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Increase Foster Student Success Through Resource Pedagogy

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors in Education requirements.

By

Madison Nudo

Under the mentorship of Dr. Karin Fisher

ABSTRACT

The perception of students in foster care is often negative, potentially leading to significant effects on their educational journey. The purpose of the study is to provide accurate and practical solutions to combat the obstacles that may face students in foster care. By conducting interviews with school personnel and related stakeholders, we propose steps to enhance the education of students who have experienced displacement from their birth homes. This includes shifting the perception of these students to a positive and realistic standpoint, using resource pedagogy to bridge the gap between existing perspectives and emerging ones.

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## Introduction

As children begin their education journey, each student is predisposed to assets and deficits in relation to scholastic learning; these accelerants and hindrances often become evident in the classroom and in interactions with peers and teachers. The educator's role is to determine and recognize the assets and utilize them to increase their student's success, as well as disable their deficits and limit the restraint that it holds on the student. Though there is a plethora of resources available to educators on how to disarm educational disadvantages, there is a lack of resources for a large and ever-growing subset of students. These students are those who are in the foster care system, in other words, students whose primary caregiver is not their natural or birth parents. Increasing the knowledge of foster care in educators can minimize the problems that could arise, as well as eliminate further problems, including social-emotional behaviors and aversion to learning. Therefore, it is pertinent to conduct and support research targeting foster care and education systems to advance hundreds and thousands of students in the United States.

Previous work published on the foster care system and education, does recall the children and educators' experiences but emphasizes reflection rather than practical steps to reduce the negative effects. This research provides perspectives on education from children in the foster care system, as well as of the foster parents watching their foster child in school (Lickteig & Lickteig, 2019). Though perspective helps expose misconceptions through first hand experiences, it does not provide a solution to the problem. While other research fails to acknowledge the root cause of the problems within the foster care system, only focusing on how to use the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP) to exploit the foster care system for resources in schools (Krcmar & Karge, 2019). In other words, this research focused on how the education system can increase its funding to better support children in foster care, by providing them with increased resources like technology and physical necessities for students (adequate school supplies). Increasing technology in schools can better their physical classroom environment but there is little research that addresses teachers' and support staff's professional development working with students in the foster care system.

Currently, teachers' and support staffs' professional development about supporting students in the foster care system are largely absent, providing little knowledge of how to incorporate practices in classrooms and schools to increase foster care students' success. It is a hope of this study to provide practical applications that can be used in the classroom and school to maximize the advantages of the foster care system and create an environment where foster students can thrive. This study aims to close the gap between current and possible practices used in schools and by teachers to create a dynamic where all children, including children in foster care, can thrive in the classroom despite any difficult circumstances. Utilizing the resources available while simultaneously seeking the advantages of the foster care system will help elevate the foster child in their classrooms.

Namely, this study seeks to explore key factors such as utilizing the resources and advantages of the foster care system to elevate the foster child in the classroom to mitigate the hindrances in academic performance for children in the foster care system. Resource pedagogy is explored to learn how it alters the environment in which educators teach and students learn. Resource pedagogy leverages the strength of a student to increase engagement and produce high achieving students through the way an educator interacts and speaks to students of diverse backgrounds. Searching for advantages in the foster care system may seem counterintuitive or nonproductive, yet it is pertinent for students to remain optimistic and feel safe so that learning can occur. Finally, this study posits that teachers and support staff who adopt resource pedagogy, including culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies, have the potential to alter the mind of foster care children by finding positivity and assets toward these students' situations, which could then reflect in the student's academic performance.

### **Research Question**

1. How can teachers use resource pedagogy to increase foster care students' success?

### **Literature Review**

People outside of the foster care system, including teachers, stand in a position of unknown and distance. Yet these are the very people that can curate resources and generate the best education for students in the foster care system. One may ask how has the unproportionate breach between the foster

care system and educators grown as big as it has, as well as how do school systems address the gap and ultimately fill it so no foster child falls between the cracks. Published work concerning educators in the foster care system lack solutions, rather the works establish an ill view of connection that has yet to be made. Perspective editorials often describe past events of educators, parents, and students in their experiences with the foster care system. Though these works are important to gain perspective and can be used to support people involved in the foster care system, more research is needed to address the void and describe a hopeful future for all foster care students and their teachers.

### **Foster Student Behavior**

Llario et al. (2013), contributed to the conversation of minors in foster care by providing an analysis of their research as it pertains to the socioemotional characteristics of foster children. Their goal was to find a common theme in foster care experiences and previous research to “provide adequate assistance to optimize [foster student’s] development” (p. 2). The authors and researchers administered a Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC) survey, which evaluates children living in a host home outside of their birth family’s socioemotional status; parents and teacher surveyed were given a questionnaire asking them to rate their student's behavior, and students were given a questionnaire in true or false format. The survey was analyzed for the child’s likeness and prone to different behavioral actions commonly found in foster care students including “aggressiveness, hyperactivity, behavioral problems” and others (p. 4). The research was conducted in Comunidad Valciana.

Once the researchers produced their data, they collectively analyzed it to configure an outcome of common themes and ideas of parents, teachers, and students as it pertains to the foster care system and socio-emotional behaviors. These common characteristics involve problems with inattention and externalization, which is evident in the parent's and teachers' responses. They noted that one difference between parents' and teachers' perspectives is that teachers tend to be less critical than parents; this may be due to parents' increased time and the environment with the foster child, and because teachers are exposed to more situations that lead to normalization. When parents' and teachers' evaluations are compared to students' evaluations, the themes remain the same.

Recognizing that their study is specific to Valencina, readers can gain a better perspective of the socio-emotional perceptions of teachers, parents, and students who are in the foster care system. The researchers established evidence of the common themes that arise in the behavior of children living in host homes including problems with externalizing and attention.

Gross and Baron (2022) discussed the turmoil and negative effects of the foster care system on fostered youth; they reported a shocking “six percent” of children by the age of 18 enter foster care in the United States and about “250,000 children” enter the foster care system each year (p. 1). The authors also displayed statistics that show the racial backgrounds of already marginalized populations including Native American and Black children, which leads to further marginalization of racial and ethnic subgroups. Gross and Baron acknowledged the unequal and disproportionate foster care systems of the United States and how results often differ based on state foster care systems. For instance, they addressed the largely negative and harmful experience of children in the “Illinois” foster care system during the early 1990s and 2000s (p. 2) and how it has affected children after the fact.

Utilizing research to address the harmful statistics of the foster care system in education, allows readers to better their understanding of the reality that is the foster care system and its effect on education. Educators are ill-informed about foster care students’ experiences, which leads to misconceptions and biases toward individuals in the system. Not only do most teachers hold biases towards a specific student, but they also yield biases on any form of guardians including biological, foster, and other guardianship.

Gross and Baron devoted their work to shedding light on the statistics revolving around the foster care system and education. Their work is pertinent to show the disadvantages of students who are in the foster care system and establishes the need for further research; as well as discovering the traumatic casualty system through exposing statistics of the foster care system. Not only the foster care system in terms of the child, but the foster care system regarding all parties including all forms of parents, peers, and educators.

### **Lack of Training for Teachers**

Langton (2017) has devoted a portion of her work to increasing awareness of adoption in education services, as well as creating resources for schools to become adoption friendly. She described her research on the difficulties in adoption and special guardianship, including disruptions, emotional needs, and lack of support from outside parties. Langton's focus emphasized "children in England who have left care into adoption and special guardianship," in other words children in England who have been adopted and those who live with other guardians though still have legal ties to their biological parents or families (p. 1). Langton establishes her research on the distinction between adoption and permanent placement and students who are active in the foster care system and its role in education.

Langton (2017) determined the stark reality of adoption and juxtaposes it with the naive nature of all parties when addressing adoption and special guardianship in education. Though the seeming end of the child's treacherous journey is adoption or special guardianship, it is only the beginning. Langton exposed key issues that are evident in education in relation to adoption and special guardianship; including misconceptions of school staff, lack of curriculum representation for students who are adopted, as well as the reality of bullying from peers. She proposed that education psychologists (EP) can be a bridge between the school system and adopted students; their specific role places them in a position to provide support and resources for adopted families. Though Langton also recognizes the need for training, not only for the EP, but other professionals in the field to establish roles and identities for each player in the game.

Langton (2017) acknowledged the "limited large-scale research into the educational experiences" of students who were adopted or placed in special guardianship, and urges for further research to better prepare schools, educators, and adoption parties (p. 6). Therefore, the reader can dive deeper into the role of the EP and their influence on the adoptive students and families.

### **Foster Student Resources**

Krcmar and Karge (2019), offered a unique approach to aiding foster students, one that utilizes government funding to support teacher-student relationships. More specifically using the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and Local Control Accountability Plan (LACP) to curate resources and



opportunities to further the development of fostered youth's social-emotional intelligence and attachments. Krcmar and Karge used a mixed method approach in form of a survey to establish relationships between teachers and foster youth; including educators teaching students in the foster care system, as well as active foster parents involved with a foster student's education. Their purpose was to serve foster youth by exploring interactions between foster students and their teachers to protect "at-risk children" (p. 2).

Krcmar and Karge (2019) ultimately reaffirmed their thesis that LCFF and LCAP increased awareness in school administration of the purpose and importance of relationships, including those between fostered youth and their teachers. A strong relationship holds greater outcomes for the student's academic and social-emotional well-being; adopting the principles set forth by LCAP and LCFF fosters appropriate attachment between teacher and foster student. The idea of mutual understanding between teacher and student operates so that teachers are able "to support and develop positive relationships" because they are aware of the "obstacles" and "struggles" foster students encounter (p. 2). Which in return develop the fostered youth's social-emotional intelligence.

Adding fostered youth in the umbrella term of diversity allows schools to offer additional funding to promote the well-being and social-emotional being, of a large subset of the student body. Krcmar and Karge (2019) recognized the need for further research into the needs of the fostered youth to better accommodate the well-being of the child; therefore, instead of a simple answer, it becomes a complex interconnection between relationships to establish strong social-emotional intelligence and attachment, but child's needs to aid their academic success. They suggested increasing awareness for all parties not only urges school administrators to fund classrooms differently but to empower foster students to achieve and dream more.

Isolated, yet simple, describes Rawlings (2015) approach to limiting the negative effects of foster care and improving outcomes for children in foster care. He delicately navigates Georgia's increasing problem of out-of-home children, by attacking cold cases in a study called The Cold Case Project. The goal of the cold-case project is to revisit cases that are deemed cold, or in other words cases with

seemingly no solution, and then “recommend approaches that may not have been considered” otherwise (p. 1). The project has yielded great results with families reunited, foster children adopted, and the replacement of children for the betterment of their well-being. Rawling offers a perspective into the legal side of the foster care system, and insights into foster care solutions in Georgia.

### **Classroom Environment of Foster Students**

Lickteig and Lickteig (2019) choose to share their experience with fostering children and how they have adapted to a new home, school, and community. They shared their knowledge of foster care before, during foster license, and after hosting foster children; mainly the drastic difference between what they knew and what they now know. Lickteig and Lickteig acknowledge the increased importance of the teacher’s role and involvement in a foster student’s life, specifically the sheer amount of time spent with the teacher compared to any other outside adult in their lives. They reflect on concepts and strategies that help aid a smoother transition for foster children in new homes, as well as in school.

Lickteig and Lickteig (2019) curated statistics that showed the disproportionate gap between foster youth and their counterparts, as well as concepts to encourage other foster parents and their students’ teachers. Statistics included fostered youth having the “highest dropout rates and lowest graduation rate compared to other comparison groups,” and they are “more likely to be classified with a disability” (p. 3). The researchers provided a distinctive perspective as educators and as foster parents, applying what they have learned as teachers, they were able to acknowledge and appreciate the needs of foster child differently than another foster parent. Lickteig and Lickteig discussed the importance of foster children’s need for control in their lives, which compensates for the lack of control their circumstances have given them. Foster children also crave stability and structure to enable a sense of security and home. Indeed, increasing a sense of security ultimately leads to other opportunities for the foster child, including sports and other extracurricular activities, similar to their counterparts.

Lickteig’s and Lickteig’s (2019) hope is to produce an environment and conversation that can better the schools for foster children by increasing the awareness of educators, foster parents, and even social workers. They expose the difference between the other struggling students and those of the foster

students, stating foster students “are unique from other subgroups” which means they are entitled to “additional support beyond instructional remediation” (p. 7). The authors concluded with the hope to encourage cooperation and mutual minded goals for foster parents, educators, schools, and social workers so that foster children can thrive in home and school life.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (2019) sought to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), in order to establish improvements in the stability of fostered youth. The authors acknowledged the challenges that arise when students are placed in foster care or placed back into the care of their birth parents, not only are their homes shifting, their schools change as well. Every Student Succeeds Act urges local foster care agencies and authorities to find host families within the same school district as the youth currently attends if it is in the child's best interest (guidelines need to be followed in order to ensure the child's best interest based on local agencies' expertise). The concept that the student remains in the same school allows a better sense of security for the child and therefore increases their likelihood of academic success. Through a large research survey, the US Government Accountability Office surveyed 51 states and provinces of the U.S., as well as conducted on-site visits in select areas to witness how schools are implementing ESSA.

Through their survey, the US Government Accountability Office was made aware of the current high turnover rates in “local child welfare and educational agency staff” which has drastically affected schools' implementation of ESSA (Nowicki et al, 2019, p. 8). This turnover rate is not only evident in social workers, but in school staff as well which creates a challenge to connect and further develop ESSA within local school systems. In addition to turnover rates, the survey exposed other challenges in the implementation of ESSA including a lack of knowledge of local authorities' roles, as well as resources like transportation to schools. The goal of ESSA and the US Government Accountability Office is to offer a “stabilizing environment for youth in foster care” through school systems and hopes to further their academic success (p. 8).

Stone, D’Andrade, and Austin (2007) discussed the collaborative effort of child welfare services and school systems in the betterment of the educational environment for students in the foster care

system. They analyzed the roles of each party and the responsibilities associated with such roles. Using data collected by “telephone surveys of 303 foster parents in Northern Carolina counties,” they discovered that the main stakeholders in a foster child's success are child welfare and education systems (p. 58). The authors also establish the need for open communication between both the schools and agencies, which requires a mutual and like-minded goal.

A unique perspective of resource pedagogy introduced by Paris and Alim (2014) focuses on using the diverse background of a student including characteristics like culture, status, and disabilities, as an asset rather than deficient. Though some characteristics of student’s background may systematically produce disadvantages, using resource pedagogy alters the perspective of all parties involved. The power of resource pedagogy will sustain the student and their willingness to learn. If teachers were to adopt resource pedagogy a viable difference will occur in student success, especially in students who are in the foster care system.

### **Foster Student Achievement**

Parker and Folkman (2015) add to the conversation of foster care and education through research focusing on students in special education and simultaneously in foster care; the authors also provided possible strategies to implement in classrooms to ensure student support and academic success. This specific subset of students not only faced the challenges of special education, some including cognitive and physical development, but they also face the struggles of being placed in foster care. They mentioned that an estimated “30% to 50% of children in foster care receive special education services, compared with 13.1%” among students overall (p. 45). Parker and Folkman recognize that foster students are sometimes falsely integrated into special education due to behaviors correlated with foster care students, but they also recognize that behaviors of the foster care student may be under-identified as a special education student due to their circumstances.

Parker and Folkman (2015) offered successful strategies at varying levels to increase the likelihood of academic success for students in foster care and special education. They use a strengths-based approach which recognizes the child’s strength already occupies and further develops

them to ensure academic success. The authors strategies at a classroom, school, and community level in order to support students with resources they need to thrive.

Along with the strength base approach, Parker and Folkman (2015) offered suggestions for Teacher education programs to better the future educator in terms of special education and foster care. These ideas include equipping preservice teachers by offering them resources and a plethora of guest speakers to increase their awareness of foster care, as well as exposing teacher candidates to their role and expectation in the foster care system.

Eibery and Fuglsang (2021) explored the variance between the expectations of academic achievement of students in foster care and their student's actual achievement status. In other words, the authors contrasted expectations projected on students in foster care and reality, and how these differences affects the child. The goal was to find empirical data to prove or disprove low educational expectations of teachers' and foster parents' leading to negative effects and vice versa.

Through their survey of Danish children in out-of-home care (OHC) and other studies relevant, Eibery and Fuglsang determined a correlation between the importance and use of educational expectations for foster children, specifically in math and reading. They also expose biases in educators and foster parents by examining their responses; these biases are those held against older children in OHC, specifically their abilities to perform and partake in higher education, which distorts their own views. The survey also distinguished characteristics like "gender, age, IQ" and "psychosocial adjustment" and their role in expectations (p. 10). Eibery and Fuglsang endorsed increased education expectations to potentially increase the student's academic achievement and their use of expectations as a driving force for motivation and success.

It becomes evident that further research is needed to properly care for and develop students in foster care. Surface-level research promotes false hope and solutions to the foster care system in terms of education. Most research eludes that increased awareness is the main solution to diminishing the gap between the academic success of children in foster care and their peers. Though an increased amount of awareness limits biases and helps prevent future trauma, it is not the solution to the ever-growing

population of foster care children's education. Rather than learning more about foster students, teachers need to learn practical steps to take to increase their success. Abandoning past ideologies and fostering resource pedagogy offers a new perspective on the assets and advantages of being in the foster care system.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The researcher used case study design (Brinkmann, 2023) to establish a holistic approach to understanding foster care students and practical strategies teachers can implement to increase support for these students. Interviews will include representatives from Southeast Georgia and involved in the education of foster care students. A veteran educator, school representative, foster parent, and a preservice teacher were interviewed. Full interview questions based on personnel are provided in Appendix A. These interviews were rooted in “individual lived experiences” (Brinkmann, 2023, p. 36) to provide first-hand experience in the topic of foster children and education.

The purpose of the preservice teacher interview was to establish preexisting knowledge preservice teachers have about the foster care system in their local area. This interview allows the reader to conceptualize how teachers are prepared to teach students in the foster care system. It creates the connection between what is being taught at a college level and how it relates to the foster care system.

The purpose of the veteran educator interview was to establish how prepared teachers felt during their first years of teaching and how they feel after teaching for an extended period. This interview established their experiences teaching students in the foster care system and allowed them to elaborate on techniques and strategies that best support those students. They were also given a chance to reflect on how they could have been better prepared to teach students in the foster care system.

The purpose of the school representative was to establish an understanding of the school counselor or other representative role in the foster care system. This interview included how they navigated the communication between social workers, school, teachers, foster students, and

foster/biological parents. School representatives were given a chance to consider their experience and reflect on classroom environments that aid student learning.

A current foster parent was also interviewed to provide the researcher with firsthand experience and information. Understanding the needs of foster students is critical to increasing support in the classroom.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using a semi structured interview protocol (Brinkmann, 2023) The researcher read aloud questions and gave space for participants time to answer questions based on their personal experiences. Interviews were held face-to-face so that information could be communicated clearly and the interviewer could ask individuals to elaborate on certain topics. If the interview is unable to be face-to-face, the interview will be via email. The researcher recorded interviews using voice memo and transcribed the interview.

Participants discussed their experiences with foster students, including their perceptions and strategies that help these students best learn. Other questions discussed training and preservice preparation and how it affected their ability to work with students within the foster care system. For interview questions, see Appendix A.

### **Participants**

For this case study, I interviewed two individuals with various levels of teaching experiences to students in the foster care system; as well as two stakeholders for students in the foster care system, including a foster parent and school counselor. These participants were recruited through email.

Participants discussed in this study (see Table 1) are a veteran educator, school representative, foster parent, and a preservice teacher. The veteran educator, school representative, and preservice teacher all are located at Hawk Elementary School (pseudonym for schools), while the foster parent has students attending Rock Elementary School; all within Southeast Georgia. The preservice teacher is currently in a preparedness program located in Southeast Georgia in their senior year, all classroom experience has been through student teaching. The veteran teacher has been teaching for over fifteen years in the classroom

and currently is in a role of “Master Teacher,” which supports preservice teachers in their first year of teaching. The school representative is a school counselor at Hawk Elementary School and has over ten years of experience working with students at the elementary level. The foster parent is a current foster parent who has foster children in a public school, Rock Elementary School, in Southeast Georgia.

**Table 1:** Participants

Role:	School:
Preservice Teacher	Hawk Elementary School
Veteran Teacher	Hawk Elementary School
School Representative	Hawk Elementary School
Foster Parent	Rock Elementary School

### Data Analysis

Using the interviews, the researcher looked for similarities to code and established different categories. Then the researcher analyzed how the perception of foster students differs between each individual and how teachers can better support students in the foster care system, in relation to resource pedagogy. Materials needed were internet access, a recording device (phone), and a computer. When coding was complete, four major themes were identified: Poor Perceptions of Foster Students, Effective Classrooms are Consistent and Calm, Lack of Preparedness, and Additional Support for Students in the Foster Care System. A codebook was created to analyze the transcribed interviews; themes that were most prominent were coded with their like groups in order to create commonalities among the data. Table 2 displays themes found in data to help guide the researcher when answering the research question.

**Table 2:** Codebook

Theme:	Number of Appearances in Data:	Codename:
Poor Perception of Foster Students	15	PP
Effective Classrooms Consistent	13	EC



and Calm		
Lack of Preparedness	8	LP
Additional Support for Students in the Foster Care System	25	AS

### Findings

The case study purpose was to gain better understanding of foster stakeholders' perspective of foster care students, but also to provide a practical step educators can take to increase foster student success. Therefore, the goal of this study was to answer the following question: "How can teachers use resource pedagogy to increase foster care students' success?"

Many themes occurred when participants answered the interview questions; including those involving the Poor Perceptions of Foster Students, Effective Classrooms are Consistent and Calm, Lack of Preparedness, and Additional Support for Students in the Foster Care System. Which informed the researcher on best practices that could aid foster student success, mainly resource pedagogy. Resource pedagogy enables teachers to alter the current poor perception of students in the foster care system, and replace it with a strength and asset based perspective leading to high inner motivation for foster students. While resources pedagogy also assists with creating a physical environment where foster students can thrive, one that is consistent and calm. Adopting said pedagogies also creates a space for educators to offer individualized support unique to the foster student and their specific needs, whether that is further communication or a safe space to feel their emotions.

#### Poor Perceptions of Foster Students (PP)

Participants were asked to describe their perception of foster students. All answers were consistently negative and described a student needing more in all aspects of education, including academically, emotionally, and socially. Teachers and stakeholders perceive students in the foster care system as needing additional support, relating these additional supports to burden. Though using a tone of empathy, they mention the poor perception of their circumstance and how they have been failed.

A current foster parent stated that “the adults these foster children have, failed them and now they are placed with you...I also feel that schools have failed these children (February 23, 2024). Despite being a close connection to the foster students, their perspective displayed a negative perception of any student within the foster system. Another participant, a veteran teacher, mentioned similar negative perceptions of foster students “the student that I had contact with was very emotionally needy because he had been taken from his mom, that bond had been broken (January 22, 2024).” Continuing the conversation of poor perceptions, the preservice teacher mentioned that “they sometimes have some behavioral issues and it can stem from them needing consistency” (February 18, 2024).

Participant answers were constantly addressing and emphasizing the negative aspects of students in the foster care system, with no mention of benefits or positive effects of being a foster student. This poor perception of foster students is consistent across all stakeholders.

### **Effective Classrooms are Consistent and Calm (EC)**

Participants were also asked what strategies they felt best supported students within the foster care system. The responses were consistent with the themes of consistent and calm, making the optimal classroom environment for students in the foster care system those that are on schedule and tranquil. A lack of the optimal classroom environment, the hectic environment, could hinder foster students’ academic career and goals. The school representative stated “classrooms that are calm and consistent will aid foster care students. The classrooms that are chaotic and don't provide any consistency whether it is scheduling or the teacher could hinder the students in the class” (March 5, 2024). Using similar words to describe the most effective classroom, the foster parent mentioned “the classroom environment that was most successful for my children were classrooms that usually stayed on a schedule” (February 23, 2024). Another participant, the veteran teacher, discussed how a foster student felt when the classroom was not consistent and stable; even touching on the difference a calm environment can make by stating:

They did not like feeling that they were getting in trouble by the people who were taking care of him, so raising your voice or anything like that. You have to use a very gentle and kind [voice] and explain to him what was going to happen and step by step so that he would feel okay with

everything. But moving too fast, changing things suddenly, things like that did not work well (January 22, 2024).

All students have the ability to thrive in an environment described as calm and consistent, though based on their reality outside of school, foster students crave this setting. Opposite of their home lives, foster students need stability and a sense of control; therefore creating a calming and consistent classroom will greatly benefit a student in the foster care system.

### **Lack of Preparedness (LP)**

Teachers highlighted the lack of preparedness of preservice teachers to teach those in the Southeast Georgia Foster Care System. Without this training, teachers and stakeholders are ill prepared to support these students; teachers mentioned training related to trauma is necessary. Similar to training before becoming a teacher, training before teaching students in the foster care system should be a requirement. Society expects a form of formal training, in order to do most tasks, why would teaching foster students be an exception to this rule? Stakeholders within education expose their thoughts on the lack of preparedness, a foster parent stated “the teacher also did not understand some of the behaviors that they were seeing and how the behaviors linked back to the child’s trauma from the biological family” (February 23, 2024). Similarly to the foster parent, the veteran teacher also recognized the lack of teacher preparation she had to teach students within the foster care system.

I think having people that actually work in the foster care system and explain to them how things work and majority of the time what is going to happen to these students. So, I think it would be great to hear from people in the foster care system to debunk some of the myths (January 22, 2024).

The school representative also states “All staff need yearly training on the trauma of students in foster care (March 5, 2024).

School systems have not prioritized training as it relates to foster care; not even preservice institutions prepare educators to teach students in foster care. Foster students have reaped the ill effects of the lack of preparedness teachers are to support them in the school environment.

### **Additional Support for Students in the Foster Care System (AS)**

Foster students need additional support compared to a student living in their birth home. Teachers and stakeholders emphasized the additional support that students in the foster care system need; teachers touched on concepts such as additional emotional support and communication. The foster parent best understands these additional needs stated:

They also need to understand that they need to relay information to the foster parent quickly so they can get things going to help the child. It takes time to get [a] diagnosis and approval for medications and set up therapies. If these are not put in place in a timely manner, the children may lose out on them (February 23, 2024).

Remaining under the umbrella of needing additional support, the veteran teacher concluded:

I wouldn't say needy is a good word, but he just needed more emotionally from the adults around him to give him a secure feeling in the world. It sometimes felt that he was unsure of things. So maybe with students in the foster system you need to give them support and they need to make sure they feel like the world isn't going to change on a dime because that already happened to them (January 22, 2024).

Additional support is needed when dealing with students in the foster care system. A solution to the problem of additional support requires long term goals and shifts in the organization mindset. Creating a sustainable step teachers can implement will begin the process of increasing foster student success despite their additional needs.

Through the data collected via interviews, the researcher is able to flush out four themes that signify the realities of being a student and simultaneously being a foster child. These themes are Poor Perceptions of Foster Students, Effective Classrooms are Consistent and Calm, Lack of Preparedness, and Additional Support for Students in the Foster Care System. Students within the foster care system are met with negative perceptions, which creates biases in adults caring for said students and these same adults are ill prepared to teach them due to lack of training. Though hope is not lost, teachers and stakeholders

provide an optimal classroom environment to better support the additional needs of students in the foster care system.

### **Discussion**

When exploring the concepts behind utilizing resource pedagogy to enhance student success in the foster care system, several themes emerged from the data analysis of interviews with teachers and foster care stakeholders. Through these themes, the need for a practical solution to aid teachers when teaching foster care students was prevalent.

One significant theme that arose from data collection was the poor perceptions of students in the foster care system. Not only did teachers recognize their bias, some not understanding due to lack of experiences with foster students, but also noting the significant additional needs of foster students compared to the normal, traditional household. Though teachers and foster care stakeholders use empathy when discussing these students, it does not mitigate their ill perception of the foster students' circumstances and challenges that they may face. Recognizing that these students have failed in many aspects of their lives, including personal and academic. First, they were taken from adults in their life which is their first failure, then the school system is not equipped to handle them, a second failure. This theme underscores the importance of addressing the stigma around foster care students to create an environment where students can succeed. Negative ideology is the opposite of what Paris and Alim (2014) discuss within their research; the authors stress the importance of adopting resource pedagogy to eliminate these poor perceptions of students within the foster care system that hinder them in the classroom.

Another prominent theme identified in the data is the importance of the classroom environment of a foster student. Teachers and stakeholders emphasized the importance of a positive classroom environment; classrooms that are positive exhibit characteristics of calmness, consistency, stability, and a space to feel emotions safely. These characteristics, aligned with the opposite of the foster student's personal life, are crucial for their learning and development. The participants highlighted the effects of a chaotic and ever changing classroom on foster care students, being poor academic performance stemming

from behavioral issues. This theme underlines the need for teachers to prioritize creating an environment structured around consistency.

The data also revealed a concerning lack of preparedness among preservice teachers, creating a larger disservice to students in the foster care system. Similar to the conclusion of Parker and Folkman (2015), better preparing preservice teachers could eliminate a large portion of the struggle during transition periods for students in the foster care system. The lack of preparedness is a significant barrier to providing effective support for foster students. Teachers and foster care stakeholders noted the absence of adequate training on trauma-informed practices and the specific needs of students in the foster care system during teacher preparation programs. Participants not only stated foster care and trauma-informed training are beneficial to the preparation programs, but also should be considered yearly as continuous education would help address the gap. These trainings should also include teachings on resource pedagogies to further the betterment of education and foster students.

Additionally, the data emphasized the importance of providing more support and resources to meet the needs of a foster care student. Teachers and stakeholders focused on supporting the students emotionally, communicating consistently, and using prompt interventions to aid their foster students. The complex life of a foster student is not solely fixed through education and academics, though teachers and stakeholders recognized their role in supporting them, in addition to the various adults in their life. Providing support will ensure the success of a foster student in an academic setting.

The findings of this study highlight the additional needs that should be addressed, so that the foster care system and educational systems can better support students in both systems. Employing resource pedagogy will enhance the success of students in these systems; not only does it address misconceptions, create supportive environments, provide continuous training, and advocate for student centered support.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study emphasized the need for educators to use resource pedagogy in supporting students in the foster care system to reach their academic goals. The themes addressed that foster students face unique challenges and should receive additional, specialized support.

Students in the foster care system are faced with poor perceptions towards them related to fear of additional work and behavioral problems. These misperceptions can be addressed with resource pedagogy, which can create an empathic and understanding teacher to provide inclusive learning for foster care students. The same solution, resource pedagogy, can be used to alter the current learning environment to a consistency and stable environment for learning. Educators should prioritize resource pedagogy to ensure predictability and a calming classroom environment. Resource pedagogy allows for stakeholders in foster student's lives to receive training, so that they can utilize this knowledge when needed. The additional support needed by foster care students can be addressed through resource pedagogy. The purpose of resource pedagogy is to provide students with a space to utilize their strengths and recognizing the diverse needs of these students. This approach provides teachers and foster care stakeholders a chance to advocate for foster care students and create a sustainable solution to a large issue.

Findings of this study display the need for universal implementation of resource pedagogy to support students in the foster care system. By implementing resource pedagogy, teachers and foster care student stakeholders can play a vital role in the success of foster care students, ultimately contributing to their overall achievement and future.

### **Limitations**

Though findings from the current study provide recommendations to aid the success of foster care students, there are also some limitations to note. First, findings from the interviews were from Southeast Georgia and may not reflect that of a broader population. Therefore, in order to apply these recommendations to a broader population, the same study should be conducted on a larger population within the desired region. Another factor to consider with qualitative research methods, such as the

interviews conducted in this study, is the ability to standardize it across all interviews; it is difficult and could affect the validity of data collected, in addition to the small sample size.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the themes (Poor Perceptions of Foster Students, Effective Classrooms are Consistent and Calm, Lack of Preparedness, and Additional Support for Students in the Foster Care System) gathered from interviews from educators and foster care stakeholders emphasize the critical need for adopting resource pedagogy to combat the challenges faced by foster care students. By addressing negative perceptions, fostering calm and consistent classroom environments, enhancing teacher preparedness, and providing individualized support through resource pedagogy, foster students can increase their success. This holistic approach not only supports foster students, but allows school environments to create space for them to thrive.

Integrating resource pedagogy into education will serve to bridge the gap between current practices and potential success of a foster student. Approaching foster student success through resource pedagogy allows educators to adapt to the needs of the foster student, while also tackling the recurring challenges that face foster students, like poor perceptions. Through its implementation, resource pedagogy will create a wave of successful students, even those in the foster care system.



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## Appendix A

### Interview Preservice Teacher:

1. What relation do you currently have with the foster care system in Southeast Georgia?
2. How does the foster care system play a role in your future occupation?
3. What resources/information have you obtained as a preservice teacher as it pertains to the foster care system?
4. Describe your perception of a student who is in the foster care system.
5. In what ways would it be beneficial to understand the needs of a foster care student?

### Interview Veteran Educator:

1. What relation (role) do you currently have with the foster care system in Southeast Georgia? Are you aware if students in your class are in the foster care system?
2. How prepared were you to teach students in the foster care system during your first year of teaching? How has your preparedness differed throughout the years you have been teaching?
3. Describe your perception of a student in the foster care system.
4. What strategies have you implemented that worked well with students in the foster care system? What strategies failed?
5. What resources/information would have been beneficial to understand the needs of a student in the foster care system during your preservice education?

### Interview School Representative (School Counselor):

1. What relation do you currently have with the foster care system in Southeast Georgia?
2. Describe your perception of a student who is in the foster care system.
3. Are there additional needs for a student who is also in the foster care system? If so, what are the needs?
4. What classroom environments aid student learning for foster care students? What classroom environment neglects student learning for foster care students?

5. What resources/information would be beneficial to understand the needs of a student in the foster care system in relation to teachers?

Interview Former Foster Student (if applicable):

1. What relation do you currently have with the foster care system in Southeast Georgia?
2. Describe your perception of a student who is in the foster care system.
3. What classroom environment did you feel you were most supported in? What classroom environment did you feel least supported in?
4. What needs were not met in the least supportive environment?
5. What resources/information would be beneficial to understand the needs of a student in the foster care system in relation to teachers?

Interview Former/Current Foster Parent (if applicable):

1. What relation do you currently have with the foster care system in Southeast Georgia?
2. Describe your perception of a student who is in the foster care system.
3. What classroom environment did you feel your student was/is most supported in? What classroom environment did you feel your student was/is least supported in?
4. What needs were not met in the least supportive environment?
5. What resources/information would be beneficial to understand the needs of a student in the foster care system in relation to teachers?