly impact their development, social skills, and ability to learn and remain in school. Murray and Murray (2010) explained that the social isolation children experience because of their parent's incarceration may contribute to maladaptive and contumacious behaviors such as withdrawing

emotionally in school, truancy, pregnancy, drug abuse, diminished academic performance, and disruptive behavior.

Shlafer and Poehlman (2010) noted that teachers reported fighting, bullying, arguing, and defiance as common behaviors of this population of students at school. One teacher wrote, “He blows up and gets mad. He is defiant, smoking cigarettes and pot. He’s sexually active and stays out late running the streets,” and another wrote, “Interactions with peers and adults have been very problematic-rude, dangerous, poor attitude, uncooperative” (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010, p. 402). Additionally, Shlafer and Poehlmann reported teachers and caregivers of these students voiced concerns about the challenges observed about the friendships and peer relationships that they attempted to forge. These youths appeared needy, distrustful, sad, anxious, and moody, and these characteristics often interfered with friendships and the relationship-building capabilities of students affected by parental incarceration.

Cognitive and Developmental Problems

In Poehlmann’s (2005) study, children with an incarcerated parent (mother) had significantly lower Stanford-Binet IQ scores when compared to published norms. Parental incarceration has also been shown to affect life-course outcomes for children as they progress from adolescence into adulthood. Mears and Siennick (2016) identified the real and potentially harmful effects that parental incarceration exacts across the life span of those children affected by it. Mears and Siennick used propensity score matching (PSM) analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) and noted that parental incarceration produces adverse effects across multiple life domains. Among the domains negatively affected were mental health outcomes and the ability to develop and maintain intimate relationships.

Support Within the School System

Chute (2017) explained that “one of the challenges for schools is identifying the children” affected by parental incarceration “because no one is required to tell school officials that a parent has been jailed” and “families may not feel comfortable sharing the information” (p. 4). Eric Rossen (2011), a school psychologist and director of professional development standards at the National Association of School Psychologists, explained that in most cases, information about parental incarceration is not shared with the school due to shame and embarrassment or a lack of trust, or fear that the school will somehow treat the students differently or judge them. Rossen contended that “adolescents whose parents are incarcerated may feel significant shame and embarrassment, engage in risk-taking or criminal behavior, and be less likely to adhere to boundaries set within classrooms, the school, or the community at large” (p. 13).

One of the recommendations presented by Rossen (2011) to improve academics and the behavioral and social-emotional outcomes of these students was to foster school connectedness. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS; 2009) stated that “any student who is “different” from the social norm may have difficulty connecting with other students and adults in the school and may be more likely to feel unsafe” (p. 4). The USDHHS (2009) identified those at greater risk for feeling disconnected as “students with disabilities, students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or question their sexual orientation, students who are homeless, or any student who is chronically truant due to a variety of circumstances” (p. 4). Rossen (2011) explained that school connectedness could be established through relationship building, in particular, the student-teacher relationship.

Student–Teacher Relationships

The importance of student-teacher relations is a fundamental area of consideration. Kautz (2017) explained that when support cannot be obtained from the incarcerated parent, children will look elsewhere for the support they need, such as caregivers, peers, and teachers and that the student-teacher relationship is an integral component to a successful school experience and a positive academic outcome. Myers and Pianta (2008) explained that from the first day of school, students rely on teachers to provide understanding and support that will allow them to get the most out of their daily interactions in the classroom. Myers and Pianta found that of the students that had been identified for referral for special education or retention, despite predictions and their high-risk status, those that were not referred or retained were found to have had a more positive relationship with their teachers than their peers that were retained or referred. Myers and Pianta concluded that a positive student-teacher relationship serves as a model of student success and that students feel more secure in both their autonomous play and work because they know that if things get difficult or if they are upset, they can count on their teachers to recognize and respond to these problems.

Wang et al. (2010) performed a study that involved 677 middle school students. The study examined how adolescents' perceptions of school climate in sixth grade co-varied with the probability and frequency of their engagement in problem behaviors in seventh and eighth grade. The study measured four dimensions of the school climate as perceived by the students. The four dimensions studied were academic focus, discipline and order, peer relationships, and student-teacher relationships. The study suggested that students who perceived higher levels of school discipline and order or more positive student-teacher relationships were associated with lower probability and frequency of subsequent behavioral problems.

Teachers as Attachment Figures

Fowler et al. (2008) stated that with attachment theory, teachers might be viewed as attachment figures which understandably supports the importance of Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment about student behavior. In 1958, British Psychologist John Bowlby developed a theory of attachment and described this theory as behavior by the child as a mechanism of survival. Bowlby (1969) subsequently theorized that separation from a parent, especially a mother, is traumatic for children regardless of age. The child views this necessary attachment not only as a means of survival but also as a channel in which security and trust may be built.

In applying the theory to the links between stress coping failures and psychopathology, Bowlby (1979) proposed that in the fields of etiology and psychopathology, [attachment theory] can be used to frame specific hypotheses which relate different family experiences to different forms of psychiatric disorder and to the neurophysiological changes that accompany them. Bowlby (1969) argued that the initial attachment bond that develops between a child and their caregiver provides the child with a blueprint that carries over with the child into successive relationships, affects the behaviors exhibited within those relationships, and impacts the success or failure of those relationships.

Mary Ainsworth, a student of Bowlby's, further explored the role that the initial attachment pattern sets in motion with the experimental design known as the Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al., 1970). Ainsworth et al. defined attachment theory as a reciprocal relationship that develops gradually through stages of childhood, which is mediated by the quality, timing, and pacing of mother-child interactions. Subsequently, Ainsworth et al. (1978) concluded that these initial pattern sets that are developed, influence thinking, emotions, and the interacting with others that affect the way children negotiate their environments throughout development. An

important finding within Ainsworth et al.'s (1970) research was that when a disruption in an attachment relationship occurred or a disturbance in the attachment-formation process occurred, future attachments were either unusually difficult to form or distorted in quality. Disruptions in attachment relationships and disturbances in the attachment formation process occur for children when one or both of their caregivers are incarcerated.

Murray and Murray's (2010) study indicated that the children who lacked a secure relationship with their parent(s) were described as rejecting their peers, lacking self-confidence, and doubting their friendships, whereas those securely attached children related more positively to their peers, caregivers, and teachers. Miller (2002) claimed that children who had formed a positive attachment relationship with the incarcerated parent could react more optimistically to the incarceration. Dallaire (2007) suggested that a secure attachment relationship may serve as a protective factor against future maladaptive outcomes. Fowler et al. (2008) explained that when an attachment figure is absent, there is a need and subsequent quest to find one.

Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions Toward Students

Research examining how teacher perceptions and attitudes have affected educational outcomes is not new. Over 40 years ago, Taddeo (1977) reviewed the literature to examine the findings of studies addressing teacher attitudes, the value of teachers having desirable attitudes, and modifying undesirable attitudes. After examining studies that produced a range of findings, Taddeo surmised that teacher attitudes had a significant part in any attempt to measure educational outcomes. Various other research has also indicated a relationship between teachers' attitudes and educational outcomes (Goddard et al., 2000; Jacobs & Harvey, 2010; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008). Longitudinal studies support the self-fulfilling prophecy hypothesis that

teacher expectations and attitudes can predict changes in student achievement and behavior beyond effects accounted for by previous achievement and motivation (Kautz, 2017).

Teachers play an active role in the school context. Both qualitative and experimental work on their perceptions and attitudes toward children with incarcerated parents demonstrates how central and impactful this position can be for children's academic performance and feelings of belonging within an academic environment (Dallaire et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2016; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Dallaire et al. (2010) demonstrated that a teacher's knowledge of a parent's incarceration could lead to a lowering of educational expectations for the impacted child. In this experimental study conducted on elementary school teachers, Dallaire et al. examined differences in teachers' expectations of children's educational competencies based on their responses to hypothetical scenarios of a parent-child separation (e.g., prison, rehab, school, or away) that caused a new student to arrive in their classroom. Hypothetical children new to the class due to parental incarceration was rated by teachers as less behaviorally, academically, and socially competent than other students, suggesting that within schools, children of the incarcerated may be especially vulnerable to stigmatization due to the teacher's perceptions, beliefs, and general attitude toward them.

Training and Resources for School Faculty and Staff

U.S. policymakers, guided by the demands for standardization, and the desire to improve student achievement and decrease student drop-out rates, control how teachers are trained and educated (Hursh, 2008). Within Texas, the TEA and the State Board of Education (SBOE) oversee and regulate the training and educational requirements for its' teachers (TEA, 2019). TEA (2019) lists five requirements to become a certified teacher in the state of Texas. The first requirement is that individuals must earn a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or

university as the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) requires that candidates completing a Texas program must have a degree from a university that is accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The second requirement is that a candidate completes an approved educator preparation program, either an alternative certification program or a postbaccalaureate program. Steps three through five are that a candidate must pass the appropriate teacher certification exams, apply to be certified after all requirements are met, and all first-time applicants must be fingerprinted as part of a national criminal background check.

Several interventions have been suggested by numerous researchers to support the students involved with the incarceration of a parent. First and foremost, school staff as well as the community, family, and caregivers need to be educated on the impact incarceration of a parent can have on a student (Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Clopton & East, 2008; Dallaire, 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2005; Shlafer et al., 2017; Timmons, 2006). Providing books, articles, and pamphlets as a part of the school curriculum (Adalist-Estrin, 2006), developing support groups and providing access to therapists, counselors, and mentors (Timmons, 2006), and including incarcerated parents in teacher/parent conference calls or sending report cards to the prison (Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Shlafer et al., 2017) are among the suggested interventions within the literature reviewed.

Research findings support the classroom use of culturally relevant learning opportunities and teacher support as a protective factor for students experiencing parental incarceration. Brown and Mowry (2017) reported positive student outcomes when the teacher in their study shared Wittbold's (2003) book about parental incarceration with students and allowed the students to question and reflect on parental incarceration. Nichols et al. (2016) reported the importance of

knowing a student's family background aids in properly supporting that student and family and helps build a positive connection with the home and family.

Summary and Preview of Chapter 3

Parental incarceration involves more than just the incarcerated individual. It also may have extensive consequences for families. For minor school-aged children, it has been associated with a lack of school connectedness, which influences truancy, academic achievement, and lifetime educational attainment (Nichols et al., 2016). Wildeman et al. (2017) concluded that teachers' expectations of behavioral problems and poor behavioral competencies could be driven by paternal incarceration. Dallaire et al. (2010) noted the potential for negative repercussions of revealing parental incarceration status to certain teachers. Glaze (2010) noted that these students had been identified as a discrete classification, but they are not systematically identified within the school system.

Children spend a large percentage of their time at school. From the ecological theory perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the school serves as one of the most important microsystems for children. It is within school classrooms, which are managed and controlled by teachers, that activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations are experienced in a face-to-face setting by the developing child. What occurs within this specific microsystem either "invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 39).

Deci and Ryan (1985) reported many years ago that children who feel a sense of belonging and social support are more likely to be engaged and participate in school. Wang and Holcombe (2010) noted that the social and emotional environment of the classroom is important for students' engagement and achievement in school. Students will be more engaged when

classroom contexts meet their needs for relatedness, which is likely to occur in classrooms where teachers and peers create a caring and supportive environment.

Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology that will be used to perform this exploratory case study. The instruments used to collect data will be presented. Participants and demographic location planned for this study will be presented and discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Methods and Design

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions, insights, experiences, and educator practices with the population of students that have or have had a parent incarcerated. This qualitative exploratory case study was designed to examine the insights of, experiences with, and the resources and pedagogical practices teachers utilize within their classrooms when they encounter a student who has had a parent incarcerated. This study also explored teacher perceptions and insights into the quality of the communication processes and family relationship building processes, available school and community resources, educational opportunities and training, and the social and legislative issues regarding this population of students. The study intends to inform practice, assess professional development needs, and assist in bringing the importance of culturally responsive teaching to the attention of educators and administrators from the teacher's lens. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1. How do teachers perceive the influence of the microsystem for students of incarcerated parents in regard to their educational development?

RQ2. How do teachers apply the mesosystem to students whose parents are incarcerated?

RQ3. How do teachers perceive the influence of the resources within the exosystem in regard to the educational development of students whose parents are incarcerated?

RQ4. What barriers within the macrosystem do teachers feel they encounter in educating students whose parents are incarcerated?

This chapter provides details about the methodology and design for the study. The setting, the participants, and participant selection criteria are described. The reliability and trustworthiness, limitations and delimitations, and role of the researcher for the study are posed.

Materials, instruments, data collection, and analysis procedures will be outlined. Ethical considerations and a summary of Chapter 3 will be included.

Review of Research Focus and Processes

This study was bound as an exploratory case study as it only examined data within the context of one small, rural school district in Texas. Exploratory in the sense of probing into the world of a small rural district setting. The intention of choosing a case study design was to gain an understanding of what teachers see, feel, and think of the environment that surrounds them and those students that have experienced a parent in jail or prison. A qualitative approach was used, in the form of semistructured interviews, to discover perceptions that teachers have regarding the current socio-ecological environment surrounding those students experiencing parental incarceration.

As the interviews were performed, I also observed the participants and the surrounding environment. The demeanor of the interviewee and the physical appearance of the classroom were taken in and observed. The 10 participants were diverse as they represented a wide age range from mid-20s to mid-60s, were both male and female of various racial and ethnic backgrounds, and represented various disciplines within the school system.

Participants were volunteers recruited through the dissemination of the invitation email distributed through the school's email system. Recruitment also occurred through direct teacher invitation by me. Participant interviews were then scheduled at the convenience and availability of the participant. The research and its purpose were clearly explained to each participant. Consent forms were obtained from each participant. I audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews using the following protocol:

1. The interview questions were presented to two experienced individuals considered

experts in the subject matter of this research. Feedback and discussions were performed to ensure that the interview protocol was appropriate for this research.

2. To ensure the accuracy of the transcripts, the audio of the interviews was listened to numerous times and then transcribed.
3. The provisions of trustworthiness of the interviews were gained by discussing the transcribed interview data with each educator to ensure that what was heard and transcribed within the taped interview truly reflected what the educator wanted to convey.
4. Relying on Saldana (2013), first-level and second-level coding methods were utilized. In Vivo Coding, using words or phrases verbatim from the interview transcripts was used as a first level, or initial, coding method. To reflect the attitudes and perception of the participant's Values Coding was also used as a first cycle coding method. This method was used to highlight common words among the participants during the interview process that reflected both the underlying research questions and theoretical framework supporting this study. Second level coding was performed through the use of Pattern Coding. Pattern Coding provided a means to uncover overarching and common themes present within the data.
5. The interview questions were presented to two experienced individuals considered experts in the subject matter of this research. Feedback and discussions were performed to ensure that the interview protocol was appropriate for this research. In addition, field notes were utilized as an additional method of triangulation.

Methodology and Research Design

This research was performed utilizing a case study format within a small rural Texas school district. Yin (2018) noted that a case could be some event or entity other than a single

person. Hancock and Algozzine (2017) noted that researchers hope to gain an in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved when a case study design is used. By purposefully selecting a small rural school district as the case, the research intention was to facilitate an understanding of how teachers' experiences, insight, knowledge, resources, and understanding of parental incarceration may or may not influence their pedagogical stance within their classrooms and to explore what and how proximal processes unfold and influence teachers.

Yin (2018) defined an exploratory case study as a way that researchers may describe a phenomenon in its real-world context. The real-world context in this study was a small rural school district in Texas where interactions between the teacher and those students whose parent has been incarcerated occur. Stake (1995) defined case study research as "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi).

Yin (2014) suggested that the case study method may enable a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context and explained that case studies explore and investigate contemporary real-life experiences through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions. The suggestion noted by Yin regarding case study research is reflected in one of Stake's (1995) characteristics of case study research as being holistic. Stake stated that case study research could be holistic. It may consider the interrelationship between the phenomenon and its contexts. Research revealed that the case study design had been used across many disciplines, including law (Rosenthal, 2016), medicine (Kahi et al., 2018), sociology (Thorlindsson & Halldorsson, 2019), and education (Hodgson & McConnell, 2019). The inquiry for this study was how teachers' perceptions, experiences with, insight into available resources, and the ensuing contextual proximal processes influence their pedagogical practices toward those

students affected by parental incarceration. An exploratory case study format was appropriate for this study.

Qualitative Design

Creswell (2014) explained that in qualitative research, the data are collected at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study. The data are gathered by talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context. Since the data gathered for this research were retained by individual teachers, I observed behaviors, examined any available documents, and conducted face-to-face interviews with the teacher participants.

Merriam (1998) presented a qualitative research method that identified conducting a literature review, identifying a research problem, constructing a theoretical framework, developing research questions, and selecting a purposive sample. Merriam noted that purposeful sampling occurs before the data are gathered. This study was conducted as Merriam (1998) suggested with a purposeful sample selected.

Interviews

Semistructured, in-person interviews were scheduled with the participants. Interview questions were open-ended, and the interview process lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Interview questions are located within the case study protocol in Appendix B. Information was gathered directly from the participant, as first-hand information directly from a knowledgeable source within the described institution can add in-depth information and interpretive validity to the overarching question of the research (Merriam, 1998). I audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews.

After transcribing the interviews, coding was performed on each interview transcript. Creswell (2014) explained that coding is the process of organizing the data into chunks or

categories, identifying the relationships between the chunks of gathered data, and figuring out the core variables that emerge from the gathered data. Shared concepts and categories were labeled and similarly grouped. An inductive process was used between the categories and groups of interview data to establish themes and categories that comprehensively represent the various participant's insights and perceptions. Emerging categories were counted for frequency and merged to identify themes and processes. Coding data are presented in Appendix C. The coding matrix contains columns that illustrate the interconnectedness between the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the supporting qualitative data that supported categories and themes that emerged from data analysis.

Instruments

A case study protocol was used to conduct this qualitative research and is available in Appendix B. Yin (2014) described four sections of a case study protocol that may be used: an overview of the study, data collection procedures, data collection questions, and a guide for the resulting report (Yin, 2014). Together, these four sections ensure the researcher maintains the scope of the study (Yin, 2014). Case study questions, according to Yin (2018), should be composed of how and why questions. Research questions developed for this study were designed to explore the how and why of the phenomenon proposed to be studied, as reflected in Appendix B.

Population and Setting

The student population of the entire school district was comprised of less than 300 students within the grades of kindergarten through grade 12. There were 23 teachers employed within the district. The population of the town in which this school is located was approximately 800. The location was in a rural area of central Texas located in Double X County (pseudonym).

In 2018, the voters of Double X County approved the issuance of \$18.75 million in bonds to build a new law enforcement center and jail. The county has a yearly arrest rate of over 4,800 and the average jail rate of 26 incarcerations per day. In addition, the Sheriff of Double X County noted that the current Double X County jail facility is often over capacity requiring up to 25 inmates per day to be housed in jails from surrounding counties.

Bordering Double X County is Triple X County (pseudonym). The city of Y (pseudonym) is located in Triple X County. Y is home to several prisons and state jails for women operated by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. One of the facilities has the state's death row unit for women. It also is home to a large male prison unit and a state jail. Over 9,000 inmates are housed within 50 miles of the school in which this study will be performed (Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2019).

Sample

Participation in the research was voluntary. Purposive and convenience sampling were used. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) noted that purposive sampling involves the identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are embedded within the phenomenon of interest of the study. Convenience sampling is a kind of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling in which members of the target population are selected for the purpose of the study if they meet certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer (Maxwell, 1992). The geographic location and the willingness of the superintendent to allow me into the school district were the rationale for choosing purposive and convenience sampling.

Teachers employed by the selected school district who have had a student involved in parental incarceration were eligible to participate in the study. The first 10 teachers who

responded and met the requirements of participants were selected. Notifications about the research were distributed through the school district's email system. All teachers employed within the school were contacted through email to invite them to participate and inform them of the study's purpose and requirements for participation. Through the research instrument, they also were informed of the steps I followed to meet all ethical considerations and guidelines. A consent form was signed and obtained from each participant. The rationale for choosing this population, setting, and the sample was based on the lack of research studies that examined teachers' experiences with students affected by parental incarceration in a small rural Texas school district.

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness and Reliability

Precautions and strategies were taken to ensure that data were carefully analyzed. Creswell (2014) noted that one way to add validity and trustworthiness to a study is triangulation data. Triangulation of data is the process of examining each data source and building themes based upon the convergence of the different data sources (Creswell, 2014). Each data source in this study was triangulated, which is common when performing a research study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017).

Yin (2018) presented case study research as a triangulated research strategy and contended that the need for triangulation arises from the need to confirm the validity of the case study research. Within this research, study data were gathered through interviews, field notes, examination of the after-school program documents, and observation. Member checking was performed during and after the interview process. Creswell (2014) explained that member checking is a way to ensure the accuracy of qualitative findings. According to Roberts (2010), member checking involves study participants reviewing the data findings, validating the

interpretation, and ensuring the researcher has captured an accurate account of their views and experiences. To enhance validity, I used participants' narrative descriptions to convey the findings and offered each of the educator participants perspectives regarding the ecological and social environments within the district, the community, and the larger macrosystem environment. In this case, the qualitative findings were gathered through interviews. After each interview, each interviewed study participant was provided an opportunity to comment on and confirm that the findings reflect their personal insights.

I self-reflected on my own possible bias. Creswell (2014) noted that this self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers. Interpretation of data contains comments from the researcher that may reveal how the researcher's background may shape the interpretation of the data. All strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the study were a vital component of conducting this study.

Assumptions

Ary et al. (2009) defined an assumption as a belief that forms one of the bases for the research. This belief is not to be tested or supported with empirical data. An assumption is described as something that you accept as true without question or proof. Three assumptions were made about conducting this study. First, I assumed and trusted that participants would answer interview questions truthfully. This assumption was made because I ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. Second, I assumed that within the school district, there would be teachers that have served students that have had or have had a parent incarcerated. This assumption is made because I have served students with incarcerated parents within a school district located in central Texas. Thirdly I assumed that participants would trust me. This assumption was made because the participants were informed that participation is

strictly voluntary, member checking will be utilized, and they may choose to exit the study at any time.

Limitations

Roberts (2010) defined a study limitation as any particular features of your study that you know may negatively affect your ability to generalize the study's findings. One limitation within this study was the participants' self-reported perceptions of their experiences. A second limitation was that the setting of the study limited its generalizability but also allowed me to perform a study that had not been previously performed in a small rural school district in this area. A second limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred during the gathering of data for this study. Shortly after this study began, the school closed for a period of time, and when it reopened, visitors were limited.

Delimitations

Roberts (2010) defined study delimitations as "the boundaries of the study" and "are under the control of the researcher" (p. 138). One delimitation was the setting, which is a small, rural school district located in central Texas. A second delimitation was the possibility of a small sample size. The third delimitation was that only teachers that have or have had a student that has experienced parental incarceration were eligible to participate in the study.

Role of the Researcher

I self-reflected on my own possible bias. Creswell (2014) noted that this self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers. Interpretation of data will contain comments from me that may reveal how my background may shape the interpretation of the data. As previously stated, all strategies to ensure the study's trustworthiness were a vital component of conducting this study. My role within this study was to present the

study in a manner that is professional and considerate of everyone involved in the research. I researched in a timely manner that adhered to the research agenda. I also ensured that steps were taken that eliminated bias from data collection and analysis, and those findings were interpreted in a manner that removes any concerns related to such.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were given top priority during data collection. Creswell (2014) explained that respect for the site, respect for participants, avoiding deception and exploitation of participants, respect for potential power imbalances, and avoiding collecting harmful information are considerations for any research study. All of these considerations were employed within this research study. A letter of consent was obtained from the district's superintendent to conduct the study, and IRB approval was obtained. IRB approval letter may be viewed in Appendix A.

Per federal regulations about human research and the institutional review board rules, all studies that were previously approved by expedited or full board review must be inactivated upon completion of the study and records stored by the investigator for at least three years. All of the records and data of this research study abided by these regulations.

Summary and Preview of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5

Chapter 3 presented the design and research methods for the study, the population and sample, materials and instruments that were used, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 provides the study results. The study's findings are discussed, relevant tables and figures are presented, and the quality control measures that were implemented and used are presented. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 4: Results

The intention of this study was to explore, within a small, rural central Texas school district, teachers' perceptions, insights, experiences, and teaching practices with the population of students that have or have had a parent incarcerated. The application of Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory allowed me to explore the teacher's perceptions, experiences, and insights within the context of their classrooms, the school, and the broader community as they are tasked with serving this population of students. Using the interview protocol, observing teacher demeanor, school climate, and pertinent documents allowed me to develop and present a more holistic view of the teacher's perceptions, experiences, and practices when parental incarceration is present within the environment.

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of the data analysis of the 10 teacher interviews that were performed. This chapter is organized as follows: introduction and restatement of the purpose of the study, research process, data analysis and resultant themes, and the summary of the findings. In this chapter, I report on the themes and insights that emerged from the interviews and observations and discuss how this data relates to the research questions.

Presentation of the Findings

There was a total of 23 teachers within the district during the 2020 Spring term. All data were collected during the 2020 Spring term. The district was comprised of one school, with a total enrollment of 282 students. Due to the small size of this campus and the ease of identifying the participants, measures were taken to protect the identity of the participants. The ages of the participants, the subject, and the grade levels they teach are not identified to protect their identities. Participants were identified as Educator 1 through 10 and denoted as E1, E2, E3, and so on.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do teachers perceive the influence of the microsystem for students of incarcerated parents in regard to their educational development? To answer this question, teachers were asked how they accommodated this population of students within the classroom/school and their thoughts on the school's responsibility and their own personal responsibility toward this population of students. They were asked about their personal knowledge about the home environments and community in which the student lived. It was vitally important to explore the individual perceptions of the teachers for this study as Bronfenbrenner (1979) stressed the importance of perceptions an individual has toward their microsystems, rather than the objective truth of their microsystems because it is within the microsystem that the individual seeks safety, relationships, and consistency. The coding matrix for each research question (RQ) is presented in Appendix C. Appendix C illustrates the interconnectedness of the research question to the theoretical framework, the emergent themes that reflected the teacher's responses to interview questions, and the support for the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data.

Emerging Themes

The two themes that emerged from the teacher interviews for RQ1 were: Supportive and Understanding.

Theme 1: Supportive

Each of the 10 participants interviewed indicated that they perceived their classroom and the school as supportive and perceived student support as critical to student success. The perception of support within the classroom and within the school was noted to center around establishing a watchful, mentorship type of relationship with students. E10 explained that all

teachers focus on building trustful relationships with all students, but when parental incarceration is involved, an extra watchful eye is focused on those students with an incarcerated parent. E9 describes watching them a little closer while E5 said that when they knew that parental incarceration was involved, they would check on them a little closer. E5 stated:

We try to build trust with them, and of course, with all of our students, but especially these ones. (Those with an incarcerated parent). I do not teach them any differently or change any of the curriculum up for them, but I do believe that everyone of us teachers here keep an extra eye out for these students just because we know how easily they can backslide. We know that most of the time a parent going to jail is a very emotional thing. So, I would say that I am watching out for any emotional or psychological problems they may be having when they are in my classroom and for that matter within the school.

E9 mentioned the following:

If I know that a student has a parent in jail, I guess I do watch them a little closer for any signs of perhaps sadness or depression or maybe defiance due to maybe anger issues they have toward the incarceration or the parent.

E5 said:

I was aware of the incarceration, and I guess I was checking on them. I didn't bring it up, but they would sometimes. If they brought something up about it or wanted to talk about it, I would talk to them, support them.

E 6, when asked if there was anything that she would like to add to the interview declared:

I will have to say that this little school, and the employees here, work together for the good of the students. If we see that a student needs help, we all do the very best to help. I guess it is like that saying it takes a village to raise a child.

In half of the interview transcripts ($n = 5$), teachers commented on the importance of multiple people lending support to this population of students. These educators believed that it was also the responsibility of the school to support its students. E8, speaking about those students with a parent in jail, said that these particular students need multiple people to be positive with them. Furthermore, this educator believed that it was not just the teacher's responsibility but also the responsibility of the school to touch base with them every day (i.e., school-wide support).

Eight of the educators mentioned the after-school program that was available at the school. It was noted that many of the students, and in particular those residing in single-parent homes, attended this support program. E1 stated:

Here at the school, Monday thru Thursday, we offer an after-school program, where the kids are given a snack and are offered help with their homework. They also have a time where they are able to interact with art and robotics.

This educator repeated what others had stated in their interviews, that many of the parents, and especially the single parents, are working when school is adjourned for the day. The after-school program not only offers help with academics, but it also serves, as E1 remarked, as “a daycare after school.” The educators that mentioned the after-school program did perceive the program as having more than just an academic stance. Many noted that the majority of the elementary students attended this program and that if it were not for the program, the majority of the students would be left to run the streets or left without any adult supervision. One educator

mentioned that the school was open in the morning just before seven so that parents could drop off their children, not only for extra help with their schoolwork but also to give them a place to be before school started. This program was perceived as support for both the students and the parents.

I was curious about this program and was permitted to view documents about it. Documents reflected that this program was possible through a 4-year grant program that the school had received. The program director stated that they planned to reapply for the grant and were hoping that more grant money would be available. According to the program director, besides herself, the program does employ four other individuals from within the community. She stated that in this small rural community, there were no daycare centers or programs available to assist with child-care or supervision and that there were not any places available for even the older teenage kids to hang out at. This statement was reiterated during the interview of E9 when they mentioned:

The community here, you saw it, there is not really much here for kids to do, there are no theaters, no skating rinks, or bowling alleys or anything like that, outside of school or some type of school activity. There are things 20–40 miles from here that they could enjoy, but here we don't even have a public library.

During an interview with one teacher, resources and programs within the area for this population of students was discussed. This teacher stated:

Well, the lack of support is disheartening because there are no official support programs around this area. We here at the school know that, and we all make a concerted effort to keep up with our students and get to know each of them on a personal level, so that if something is wrong, we recognize it. That is a plus to being in such a small school

district, we get to know the students very well, therefore we are able to recognize if something is amiss and we can lend the proper support.

Three of the participants interviewed divulged duplicate information involving a specific student that experienced more than one incarceration occurrence of the household's maternal figure.

During the interview process, each of these participants reiterated the emotional and economic difficulties that occurred in this case. One of these educators spoke about the emotional needs of the student and how emotional needs have to be addressed to obtain academic success. This educator stated that referrals to the school counselor were frequent but that the school counselor, in their opinion, was not qualified to provide the proper therapy that this specific population of students needs.

Theme 2: Understanding

Throughout the interview process, educator perceptions indicated that the ability to view themselves from the perspective of their students was present. E1 exhibited this position when they stated:

I led a very sheltered life. I had one set of parents, when I came home from school, we had food on the table. I never thought or felt like we were going to lose our home. Never had the police coming and knocking on the door looking for somebody. I never experienced a lot of the things that this population of kids have experienced.

This educator also understood that being a child within this type of home environment may have life-long consequences for the child, as this scenario shared by the educator indicates:

We have had kids that have found it very hard to escape the environment that they were raised in. One student I remember, we talked and talked and tried to help him and the kid dropped out of school and said he was going to be homeschooled by his mom. The next

thing we know he is in jail for stealing a car. He got out of jail and came up here to a ballgame and told some people what he had done. He got out of jail, stole another car, went back to jail and God only knows where he is now.

Half of the participants ($N = 10$) spoke of the low socio-economic status (SES) within the households, particularly after incarceration. Educators 1, 3, and 10 mentioned that the lack of financial resources in the majority of the homes experiencing parental incarceration there were no telephones or internet, which greatly hindered communication between the school and the home and left educators dependent on written communication between these two entities. E10 said that the notes and letters they had sent to the home were rarely answered.

Each of these participants stated that they understood that in most of the households where incarceration had occurred that the home environment was generally chaotic. E10 noted that when incarceration occurs within a household that: “Many times, the incarceration is over drugs or alcohol, so the things that go along with drugs and alcohol, like fighting and erratic behavior, are present.”

E3 shared insight that not every household where incarceration had occurred was chaotic that sometimes the household appears normal. This educator went on to say that they felt like educators needed to have information about the challenges and processes that may occur before, during, and after incarceration, in particular from the student’s point of view.

Three of the educators mentioned the emotional and psychological toll that incarceration had on some of the students they had encountered included academic failure, truancy, the unavailability of the residential parent, and at times, anti-social behaviors exhibited by the affected students. E6 shared that understanding, or at least trying to understand the psychological and emotional issues that go along with having a parent in prison, has raised the educators'

awareness to be more diligent in watching this specific population of students. E8 spoke of a student that experienced the incarceration of their mother and noted the following:

The child, probably the day after he found out she was going down, there was a little encave at the school, and he would go there and just sit there. He didn't interact with his peers and several of us would go and talk to him. It was very important that someone talk and support him, understand.

E9 expressed the sentiment that every one of the teachers and staff at the school realizes that a family member being incarcerated can be a very emotional event. This educator stated that everyone is aware of keeping a watchful eye out for those affected by this type of event.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do teachers apply the mesosystem to students whose parents are incarcerated? The mesosystem, as explained by Bronfenbrenner (1979), is the connections and interactions taking place between two or more settings that are surrounding the developing person. It is these processes that occur between systems that may affect the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These processes that occur can have a negative or positive effect on individuals. For this study, the identified proximal processes are reported as either positive or negative.

Positive Proximal Processes

E5 presented a proximal process that occurred between the church and themselves. The educator explained:

Last Christmas at my church we worked with the Angel Tree outreach program.

Our group there at the church supported a child here at school who had a mother incarcerated that had signed up through the program. Our church adopted that student. I

knew that student from the after-school program here, not because I had her in class. I said I wanted to help with that. It was wonderful. Then the little girl came back so excited that she had received gifts from her mom!

E10 commented that within the community, there were a couple of churches that did participate in the Angel Tree program.

The Angel Tree program is part of a Christian prison fellowship network. According to the Prison Fellowship (2021) website, this program “believes that a restorative approach to prisoners, former prisoners, and all those affected by crime and incarceration can make communities safer and healthier.” They are a ministry that is “founded on the conviction that all people are created in God's image and that no life is beyond God's reach.” This program is a Christian program that believes that Jesus — Himself brought to trial, executed, buried, and brought to life again — offers hope, healing, and a new purpose for each life (Prison Fellowship, 2021). This ministry sponsors children of the incarcerated and their families. Angel Tree is among its numerous outreach programs.

Educators 1, 5, 7, and 10 all perceived the after-school program as producing positive proximal processes for the student. Educator 1 explained that this program not only supported students academically but also assisted in giving students a safe, adult-supervised setting until parents or caregivers were home from work to care for these students.

E1 revealed a positive proximal process that operates between a student's parent and school employees. E1 stated that one of the mothers of a student with an incarcerated father prepares a variety of Hispanic foods and that many employees of the school order and buy from her. This, the educator stated, “supplements the student's household income” and “employees get to enjoy delicious food.”

Educators 1 and 6 identified another positive proximal process when they detailed the scenario of the school nurse and the collection of monetary donations within the community to purchase clothing or shoes for students when the need arises. E1 stated that “within their knowledge,” most of those in need of clothing or shoes were often those residing in a single-parent, single-income household. E2 also revealed a positive proximal process when they stated that within the community, there had been good parental involvement with the school. The parents of the students attended school functions and supported the school very well.

Negative Proximal Processes

Every participant ($N = 10$) expressed disdain that besides school activities, there was very little for kids to do in this community. Educator 10 said:

The community here, you saw it, there is really not much here for kids to do, there are no theaters or skating rinks or bowling alleys or anything like that, outside of school or some type of school activity. There are things 20 or 40 miles away from here they could enjoy, but here we don't even have a public library.

Educators 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, and 10 perceived limited resources and money within the area as the primary reason for the absence of community activities. E1 explained that, like many other school districts, this school district is very low on funds and many teacher contracts were based on the needs of the school and available school resources. E3 said that the lack of both money and resources is a challenge here in the district. Lack of resources and money within district households was noted by Educators 1, 6, and 10. E1 stated that many of the households within the district were at or below the set poverty level for this area, while Educators 6 and 10 articulated low SES within the households as the family having “limited financial resources” and or being “low income.”

Educators 1, 2, 9, and 10 mentioned substance abuse within the community and district student households. Educators 9 and 10 stated that within the area, substance abuse was usually why the incarceration occurred. Educators 1 and 2 reported that there were drug houses within the community. Educator 1 said that some of the drug houses in the area had been shut down by the police, but the underlying drug problem remains.

E2 stated that demographics in this area as a factor in low student motivation and irresponsibility. Educators 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 mentioned the demographic of single-parent households within the district. Educator 1 stated that “within their knowledge,” most of those students needing assistance with their deficiency needs were often those residing in a single-parent, single-income household. Those same five educators also answered interview questions in feminine gender expression about these single-parent households.

Research Question 3

How do teachers perceive the influence of the resources within the exosystem in regard to the educational development of students whose parents are incarcerated?

Influence of Resources Within the Exosystem

Educator participants perceived five resources within the exosystem that had an impact on their students that experienced parental incarceration.

After School Program

Educators 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10 addressed the After-School program. Educators 1 and 7 described the After School program as supportive and helping. Educator 1 specified that the program supports education. The After School program was portrayed by Educators 1, 3, and 10 as an after-school daycare. Educators 1, 3, and 7 stated that this program was particularly helpful for those students in elementary school due to the after-school adult supervision provided by the

program. E1 explained that without the program, students would be on the streets or without adult home supervision.

Texas Department of Health and Human Services

Educators 3 and 6 spoke about the services provided through the state's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Both educators identified the student's receiving services from DHHS as having a parent incarcerated. E3 described a scenario of a student having academic and psychological issues related to incarceration. In this case, the school counselor could secure the student some outside-of-school counseling through DHHS. E6 commented that DHHS also provided such things as food stamps and welfare to families within the district.

Angel Tree Program

Educators 5 and 10 talked about the Angel Tree outreach program for those children experiencing parental incarceration. E10 stated that there were a couple of churches in the community that participated in the program. E5 presented a narrative about how the church they attended participated in this program and sponsored a student experiencing maternal incarceration. This educator describes the student's excitement after receiving Christmas presents from her incarcerated mother and how wonderful that experience was for her as well as the student.

Legislation

Regarding parental incarceration and those students affected by it, Educators 6, 7, 9, and 10 referenced the lack of policies and laws enacted by legislatures and the entities that control these processes. Educators 6 and 9 stated that nothing would change for this population of students unless some type of legislation is put in place for them. Both of these educators specified the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) and the Texas Educational Agency (TEA)

as entities that regulate and control the standards, rules, and regulations that the state educational system must uphold. E9 explained that until legislation is changed for this specific group of students, nothing will change. E9 elaborated on the deployment programs that are available within some schools for military-connected families and students. Within prior school districts that this educator worked for, student absences related to predeployment, deployment, and postdeployment activities of a parent were often excused.

Educational Training and Professional Development

All participants ($N = 10$) stated that they had no training, preservice or in-service, regarding parental incarceration and those students experiencing it. Each of these participants stated they felt there should be some type of education offered specifically for this population of students. E9, about educator training, stated: “I have a particular philosophy when it comes to teacher training, I think we undertrain them for what they are going to experience in the classroom.”

This educator exclaimed those teachers “absolutely” should be trained about parental incarceration. E10 expressed bewilderment about the absence of education they had received about parental incarceration and those students experiencing it in my classroom.

Wonder why they don’t teach us something about them while we are in college or our teacher training programs or even as a teacher? Especially a new teacher, they need to give some kind of blurb about these students, that way at least we could kind of know how it could affect them.

This educator added that even though these students are in the classroom, education about them is absent. Educators 2, 3, and 9 divulged that they had received education on students with mental health needs, behavioral issues, and medical requirements. Each of these educators

acknowledged the importance of addressing those needs in striving for student academic success. E3 said receiving education about the incarceration process from the affected student's point of view would be helpful.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 (RQ4): What barriers within the macrosystem do teachers feel they encounter in educating students whose parents are incarcerated? Bronfenbrenner (1989) explained that it is the belief systems, patterns of social interchange, knowledge, resources, and customs that are embedded within the macrosystem of a given society that determines how the micro, meso, and exo systems of a given society are interconnected and organized. The macrosystem is the culture or society that frames and influences the relationship of the systems.

Stigma

All 10 of the participants in this study acknowledged that they had each taught students experiencing or had experienced parental incarceration. E7 said that within this culture, incarceration was accepted because it is so common. E10 had the opposite view about acceptance of incarceration within society when they said that the students entangled in parental incarceration are often looked down on by society and that the incarceration often leads to opinion-forming about the student. E9 spoke about the behaviors exhibited by students when he compared parental loss due to deployment parent and parental loss due to incarceration. Those with parents deployed are open and proud about the location of the absent parent, whereas those students with absent parent's secondary to incarceration will try to hide the reason their parent is absent. This educator believed that hiding the incarceration was due to shame and guilt experienced by the student.

Kids that have a parent that are deployed are not trying to hide it, they are proud that their parent is defending our freedom. The kids that have a parent in jail have shame and guilt and will try and hide it a lot of times.

E9 explained that for those students residing in military households, there are predeployment programs, deployment programs, and debriefing programs available through a joint initiative between the Department of Defense (DOD) and the TEA. This educator went on to say that for those students left behind when a parent is incarcerated, there are no TEA requirements. The legislation was specifically mentioned by Educators 6, 7, and 9. They agreed that until legislation was changed and the funds were available to support those changes, nothing would change for these particular students.

Lack of Formal Educational Training and Professional Development

Each of the educators interviewed ($N = 10$) reported that they had received no formal training, both as preservice teachers and as in-service teachers, about parental incarceration. Each of these educators stated they felt that information gained through their own education would be beneficial. Educators 6 and 9 stated that the SBOE and the TEA should require all educators to receive training about parental incarceration. E9 explained that in the large urban areas where he taught, the population of students with a parent in jail was challenging because most of these students were at-risk students. Educator 6 reiterated this point when they explained that every student they had taught with an incarcerated parent was identified as an “at-risk student for one reason or another.” E9 added that in his experiences, some were gang members that “have very little regard for schools or education.”

Cultural Beliefs

Educators 1, 2, 3, and 4 presented four separate parental incarceration cases within the district. Each of the cases presented actions that reinforced the cultural belief that education is important. Educator 1 indicated that some of the families residing in the district came to the United States because of the educational opportunities afforded their children here. The belief in the importance of education was exhibited in parental actions that were described by this group of Educators as “overbearing,” “very involved,” and “pushy.”

Summary

This chapter began with the presentation of the purpose of the study, the research questions, and a summary of the research processes. Analysis of research data was presented. Isolated themes identified positive and negative proximal processes, educators’ perceptions of both negative and positive influences on the socio-ecological environment, and the barriers these educators identified as hindering their profession in educating this population of students are divulged. Chapter 5 presents a further discussion of the findings about past literature followed by the limitations of this research, the recommendations for future research and practice, and the conclusions of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Concluding Remarks

The purpose of performing this study was to examine the perceptions of, insights of, experiences with, and the resources and teaching practices utilized by teachers within their classrooms, the school, and the broader community when they encounter a student who has or has had a parent incarcerated. The intentions of the study are to inform practice, assess professional development needs, and assist in bringing the importance of culturally responsive teaching to the attention of educators and administrators.

This chapter provides a further discussion of the findings of past literature and theoretical framework. The limitations of this research, the implications for practice, the recommendations for future research, and the conclusions derived from this study are presented. The research question findings are discussed individually as they relate to the past literature and the theoretical framework.

The increase in the United States prison population has precipitated a record number of children in the school system with incarcerated parents. Consequences of this trend have recently been given significant attention by researchers since these children often exhibit a range of problematical and maladaptive behaviors (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Shlafer et al., 2017; Wildeman et al., 2017). The strain to define and make sense of an absent parent due to incarceration is a unique situation that this population of students often experience. Moses (2010) explained that what made this population of students different from other students is their cumulative risks (e.g., the incarceration of the parent is likely to be one of a long list of negative experiences and undesirable environmental circumstances that have been deposited into the child's life-experiences account).

There was a lack of research regarding the perceptions, experiences, training, or teaching practices utilized by teachers within Texas when they are tasked with working with and teaching a student experiencing parental incarceration within the context of their classroom, the school, and the broader community. The application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory allowed me to explore the teacher's perceptions, experiences, and insights within the context of their classrooms, the school, and the broader community as they are tasked with serving this population of students. Using the interview protocol, observing teacher demeanor, school climate, and pertinent documents allowed me to develop and present a more holistic view of the teacher's perceptions, experiences, and practices when parental incarceration is present within the environment.

This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions, insights, experiences, and educator practices with the population of students who have had a parent incarcerated. The application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory allowed me to explore the teacher's perceptions, experiences, and insights within the context of their classrooms, the school, and the broader community as they are tasked with serving this population of students.

This study was bound as an exploratory case study as it only examined data within the context of one small, rural school district in Texas. Exploratory in the sense of probing into the world of a small rural district setting. The intention of choosing a case study design was to gain an understanding of what teachers see, feel, and think of the environment that surrounds them and those students that have experienced a parent in jail or prison. A qualitative approach was used, in the form of semistructured interviews, to discover perceptions that teachers have regarding the current socio-ecological environment surrounding those students experiencing parental incarceration.

Results of Individual Research Questions

Presented here is a summary of the results for each research question. A more detailed discussion of each research question result is also presented.

Research Question 1

How do teachers perceive the influence of the microsystem for students of incarcerated parents in regard to their educational development?

Teacher participants in this study perceived their classrooms and the school as:

- Supportive
- Understanding

Research Question 2

How do teachers apply the mesosystem to students whose parents are incarcerated?

Teacher participants identified both positive and negative proximal processes being applied within the environment for these students. The interactions between various systems that produced positive applications were:

- After-School program
- Angel Tree program
- Faculty monetary support

Negative applications were identified by teacher participants were:

- Lack of industry in the community
- Lack of school funds and budget restraints
- Demographics
- Drug abuse and drug houses in the area.

Research Question 3

How do teachers perceive the influence of the resources within the exosystem in regard to the educational development of students whose parents are incarcerated?

Teacher participants perceived four resources within the exosystem that had an impact on their students that experienced parental incarceration. They were:

- After-School Program
- Texas Department of Health and Human Services
- Angel Tree Program
- Legislative Policies

Research Question 4

What barriers within the macrosystem do teachers feel they encounter in educating students whose parents are incarcerated?

Teacher participants felt that they encountered the following barriers:

- Stigma
- Lack of formal education and professional development
- Cultural Beliefs

Discussion of Research Findings in Relation to Past Literature and Theoretical Framework

Research Question 1

How do teachers perceive the influence of the microsystem for students of incarcerated parents in regard to their educational development?

This research question explored individual educator perceptions into the microsystems operating within their classrooms and the school. The microsystem is the immediate setting that surrounds an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An individual's home, school, church, and peer

group are within this system. In the ecological system theory (EST) that framed this study, Bronfenbrenner stressed the importance of the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that it is within the microsystem that proximal processes operate to produce and sustain development, but the extent of this system to promote development is dependent on the content and structure of the macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1999) explained that the microsystem occurs in a face-to-face setting and consists of the interactions, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by the developing person. Two emergent themes were identified after analyzing the interview data regarding educator perceptions of their available microsystems. Educators perceived themselves, their classrooms, and the school as being supportive and understanding of students with an incarcerated parent.

Theme 1: Supportive

All participants in this study perceived the microsystem operating within their classrooms and the school as supportive of these youth. When parental incarceration was involved, participants spoke about how they would find themselves being more watchful of those students experiencing it than for those students not experiencing it. Educators mentioned that past experiences with those students with a parent in jail had taught them that besides academics, watching out for any physical, emotional, and psychological needs was usually required.

The teachers interviewed were utilizing a whole child approach as defined by Slade and Griffith (2013). Slade and Griffith reported that a whole child approach is an understanding that children's growth and development, including academic development, cannot be fully realized without providing a system of supports for their nonacademic needs. Nonacademic needs were identified by Slade and Griffith as encompassing the psychological and social aspects of the developing person.

It was noted by the educator participants in this study that working in such a small district enabled them to put forth a concerted effort to keep abreast of each student, both on an academic and a personal level. Nichols et al. (2016) reported that small school size positively affects academic outcomes. Educators felt that recognizing that something was amiss with this specific population of students was critical because of how quickly and easily they had witnessed them backslide, both socially and academically. Nichols et al.'s study reported the importance of knowing about the parent's incarceration and using that knowledge to forge connectedness and support for those affected by the incarceration of a household head.

Study participants stated that some of these students are negatively impacted by the loss of connection with the incarcerated parent. At times these educator participants had witnessed truancy, social withdrawal, and self-isolation in these students. Nichols et al. (2016) emphasized that parental disconnections and disconnections from the school environment contribute to truancy and lifetime educational attainment. Johnson (2008) found positive outcomes in academics, behavior, and social-emotional well-being in those students that felt connected to caring adults within the school. Ninety percent of the educator participants ($N = 10$) spoke about the forging of a responsive, supportive type of mentorship with students. It was stressed by these educators that this specific population of students is sometimes trying to fill a void left by the absent parent.

In supporting those students dealing with parental incarceration, the educators interviewed highlighted the importance of letting the student know that they were available if the student felt like talking about anything that may be troubling them. Careful consideration was expressed by the majority of the educators in mentioning anything about the incarceration of a student's parent to any students; however, they did discuss the status of the student with other

teachers and administrators in light of the welfare of the student. Wang and Holcombe (2010) noted that the social and emotional environment of the classroom and school is important for students' engagement and achievement in school. Students will be more engaged when classroom contexts meet their needs for relatedness, which is likely to occur in classrooms where teachers and peers create a caring and supportive environment.

Theme 2: Understanding

During interviews, nine of the 10 educator participants viewed the incarceration of a parent from the perspective of their students. The uncertainty of a safe home environment, the stress of the loss of the incarcerated parent, the stress of not having adequate clothes, shoes, or school supplies were all things mentioned that are generally present in the majority of the students they had served with a parent in jail. E1 spoke about how within the childhood home. E1 had grown up in one set of parents, daily regimented family meals, and was not worried about their family being homeless or the police knocking on their door looking for a household member or arresting a parent. In addition, there were no worries or stress related to prison visitations or parole hearings within this educator's home life, nor was it present in any of the interviewee's childhood homes. Phillips and Zhao (2010) highlighted the nightmares, flashbacks, and traumatic stress experienced by some children that witnessed police activities within their homes. Though the educators in this research had never experienced the life events associated with parental incarceration, they each had a sense of understanding of the turmoil that often accompanies the incarceration of their students.

Economic status was a subject that half ($n = 5$) of the interviewees mentioned spiraled downward after incarceration had occurred in the homes of their students. Loss of household income and economic instability was also reported by Davis and Shlafer (2017), Murray et al.

(2012), and Nichols et al. (2016) in their research on parental incarceration. Half of the educators interviewed for this study ($N = 10$) spoke about the decline in household income after parental incarceration. These participants stated that the lack of resources to purchase internet services and/or telephone services and the work-related unavailability of the remaining parent within the homes of these students often hindered communication between the home and the school. These educators spoke of breaching the barriers in any communication gaps through written communication sent to the home in English and Spanish and, on occasion, an interpreter. It was understood by educators that keeping the utilities on and the rent paid was about all most of these households could afford.

All of the educators ($N = 10$) mentioned that parental incarceration was frequently associated with stigma within society and shame and guilt within those students experiencing it. The association between incarceration and stigma is certainly present in the prior research literature (Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Dallaire et al., 2010; Young & Smith, 2000). Understanding that incarceration is often linked to stigma, shame, and guilt precipitated educators in this district to avoid initiating student/educator conversations about the incarceration unless the conversation was initiated by the student themselves.

Research Question 2

How do teachers apply the mesosystem to students whose parents are incarcerated?

Bronfenbrenner (1979) presented the mesosystem as the interactions and processes between two or more microsystems that affect the developing person. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that the developing person might also be affected by the interactions between two systems which they are not situated within but may produce proximal

processes that affect their environment. The processes produced may be positive or negative to that environment to which it affects.

Positive Proximal Processes

Educators identified two programs, the After-School program, and the Angel Tree program, that operated within the district's environment. The application of these programs was identified as providing positive proximal processes for this specific group of students. Four of the educators ($N = 10$) stated that every student identified as having a parent in jail utilized this program. The afterschool program and its presence within the district produced structured academic support and adult supervision for students. Nichols and Loper (2010) found that when parental incarceration occurs, the time and resources the remaining caregiver has are often limited and leave the child with inadequate adult supervision and support. The educators in this district support these findings. E1 and E3 said that without this program, most of their students would be on the streets or left without any adult supervision.

The Angel Tree Program that operated within some of the churches in the area provided Christmas gifts from the incarcerated parent to their children. This program was found to operate in a couple of churches within the town. Educators within the district had participated in this program through their church. The educator was prominent in both systems (church and school), which produced an outcome that was identified by E5 as positive for a student experiencing parental incarceration. Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified the connection between a person that is prominent within two systems and how the interactions produce a link or proximal process to another individual.

An additional positive proximal process that specifically applied to a student experiencing parental incarceration was identified by E1. This educator stated that to generate

income for her household, one student's mother prepared and sold homemade meals to members of the community and employees within the district. The purchasing of these meals provided much-needed income for this household.

Negative Proximal Processes

The identification of negative proximal processes by educators involved their applications that were recognized and that occur within the local environment. Educators identified a lack of industry in the area and limited school budgets for the absence of both activities and programs available to students here. The educators implicated that the district's demographics played a tremendous role in what could be provided for all of their students, especially for those experiencing parental incarceration.

Outside psychological therapy was hard to obtain for those students needing it, and if it was obtained, the limited resources held by homes experiencing parental incarceration prevented consistent travel back and forth to therapy appointments. However, one of the educators recalled a student that experienced severe emotional problems after their parent was incarcerated. The school counselor, recognizing that the needs of this student were beyond the school counselor's scope of practice, was able to secure appropriate treatment through the Department of Health and Human Services. According to this educator, it was with great difficulty that this out-of-school therapy was obtained. Indications from past research indicate that students with incarcerated parents frequently require professional mental health treatment and other supportive services (Murray & Farrington, 2005; Phillips & O'Brien, 2010; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010).

Educators reported that the majority of times, the incarceration of the parent was related to drug offenses. Some of the educators spoke of drug houses in the community. Aaron and Dallaire (2010) explained that proximal risk factors associated with drug use and incarceration

within these households expose this population of students to unresponsive parenting practices in the familial context, teacher stigmatization in the academic context, and risk for association with delinquent peers in the peer context. Educators stated that at times they had known of drug busts and arrests within the community, yet illegal drugs and drug use continue to be a problem here.

Research Question 3

How do teachers perceive the influence of the resources within the exosystem in regard to the educational development of students whose parents are incarcerated?

Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the dimension of the exosystem as the specific systems of the given society in which the individual is located. He explained that events in these systems could influence an individual's immediate setting without the individual's participation in the process. All of the educators in this study stated that they had been involved with students that had experienced parental incarceration within this district, yet they had never received any educational training or professional development concerning this population of students. Half of the educators stated that they felt ill-prepared when they first encountered students with a parent incarcerated. Specifically, these educators blamed the lack of rules and regulations regarding this population of students, enacted by legislative bodies, such as the SBOE and the TEA, as responsible for the lack of educational requirements imposed upon their individual educational institutions and state public schools. These educators stated that it would help educate these specific students if they had had information on the effects of parental incarceration on children and families before they encountered them within the school and their classrooms. Chute (2017) established virtually no information, training, or educational strategies provided to in-service or preservice teachers concerning this student population.

During the execution of this study, the TEA announced that the 86th Texas Legislature, 2019, amended Section 29.081 of the Texas Education Code (TEC) to expand the definition of students who are at risk of dropping out to include students who have been incarcerated or who have parents that have been incarcerated within the student's lifetime, in a penal institution as defined by Penal Code, §1.07. These students are eligible to receive certain services that other at-risk students receive, such as counseling and academic enhancement services. The general guidelines set forth by the TEA require the immediate reporting of incarceration by appropriate school staff when the incarceration is revealed to them. The identified student remains identified as at risk for the remainder of their public-school education. Though this change in the educational code broadens the scope of who can be identified as an at-risk student, there is yet to be a change in the state codes regarding preservice and in-service teacher education requirements on parental incarceration.

Half of the educators ($N = 10$) viewed the resource of the After-School program as helpful in educating those students with an incarcerated parent. Four of the educators stated that every student they knew that had a parent in prison had participated in this program. This program was described by educators as providing students with a sense of school connectedness through academic support and nonacademic support in the form of adult-supervised activities. One of the recommendations presented by Rossen (2011) to improve academics and the behavioral and social-emotional outcomes of students experiencing parental incarceration was to foster school connectedness.

The Angel Tree Program operating in some of the area churches was viewed by three educators as helpful in providing positive emotional support for students with a parent incarcerated. The description of the exhilaration that a student exhibited after receiving a

Christmas gift from their incarcerated parent was given by one of the educators. Supporting the social, emotional, mental, physical as well as cognitive needs of students aids in their academic development and is noted by Slade and Griffith (2013) as a whole-child approach. The Angel Tree program was viewed as a resource within the environment that assisted in supporting the emotional and mental needs of this specific population of students. Academic achievement is enhanced, according to Dotterer and Lowe (2015), when the psychological needs of a student are addressed.

Research Question 4

What barriers within the macrosystem do teachers feel they encounter in educating students whose parents are incarcerated?

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that the content and structure of the macrosystem have a direct effect on the interactions and processes that produce and sustain the development of the individual. Bronfenbrenner explained that it is the belief systems, patterns of social interchange, knowledge, resources, and customs that are embedded within the macrosystem of a given society that determines how the micro, meso, and exosystem of a given society is interconnected and organized.

All of the educator participants ($N = 10$) stated that the lack of their own education and training had been a barrier to serving students and families experiencing parental incarceration. Most of the interviewees acknowledged that it would have eased the anxiety they felt the first couple of times they had a student in their classroom with a parent incarcerated if they had known more about parental incarceration. Knowledge about incarceration was imperative for these educators, so they knew to keep what E1 described as an extra watchful eye on them to

support them. E5 stated that education about parental incarceration should especially be offered to young teachers just coming into the classroom.

Past literature supports educator training on parental incarceration and the stigma associated with parental incarceration (Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Davis & Schlafer, 2017; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). Three educators believed that until legislation in Texas was changed requiring future and current educators within the school systems to receive formal education regarding parental incarceration, educators would continue to face this barrier.

Another barrier that educators were aware of was the stigma that society places on incarceration and those associated with someone incarcerated. Even though E7 stated that incarceration was accepted within the culture because it happens so often, E10 stated that opinion-forming and stigma were present. E10 stated that due to the small size of the community and the school district, when someone has been arrested, everyone usually knows. The stigma of incarceration is frequently noted in the past research literature (Adalist-Estrin, 2006; Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Davis & Schlafer, 2017; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). Young and Smith (2000) emphasized that the social stigma of having a parent incarcerated exacerbates the emotional difficulties children naturally experience when they are separated from a parent. Schlafer and Poehlmann (2010) found that the social stigma associated with parental incarceration contributed to maladaptive and problematic behaviors exhibited by some students.

All participants mentioned a lack of resources and money within the district and the community as a barrier. Without adequate funding, proper psychological counseling for those students requiring mental health interventions was unavailable locally. Traveling the distance required to obtain the required counseling was restrained by the low socio-economic status of the majority of the households experiencing parental incarceration. A majority ($n = 7$) of the

educators described students with an incarcerated parent as those students that, in many cases, could benefit from this type of counseling. E2 stated that if a student's emotional needs are not taken care of, they will not succeed academically. Educators noted that the absence of industry within the community, the tight school funding and budget restraints within this district, and the population demographics shared the responsibility for the lack of resources within this area.

Limitations

As with most qualitative research, due to the sampling method and sample size, this study cannot be generalized. A limitation of the study was the size of the district. The small size of the district limited the type of data that could be shared within the research. Educator demographics such as years of educator service, current grade or subject taught, gender, age, and educational attainment had to be protected to protect the participants' identities. The sample size was also limited due to the size of the district. The study was also limited to the self-reported perceptions of the participants.

Another limitation of the study was that the research was conducted during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. As this study was being conducted, the district was encountering issues and changes related to COVID-19. The pandemic limited the availability and number of educators involved in this study. The COVID-19 pandemic was also responsible for the closing of the school for periods of time and restricting those allowed on school property to students and school employees.

Recommendations for Practice

Educator participants in this study revealed that they lacked formal training regarding parental incarceration. They relied on their own experiences and trial and error in their support of students they served that had a parent incarcerated. Each of the educator participants

acknowledged that there was a need for this training. However, this acknowledgment in no way signified that these educators do not address the needs of each student in their respective classrooms to the best of their abilities and conjunction with available resources. For administrators within public school systems, it is recommended that in-service professional development is offered to all school employees that includes information and education on the impact parental incarceration may have on students and families. Shollenberger (2019) argued that increasing awareness among teachers and administrators about the specific needs and challenges that families and students may encounter when parental incarceration occurs helps alleviate the stigma associated with it and promotes the well-being and academic outcomes for those students experiencing it.

One problem revealed by this study was the lack of access to appropriate psychological counseling. For school counselors, it is recommended that information and logistics be researched and gathered regarding online psychological therapy. Mehmet et al. (2020) explained that in those geographic locations where there is no access to mental health treatment, online therapy is an alternative.

For those educators practicing within teacher training programs in higher education institutions, it is recommended that instruction and curriculum presented to their students include information about parental incarceration. Roberts (2012) highlighted why teacher training regarding parental incarceration is often important to student well-being and success.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was performed in a small, rural school district in central Texas. Based on the findings of this study, I suggest the following recommendations:

- Future research may benefit from examining how teachers in a larger urban school district in Texas perceive the socio-ecological environment surrounding students experiencing parental incarceration.
- Future research could also explore a school district that is situated near a prison in Texas. This environment would be interesting to research from an educator's perspective. Many times, when a parent is incarcerated, the family will relocate closer to the prison where the parent is being held.

Concluding Remarks

This research required me to be very mindful of my own perceptions and perspective based on my own personal and professional experiences with parental incarceration. While listening to the voices of these educators, I had to constantly reflect on my personal assumptions and remain cognizant of the difference in perspective between myself and the participants. Maintaining mindfulness toward my own perceptions enabled me to present research that was based solely on the narratives of the participants.

Educators in this small rural Texas school district perceived themselves and their school as providing an environment that was both understanding and supportive of this specific population of students. Through their own real-life experiences in serving these students and their families, educators realized that when a parent is incarcerated, the dynamics of the household change. The changes within the household dynamics in this area centered around the decrease in economic status and the unavailability of the remaining parent.

The psychological issues mentioned by the educators that they had witnessed in a majority of students when a parent was incarcerated elicited them to keep a watchful eye on these specific students. Educators spoke of how quickly and easily they had seen these specific

students backslide, not only academically but emotionally. Educator narratives indicated that this watchful eye was not just their responsibility but the responsibility of every employee within the district and ultimately the school's responsibility.

The limited resources and industry within the community and district were perceived by educators as a major contributor to their own and the district's inability to provide programs specifically aimed at this population of students. The educators appeared to make the most of the two programs identified here. One being the after-school program at the school, and the other being the Angel Tree program within some of the area churches.

The drug culture reported by educators in the community was perceived as producing negative proximal processes, especially for those students with an incarcerated parent. Educators stated that drug convictions were the major reason that parents had been sent to jail. They were also insightful in their revelation that sometimes the chaos within the household was minimized when the drug offender was incarcerated. Even though the homes experiencing parental incarceration were, at times, less chaotic after the incarceration, students frequently exhibited emotional distress.

Educators were united in their belief that they should have received some type of training regarding parental incarceration before encountering students experiencing it. It was heart-warming to encounter educators doing their best to serve all students entrusted within this district. There was a sense of sincere caring and empathy detected in each of these educator participants.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



December 2, 2019

Melissa Phelan
Department of Educational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Melissa,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "An Exploration of Teacher's Perceptions and Experiences Serving Students Facing Parental Incarceration in a Rural Setting",

was approved by expedited review (Category 7) on 12/2/2019 (IRB # 19-133). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Case Study Protocol

Section A: Overview of the Case Study

The purpose of this case study research is to explore the perceptions, insights, and knowledge of teachers that have had students who have, or have had, a parent incarcerated. The intention is to examine the ecological system surrounding the teacher in order to discern what supports are available to teachers and how those supports foster their awareness of parental incarceration. The rural nature and small size of the school district will serve as the context of the case. Purposeful sampling will be utilized. Each teacher participant will be interviewed for the study. Observation, the examination of pertinent documents and interviews will be used to triangulate data.

Section B: Procedures and Data Collection

Access to Schools and Personnel

1. Obtain IRB permission from the university.
2. Obtain permission from school district administrator to conduct research study.
3. Recruit participants via e-mail and obtain consent from each participant.

Fieldwork Procedures-Interviews

1. Schedule interviews with participants.
2. Interviews:
 - a) All interviews will be held at the convenience of the participant.
 - b) All interviews will be recorded using an audio recording device.
 - c) Each interview will include a hard copy print out of questions with space for researcher notes.
 - d) Each interview will last 20-30 minutes and will not exceed 60 minutes.

Documentation Collection Procedures

1. Any pertinent documentation (such as district employee and/or student handbooks, etc.) will be obtained from the individual responsible for keeping the required data.
2. Data will either be picked up in person, obtained electronically, or copied at its location for examination by the researcher.

Section C: Interview Protocol

Teacher Interviews

1. Teacher interview questions will be focused around the research questions developed for this study.

2. Each of the research questions will be addressed within the interview process through a sub-set of interview questions that probe at the interviewee's perceptions, knowledge, insights and application of resources.

General Questions

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. What grade do you teach?
3. What was your position prior to this one?
4. How long have you taught within this school district?
5. Tell me about your responsibilities with your current class. What is a typical day for you?

Interview questions regarding RQ 1. How do teachers perceive the influence of the microsystem for students of incarcerated parents in regard to their educational development?

How familiar are you with parental incarceration?

- A. What do you know about teaching and serving students experiencing parental incarceration? (Probe for more information: How did you learn and where did you learn this info about parental incarceration?)
- B. What experiences have you had teaching students experiencing parental incarceration? (Probe about the experience. How did they know the student had a parent incarcerated? Did the student, or did you have any type of support if needed in this situation? If so, what were they? How effective do you feel those supports were at helping you meet the needs of this student?)
- C. How do you feel about your personal responsibility as a teacher, and the school district's responsibility toward serving students experiencing parental incarceration, beyond providing instruction?

Interview questions regarding RQ 2. How do teachers apply the mesosystem to students whose parents are incarcerated?

- A. Tell me about the communication processes you have encountered with the caregivers or parents of this student? (Probe for specifics. Describe your contact with the family. Have you ever given a parent/teacher conference via a telephone conversation with the incarcerated parent? Have you ever mailed a progress report or grade report to an incarcerated parent? What are your perceptions and experiences regarding the family/school communication process in this situation?)
- B. Describe your contact with the family of the students you have served that have a parent in prison.
- C. What strategies or actions are you aware of that incarcerated parents and the student's guardians use to support them?

Interview questions regarding RQ 3. How do teachers perceive the resources within the exosystem in regard to the educational development of students whose parents are incarcerated?

- A. Is there anything the community does specifically that supports students whose parents are incarcerated? Any programs? Describe them.
- B. What resources are available within the area that support you or those students whose parents are incarcerated?
- C. Describe your contact with any resources that have assisted you with a student experiencing parental incarceration.

Interview questions pertaining to RQ 4. What barriers within the macrosystem do teachers feel they encounter in educating students whose parents are incarcerated?

- A. What is your opinion of the education, both as a pre-service and in-service teacher, that you received regarding this population of students? Why do you feel this way?
- B. What is your opinion of the supports that teachers and those students who have an incarcerated parent receive at this time? Justify your response
- C. Describe challenges teachers encounter in educating these students

Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

Appendix C: Coding Matrix

Research Question 1: How do teachers perceive the microsystem for students of incarcerated parents in regard to their educational development?

| Relationship to Theoretical Framework | Code Word | Support for Code Word |
|---------------------------------------|------------|---|
| Microsystem | Supportive | <p>Educator 5 said: I was aware of the incarceration, and I guess I was checking on them. I didn't bring it up, but they would sometimes. If they brought something up about it or wanted to talk about it, I would talk to them. Support them.</p> <p>E8, speaking on those students with a parent in jail, said that these particular students need multiple people to be positive with them. Furthermore, this educator believed that it was not just the responsibility of just the teacher, but also the responsibility of the school to touch base with them every day. School wide support.</p> <p>E5 stated: We try to build trust with them, and of course with all of our students, but especially these ones. (Those with an incarcerated parent). I do not teach them any differently or change any of the curriculum up for them, but I do believe that everyone of us teachers here keep an extra eye out for these students just because we know how easily they can</p> |

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| | <p>backslide. We know that most of the time a parent going to jail is a very emotional thing. So, I would say that I am watching out for any emotional or psychological problems they may be having when they are in my classroom and for that matter within the school.</p> <p>In half of the interview transcripts (n=10), teachers made comments about the importance of multiple people lending support to this population of students. These educators believed that it was also the responsibility of the school to support its students.</p> <p>Eight of the educators mentioned the after-school program that was available at the school. It was noted that many of the students, and in particular those residing in single parent homes, attended this support program.</p> <p>Well, the lack of support is disheartening because there are no official support programs around this area. We here at the school know that, and we all make a concerted effort to keep up with our students and get to know each of them on a personal level, so that if something is wrong, we recognize it. That is a plus to being in such a small school district, we get to know the students very well, therefore we are able to recognize if</p> |
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| | Understanding | <p>something is amiss and we can lend the proper support.</p> <p>Educator 1 indicated that they were able to understand what some of the students with an incarcerated parent were experiencing when they stated the following: I led a very sheltered life. I had one set of parents, when I came home from school, we had food on the table. I never thought or felt like we were going to lose our home. Never had the police coming and knocking on the door looking for somebody. I never experienced a lot of the things that this population of kids have experienced.</p> <p>Half of the participants (n=10), spoke of the low socio-economic status (SES) within the households, in particular after an incarceration. Educators 1, 3 and 10 mentioned that the lack of financial resources in the majority of the homes experiencing parental incarceration there were no telephones or internet.</p> <p>Each of these participants stated that they understood that in most of the households where incarceration had occurred that the home environment was generally chaotic. Educator 10 noted that when incarceration</p> |
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| | | <p>occurs within a household that:</p> <p>Many times, the incarceration is over drugs or alcohol, so the things that go along with drugs and alcohol, like fighting and erratic behavior, are present.</p> <p>Educator 9 expressed sentiment that every one of the teachers and staff at the school realize that a family member being incarcerated can be a very emotional event.</p> <p>Three of the educators mentioned the emotional and psychological toll that incarceration had on some of the students they had encountered. academic failure, truancy, the unavailability of the residential parent and at times, anti-social behaviors exhibited by the affected students. Educator 6 shared that understanding, or at least trying to understand the psychological and emotional issues that go along with having a parent in prison, has raised the awareness of educators within the district to be more diligent in watching this specific population of students.</p> <p>Educator 8 spoke of a student that experienced the incarceration of their mother and noted the following: The child, probably the day after he found out she was</p> |
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| | | going down, there was a little encave at the school, and he would go there and just sit there. He didn't interact with his peers and several of us would go and talk to him. It was very important that someone talk and support him, understand. |
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Research Question 2: How do teachers apply the mesosystem to students whose parents are incarcerated?

| Relationship to Theoretical Framework | Type of Proximal Process | Support for Process |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Mesosystem | Positive | <p>Educator 5 presented a proximal process that occurred between the church and themselves. The educator explained: Last Christmas at my church we worked with the Angel Tree outreach program. Our group there at the church supported a child here at school who had a mother incarcerated that had signed up through the program. Our church adopted that student. I knew that student from the after-school program here, not because I had her in class. I said I wanted to help with that. It was wonderful. Then the little girl came back so excited that she had received gifts from her mom!</p> <p>Educator 10 commented that within the community there were a couple of churches that did participate in the Angel Tree program.</p> <p>Four educators (1, 5, 7 and 10) all perceived the schools</p> |

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| | | <p>after school program as producing positive proximal processes for the student.</p> <p>Educator 1 explained that this granted program not only supported students academically, but it also assisted in giving students a safe, adult supervised setting until parents or caregivers were home from work to care for these students.</p> <p>Educator 1 revealed a positive proximal process that operates between a student's parent and school employees in this description: One of the mothers of a student with an incarcerated father prepares a variety of Hispanic foods and that many employees of the school order and buy from her. This, the educator stated, "supplements the student's household income" and, "employees get to enjoy delicious food."</p> <p>Identifying another positive proximal process Educators 1 and 6 detailed the scenario of the school nurse and the collection of monetary donations within the community in order to purchase clothing or shoes for students, when the need arises.</p> <p>Educator 1 stated that "within their knowledge," the majority of those in need of clothing or shoes were often those residing in a single parent, single income household.</p> |
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| | Negative | <p>Educator 2 also revealed a positive proximal process when they stated that within the community there has been good parental involvement with the school. That the parents of the students attend school functions and support the school very well.</p> <p>Every participant (n=10) expressed disdain that besides school activities, there was very little for kids to do in this community.</p> <p>Educator 10 said this: The community here, you saw it, there is really not much here for kids to do, there are no theaters or skating rinks or bowling alleys or anything like that, outside of school or some type of school activity. There are things 20 or 40 miles away from here they could enjoy, but here we don't even have a public library.</p> <p>Educators, 1, 3, 5, 6, 9 and 10 each perceived limited resources and money within the area as the primary reason for the absence of community activities.</p> <p>Educator 1 explained that, like many other school districts, this school district is very low on funds and many teacher contracts were based on the needs of the school and available school resources.</p> <p>Educator 3 said that the lack of both money and resources</p> |
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| | | <p>is a challenge here in the district.</p> <p>Lack of resources and money within district households was noted by Educators 1, 6, and 10.</p> <p>Educator 1 stated that many of the households within the district were at or below the set poverty level for this area while Educators 6 and 10 articulated low SES within the households as the family having limited financial resources and or being low income.</p> <p>Educators 1, 2, 9, and 10 each mentioned substance abuse within the community and within district student households. Educator 9 and 10 stated that within the area, substance abuse was usually why the incarceration occurred.</p> <p>Educators 1 and 2 reported that there were drug houses within the community.</p> <p>Educator 1 said that some of the drug houses in the area had been shut down by the police, but the underlying drug problem remains.</p> <p>Educator 2 stated that demographics in this area as a factor in low student motivation and irresponsibility.</p> |
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| | | <p>Educators 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 each mentioned the demographic of single parent households within the district.</p> <p>Educator 1 stated that within their knowledge, the majority of those students needing assistance with their deficiency needs were often those residing in a single parent, single income household. Those same five educators also answered interview questions in feminine gender expression in reference to these single parent households.</p> |
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Research Question 3: How do teachers perceive the influence of the resources within the exosystem in regard to the educational development of students whose parents are incarcerated?

| Relationship to Theoretical Framework | Resource | Support for Identification of Resource |
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| Exosystem | After-School Program | <p>Educators 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10 each addressed the After-School program.</p> <p>Educators 1 and 7, described the After School program as supportive and helping. Educator 1 specified that the program supports education.</p> <p>The After School program was portrayed by Educators 1, 3, and 10 as an after-school daycare.</p> <p>Educators 1, 3 and 7 stated that this program was particularly helpful for those students in elementary school due to the after school adult supervision provided by the program.</p> |

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| | <p>Texas Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)</p> | <p>Educator 1 explained that without the program students would be on the streets or without adult home supervision.</p> <p>Educators 3 and 6 both spoke about the services provided through the state's Department of Health and Human Services(DHHS). Both educators identified the student's receiving services from DHHS as having a parent incarcerated.</p> <p>Educator 3 described a scenario of a student having academic and psychological issues related to the incarceration. In this case the school counselor was able to secure the student some outside of school counseling through DHHS.</p> <p>Educator 6 commented that DHHS also provided such things as food stamps and welfare to families within the district.</p> |
| | <p>Angel Tree Program</p> | <p>Educators 5 and 10 talked about the Angel Tree outreach program for those children experiencing parental incarceration.</p> <p>Educator 10 stated that there were a couple of churches in the community that participated in the program. Educator 5 presented a narrative about how the church they attended</p> |

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| | <p>No Legislation, Policies, Rules and Regulations pertaining to those students with a parent incarcerated.</p> | <p>participated in this program and sponsored a student experiencing maternal incarceration. This educator describes the excitement of the student after receiving Christmas presents from her incarcerated mother and how wonderful that experience was for her as well as the student.</p> <p>Regarding parental incarceration, and those students affected by it, Educators 6, 7, 9 and 10 each referenced the lack of policies and laws enacted by legislatures and the entities that control these processes.</p> <p>Educators 6 and 9 stated that they felt that nothing would change for this population of students unless some type of legislation is put in place for them. Both of these educators specified the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) and the Texas Educational Agency (TEA), as entities that regulate and control the standards, rules, and regulations that the state educational system is required to uphold.</p> <p>Educator 9 explained that until legislation is changed for this specific group of students, nothing is going to change.</p> <p>All participants (n=10) stated that they had no training, pre-service or in-service,</p> |
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| | <p>Lack of Formal Education and Professional Development Regarding Parental Incarceration</p> | <p>regarding parental incarceration and those students experiencing it. Each of these participants stated that they felt that there should be some type of education offered that is specific for this population of students.</p> <p>Educator 9, in reference to educator training, stated: I have a particular philosophy when it comes to teacher training, I think we undertrain them for what they are going to experience in the classroom. This educator exclaimed that, teachers “absolutely” should be trained about parental incarceration.</p> <p>Educator 10 expressed bewilderment about the absence of education they had received about parental incarceration and those students experiencing it they are in my classroom. Wonder why they don’t teach us something about them while we are in college or in our teacher training programs or even as a teacher? Especially a new teacher, they need to give some kind of blurb about these students, that way at least we could kind of know how it could affect them.</p> <p>This educator added that even though these students are in the classroom, educator education about them is absent.</p> |
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| | | <p>Educators 2, 3, and 9 divulged that respectively, they had received education on students with mental health needs, behavioral issues, and medical requirements. Each of these Educators acknowledged the importance of addressing those needs in striving for student academic success.</p> <p>Educator 3 said receiving education about the incarceration process from the affected student's point of view would be helpful.</p> |
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Research question 4: What barriers within the macrosystem do teachers feel they encounter in educating students whose parents are incarcerated?

| Relationship to Theoretical Framework | Barrier | Support for Identified Barrier |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---|
| Macrosystem | Stigma | <p>Educator 7 said that within this culture, incarceration was accepted because it is so common.</p> <p>Educator 10 stated that the students entangled in parental incarceration are often looked down on by society and that the incarceration often leads to opinion forming about the student.</p> <p>Educator 9 spoke about the behaviors exhibited by students when he compared parental loss due to deployment parent and parental loss due to incarceration. Those with parents deployed are open and proud about the location of the absent parent, whereas</p> |

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| | | <p>those students with absent parent's secondary to incarceration will try to hide the reason their parent is absent. Hiding the incarceration, this Educator believed, was due to shame and guilt experienced by the student.</p> |
| | Lack of Programs | <p>Educator 9 explained that for those students residing in military households there are pre-deployment programs, deployment programs and debriefing programs available through a joint initiative between the Department of Defense (DOD) and the TEA. This Educator went on to say that for those students left behind when a parent is incarcerated there are no TEA requirements.</p> |
| | Lack of Legislation | <p>Legislation was specifically mentioned by Educators 6, 7, and 9. They were in agreement that until legislation was changed and the funds were available to support those changes nothing would change for these particular students.</p> |
| | Lack of Training/Education for Educators | <p>Each of the educators interviewed (n=10) reported that they had received no formal training, both as preservice teachers and as in service teachers in reference to parental incarceration. Each of these educators stated that they felt that information gained through their own</p> |

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| | Cultural Beliefs | <p>education would be beneficial.</p> <p>Educators 6 and 9 stated that the SBOE and the TEA should require all educators to receive training about parental incarceration.</p> <p>Educator 7 said that within this culture, incarceration was accepted because it is so common.</p> <p>Educators 1, 2, 3, and 4 presented four separate parental incarceration cases within the district. Each of the cases presented actions that reinforced the cultural belief that education is important. This belief was not identified as a barrier but the precipitation of difficulties in working with some of parents that held this belief was. The belief in the importance of education was exhibited in parental actions that was described by this group of Educators as “overbearing,” “very involved” and “pushy.”</p> |
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