BLOCKS AND PLAYDOUGH: RECONCEPTUALIZING PRESCHOOL EDUCATION THROUGH AN HEURISTIC MULTIPLE CASE STUDY APPROACH

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by
CARLA NICOLE WILLIAMS

B.S., Creighton University, 2000
M.A., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2008
Ed.S., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2010

Kansas City, Missouri, 2014

BLOCKS AND PLAYDOUGH: RECONCEPTUALIZING PRESCHOOL EDUCATION THROUGH AN HEURISTIC MULTIPLE CASE STUDY APPROACH

Carla Nicole Williams, Candidate for the Doctor of Education Degree

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ABSTRACT

This study utilized a multiple case study approach, informed through heuristic inquiry, which examined the ways in which preschool quality remains uneven across early childhood settings, despite the wealth of research noting the long-lasting benefits of a high quality Pre-K experience. In order to improve outcomes for all children, regardless of the Pre-K they attend, we must look at the capacity of those who deliver and supervise what happens in the classroom. This study utilized a unique lens to identify high quality Pre-K classrooms by employing teacher and director voice as the underpinning to explore what they believe constitutes a high quality Pre-K experience through a focus on teacher quality, leadership beliefs, and effective classroom practices. This vision is intended to enable children of all backgrounds to build a strong and stable foundation for a lifetime of learning.

The participants in this study included three lead Pre-K teachers and three center directors. Individual teacher and director pairs each came from a unique Pre-K setting, one dependent on private tuition, one federally-funded center, and one school district preschool. Teacher and director beliefs on high quality Pre-K were discovered through data sources that include in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis.

The research findings suggest a dual theoretical framework of center organizational climate and learning community. The overarching implication of this study rests on the principle that a developmentally appropriate learning community built within a climate of trust, respect, and knowledge leads to a high quality experience in Pre-K. The teacher plays a crucial role in fostering classroom climate that is developmentally appropriate and the center director defines the center climate through use of policy, communication, visibility, understanding of developmentally appropriate practice, and establishment of a culture of collaboration.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled "Blocks and Playdough: Reconceptualizing Preschool Education through an Heuristic Multiple Case Study Approach," presented by Carla Nicole Williams, candidate for the Doctorate of Education degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee

Jennifer Friend, Ph.D., Committee Chair
Division of Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations

Loyce Caruthers, Ph.D.
Division of Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations

Gus Jacobs, Ed.D.
Division of Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations

Shirley Marie McCarther, Ed.D.
Division of Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The Context

While the primary teachers for most children remain their parents, children today spend a significant amount of time outside the immediate care of the parents. Research has consistently shown that high quality pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) programs improve outcomes for children in school and in life (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald & Squires, 2011; Barnett & Yarosz, 2007; Schulman, 2005; Schweinhart, 1994). This elucidates one reason for high quality Pre-K. In addition, the impact of a high quality Pre-K experience is shown to affect intellectual, social, and emotional development as well as to contribute to the children becoming engaged members of society (Herzenberg, Price & Bradley, 2005). Head Start, a federally funded program started in 1965, is a Pre-K program that offers comprehensive services and is required to meet federal performance standards and child care licensing regulations (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1993). Head Start has been the foundation of most American Pre-K conceptualizations, yet remains today an economically segregated program (Kagan, 2008a). A comprehensive meta-analysis of 50 Head Start studies found evidence of immediate improvements on children's intellectual and socio-emotional performance and health that lasted several years (McKey et al., 1985). Pre-K experiences vary widely for each child, and the type of Pre-K varies as well. Figure 1.1 highlights the types of Pre-K classrooms that exist and are available for children to attend.

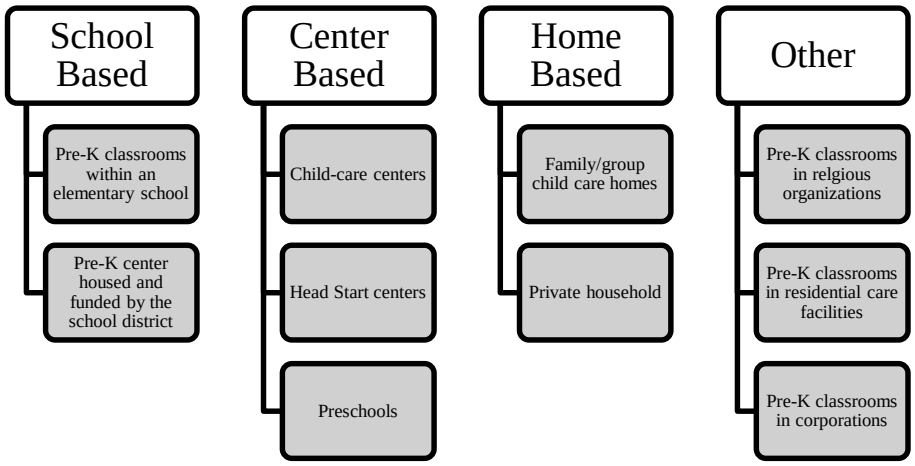


Figure 1.1. Multiple Pre-K Service Deliveries. Adapted from Economic Policy Institute, 2005

Pre-K programs also struggle from multiple service deliveries. Twenty-nine states with Pre-K programs allow a mixed service delivery model in which public schools, public and private preschools, Head Start, and community agencies may participate in serving children (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin & Schulman, 2005). Although schools house the majority of Pre-K students, about 30 percent of all enrolled children receive services in community settings (Barnett et al., 2011). The challenges with multiple delivery methods may include different licensing requirements, uneven teacher pay and salary structures, and overall quality assurance.

Several national and state studies have found benefits for young children who participated in Pre-K programs. In the National Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort, a study that followed 22,000 children from school entry through eighth grade shows that students who attended a Pre-K program scored higher on reading and math tests than children receiving parental care (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips & Dawson, 2004). This cohort also showed students who attended a child care center or other preschool

program demonstrated gains, although former Pre-K students exhibited the greatest achievement. An additional study conducted by National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) examined state Pre-K programs in Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and West Virginia and compared Pre-K graduates with similar non-participants. It used an evaluation research design that compared Pre-K participants with children of a similar age who had not yet had the Pre-K experience. For this study, researchers identified samples of children with birthdays just before and just after the Pre-K eligibility cutoff date. One year later, they assessed the skills of Pre-K graduates against those children who could not participate that year due to the age cutoff but who were just ready to begin Pre-K.

The story that emerged for me from the variety in centers is there is a disparate amount of quality differences among centers that ranges based on center location, population, funding source, and teaching staff. Research has shown that child care quality measures vary based on these characteristics (Bryant, 2010). Yet, it is the characteristics of interaction and content-specific instruction that have been shown to more strongly predict child outcomes, such as observations of teacher-student interactions, teacher sensitivity, and observations of instructional quality rather than teacher certification levels or teacher salary (Burchinal, 2010; Frede, 1995). This study aimed to understand the differences and listen to the stakeholders' recommendations for leveling the quality of Pre-K classrooms. The teachers' and center directors' voices illuminated the research questions, and provided a story map for realizing a collective vision for Pre-K.

Case studies seek to understand a problem within given circumstances (Stake, 1995). A multiple case study by definition involves one issue, but the researcher seeks multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (Yin, 2009). This study is a multiple case study informed through heuristic inquiry that will focus on three types of Pre-K classrooms: a district Pre-K classroom, a Head Start Pre-K, and a private Pre-K classroom. This study was informed through heuristic inquiry, so that my voice and experience played a part. Patton (2002) defines heuristic inquiry as seeking to understand what is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon under review for the researcher and for the participants. When I think about my fervor for early childhood education, I struggle to narrow it down to a single experience that occurred in my childhood. In fact, I did not even go to preschool when I was growing up. As I start to conceptualize my own education, I realize that I have a personal story to tell –my mom was a teacher, my dad a principal. Education was obviously imperative to my parents. My first experience in early childhood education came later in my life; I worked in a preschool setting during my undergraduate program. I rotated from room to room, which I distinctly remember troubling me then because I could see that consistency in providers was indispensable for these children. Yet on a daily basis, I would be moved to where numbers required an extra body. What this experience did for me was interest me in teaching kindergarten and first grade when I graduated. For me, this age group had minds that were malleable, they were excited to learn, and there was sheer exuberance that showed in their eyes when they learned something new. Fast forward several years and I started working at the state department of education. Teacher quality became the focus of my work there. It afforded me the

opportunity to go visit classrooms across the state, in every shape and size district. I then started to realize the impact a teacher can have on their students when teaching is of high quality and the culture of learning is fostered within the classroom setting. True to my kindergarten roots, I discovered the emphasis on teacher quality was higher for middle and high school teachers. The question that continued to nag me, which paralleled my thoughts from my preschool experiences during college, what about focusing on the youngest grades?

Later on in my professional career, I was in a position that enabled me to move into preschool classrooms on a daily basis, and it became jarringly evident that there is a huge gap between early childhood (ages 3-5) classrooms and early primary (grades K- 2) classrooms. While district preschool classrooms had a framework in place for things like curriculum and teacher certification, private and federally funded classrooms did not have such stringent expectations. For example, a district Pre-K teacher must hold a minimum of a B.A. degree in early education or elementary education as well as hold a current teaching license. For Head Start, one of the classroom teachers must hold an associate degree in early childhood education or an associate degree in another related field, but be working on coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education. Centers are allowed a three year waiver if they are unable to find a candidate to meet these qualifications (Head Start, 2013). For Head Start, as of September 30, 2013, at least 50% of Head Start teachers nation-wide must have a baccalaureate or advanced degree in Early Childhood Education or a baccalaureate or advanced degree in any subject, and coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education with experience teaching preschool-age children. Taking into account the work I had done with teacher quality, I discovered that the children

in Head Start, federally funded classrooms would never be where their counterparts in higher quality settings were at when entering kindergarten. Thus, why isn't the focus on equalizing early childhood education? I decided it was important to look at the infrastructure of preschools, the various supports in the classroom, the specific teacher quality in each classroom, and how leadership could shape the quality of each classroom. Consequently, my research questions were formed. The following diagram depicts the focus of my study – a three-pronged approach to determining a high-quality Pre-K (see Figure 1.2).

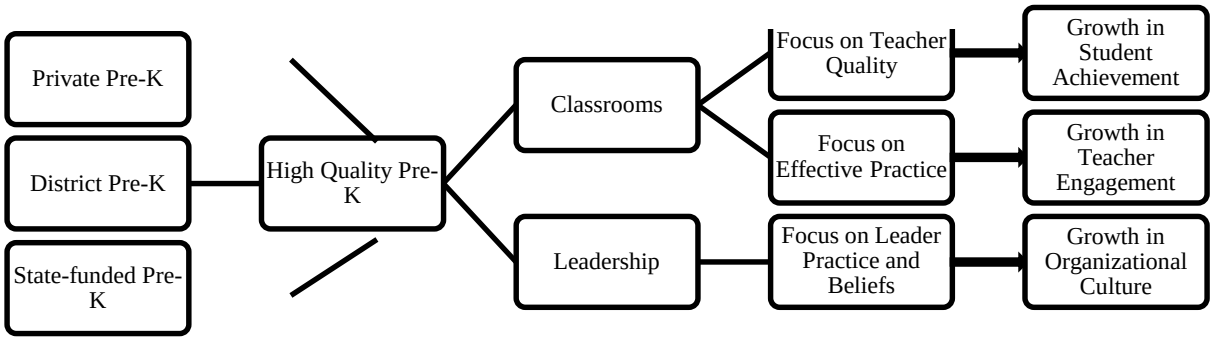


Figure 1.2 Three Pronged Approach to High-Quality Pre-K. Diagram representing the improvement of the Pre-K system through a three-pronged focus on teacher quality, effective practice, and the practice and beliefs of leaders.

This study was designed to investigate this three-pronged approach (further explained in this chapter) and contributed to the literature regarding ensuring a high-quality Pre-K. This study was based on a conceptual framework, in which teacher quality, effective practice, and leadership all impact the quality of the experience for the Pre-K child. Thus, it is my belief, if Pre-K, regardless of setting, could focus on these three quality elements,

quality would be enhanced and children would experience long term benefits. High quality programs empower young children as well as they empower teachers to achieve success.

There is still no universally accepted terminology for the complex system of programs used to educate and provide care for children ages birth-5. This system includes infant and toddler programs, for-profit, and not-for profit, programs. Community based centers, family child care homes, and pre-school programs, Head Start (ages 3-5), Early Head Start (ages birth-3), and after school programs. This study used the term Pre-K to describe preschool and early childhood education systems. Pre-K, in this study, was also defined as schooling for children within the ages of three to five years. For leadership in Pre-K settings, this study used the term director.

The Problem

Across the nation, state funding for Pre-K decreased by more than half a billion dollars in 2011-12, signaling the largest drop ever (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald & Squires, 2012). Funding per student for state pre-school programs has reached its lowest point in a decade, according to the annual report, The State of Preschool 2012, released by Rutgers University's National Institute for Early Education Research. The author found that the 2011-2012 school year was the worst in a decade for progress in access to high-quality Pre-K for children in the United States. After a decade of increasing enrollment, that growth stalled, according to the report (Barnett et al., 2012). Between the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, Pre-K spending on state programs dropped by more than $548 million overall, and $442 per student (to $3,841) when adjusted for inflation, according to the report. This means state Pre-K funding per child has fallen more than $1,100 in real dollars from 2001-

2002. Low funding, Barnett states, affects quality since states have been shown to skimp on things like visits to monitor preschool programs. In President Obama's 2014 budget, the administration proposed "Preschool for All," a plan that would incentivize state spending on high-quality Pre-K slots for 4-year-olds living below 200 percent of the poverty line by providing matching federal funds, paid for in part by an increase in the tobacco tax. Yet, the definition of high quality is still in debate (Hunter, 2013).

Positive, supportive relationships, important during the earliest years of life, are essential for cognitive, emotional, and social development (Ackerman & Barnett, 2006). The Pre-K years are the optimum time to develop the foundational skills of development. However, there is a large gap in the quality of preschool education in the United States. Improving the quality of Pre-K efforts is essential if we are going to prepare children for school and later success in life. Research has clearly demonstrated that high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs produce long and short-term positive effects on children's cognitive and social development (Barnett, 1995; Barnett & Yarosz, 2007; Frede, 1995; Schulman, 2005). Barnett (1995) concluded that "across all studies, the findings are relatively uniform and constitute overwhelming evidence that early childhood care and education can produce sizeable improvements in school success" (p. 40). Yet several large scale evaluations found that high-quality Pre-K experiences are not the norm. Each of these studies found that high quality programs supporting social and cognitive development were only visible and evident in about 15% of the programs (Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995). More startling was the finding that 12-20% of the children

were in settings deemed dangerous to their health and safety and hurtful to their social and cognitive developments (Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995).

In order to understand why this uneven quality exists, I focused on three elements of Pre-K classrooms: teacher quality, effective practice, and leadership.

Teacher Quality

Teachers vary dramatically in the quality of their classroom practice, and this variation is strongly linked to significant differences in children's learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000). When children consistently have good teachers, they can make great developments. Yet, when children are exposed to poor instruction, their development and learning can suffer (Darling-Hammond, 2000).With wide discrepancies in the quality and quantity of Pre-K education, children are entering kindergarten with a differences in skills and readiness. Children who have attended low quality Pre-K classrooms are already far behind their peers in skills and measures of school readiness when they reach kindergarten (Schulman, 2005). Barnett indicates that more developmentally appropriate practices in preschool and kindergarten predicts greater success in later grades (1995). Xiang and Schweinhart (2002) found that children who attended Pre-K performed higher in language, literacy, math, music, and social-emotional relationships. Two specific gaps in quality have been revealed in large scale studies. First, the average Pre-K program serving children from middle class families was found to yield moderate benefits at best (Duncan, 2003; Gormley & Gayer, 2005). Second, there is a quality problem related to Pre-K's disappointing results for poor children (Currie & Thomas, 1999). Historically, policy makers have attempted to improve early childhood education through state regulations and structural changes, such as

class size, teacher certification and teacher-child ratios. Teacher quality does not necessarily fall under the umbrella of structural indicators. For this study, teacher quality was defined as the classroom experience that is provided by the teacher and rests on the quality of emotional and cognitive interactions, support and engagement between teacher and students. Nothing is more important than ensuring that every child experiences high-quality teaching.

Effective Practice

One example of effective practice that will be explored is instructional coaching, still relatively sparse in Pre-K. A growing research base describes characteristics of effective professional development for Pre-K teachers (Hemmeter, Snyder, Kinder & Artman, 2010). Based on this research, current guidelines recommend professional development should be implemented over time, grounded in teacher practice, linked to outcomes, collaborative with the teacher, and interactive (National Staff Development Council, 2001; USDE, 2007). Even despite these recommendations, professional development often remains a one-time event (Gusky & Yoon, 2003). This kind of professional development does not allow for changes in teacher behavior or classroom practice. Instructional coaching provides an effective and relevant approach to professional development for Pre-K teachers. Denton and Hasbrouk (2009) state that effective coaches should possess pedagogical knowledge, content expertise, and interpersonal skills. A meta-analysis on literacy coaching by L'Allier, Elish-Piper, and Bean determined that coaching offers promise in terms of improving teacher practice and student achievement and school readiness (2010). The authors found that the practices of conferencing with teachers, having data-based conversations to guide decision making, observing classroom instruction coupled with formative and supportive feedback

and modeling instruction in the classroom are more likely to produce these student achievement gains. Coaching, in this light, then transforms into a form of job-embedded professional development.

Leadership

Leadership takes on a different appearance in Pre-K. Often times, leadership is found in site directors who have been placed in their position without adequate training or experience, rather, they have been a childcare teacher for several years and progressing up the career ladder. Most early childhood directors were promoted to their current position because others saw their leadership ability and encouraged them to pursue an administrative role (Jorde-Bloom, 1997b). The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership (Bloom & Bella, 2003) reports that only 27% of directors state they were well-prepared for their administrative role, and over one-half of directors describe the transition as overwhelming. Leadership can also be school principals, when Pre-K is housed in their building. Often times, school principals focus is K-8 and lack the expertise to effectively serve and support the preschool classroom and teacher in their building.

Early childhood leaders need to articulate a commitment to high-quality instruction that is pointed at supporting individualized child development and learning while supporting and engaging their teachers, in addition to making organizational decisions that affect the culture and climate of the center.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study, also informed through the tradition of heuristic inquiry, was to develop a vision of high-quality Pre-K, as informed by those in the

field in order to provide recommendations for policy and research for an equitable and high quality preschool education for all children. Case study, as the major strategy of inquiry, is used when the researcher is interested in studying a "program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2013, p. 104). I elected to use a multiple case study approach where preschool education in private, district, and federal preschool classrooms are examined. This study took place in three preschool classrooms with distinctive characteristics each located within a large metropolitan city in the Midwest. The unit of analyses, determined by research questions outlined in the following section, is the quality of education based on infrastructure, process, and structural variables across multiple preschool delivery systems. Quality of education was defined by the quality of interactions between teachers and children, high-quality instruction where each child is taught at their developmental levels, and an offering of a range of comprehensive services. These all lead to children exiting Pre-K with the ability to be efficacious in a range of skills encompassing socio-emotional and cognitive domains leading to school readiness. Process variables are defined as the child's experiences in the child care setting. These may include caregiver responsiveness and sensitivity, instruction, and behavior. Structural variables are defined as classroom characteristics such as the ages of the children served, group size, child-adult ratio, the health and safety of the environment and caregiver characteristics such as education and training (Lamb, 1998). A preschool delivery system was defined as the system which is comprised of for profit and not for profit centers that include community-based centers, private preschool programs, school district preschools, and Head Start centers, working with children ages 3-5.

Heuristics is the form of "phenomenological inquiry that brings to the forefront the personal experience and insights of the researcher" (Patton, 2002, p. 107). I chose heuristic inquiry because I have personal experience and interest with the phenomenon under study – preschool quality. Heuristic inquiry "yields an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon through intensity…where the reports will be filled with discoveries, personal insights, and reflections from the researcher" (Patton, 2002, p. 107). Moustakas (1994), the primary developer of this approach, sees the systematic steps of this inquiry approach as immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. Thus, understanding the preschool teacher and preschool setting through my connectedness to the settings allowed me to portray how this phenomenon operates within the broader context high-quality preschool classrooms. The goal of the study was to develop a system understanding of my experience and the experiences of others that allows for effective and equitable practices to infiltrate Pre-K classrooms across multiple delivery methods. Utilizing heuristic inquiry enabled the researcher to understand the meaning, essence, and experience of themselves as well as the teachers in the classroom that in order for high quality and equitable preschool education to be realized, the field needs to advance programmatic and conceptual variables. Methods of inquiry included interviews, observations, surveys, and document analysis..

For a preschool system to be successful, the three classroom types must be interconnected and interdependent upon one another to provide a high quality education for all students (Schultz & Kagan, 2007). Low quality preschool education pervades early childhood education, seriously restricting the quality of the services themselves, the quality

and the competency of who teaches preschool, the quality of the standards that guide pedagogy and instruction, and the amount and distribution of resources.

While there are many valuable lessons to be learned from individual preschool programs, the foundation of all lessons is even quality across all Pre-K settings. As a nation, we must reconceptualize U.S. preschool education through research and policy in order to prevent inequity and inequality.

Research Questions

To better understand how to make preschool education of higher quality, I used the following research questions to guide my inquiry of heuristic case study. The overarching question I sought to answer was: *How can the system of Pre-K education in the United States be reconceptualized and developed to ensure it is of high quality for all children?*

Sub-questions looking at programs and infrastructures of Pre-K education included the following:

- How can teacher quality improve development and readiness for kindergarten for every preschooler?
- What can educational leaders do to support high-quality Pre-K classroom instruction?
- What elements of effective practice contribute to high quality instruction within the Pre-K classroom?

The research questions focused the study and led to the development of the theoretical framework, the foundational knowledge needed to support the design. These will include: (1) research questions that relate to the study's goals, the researcher's experience,

prior research, and exploratory research; and (2) questions form a coherent whole, rather than being a random collection of queries about your topic (Maxwell, 2013). With these points in mind, I selected several areas of research that formed the study's theoretical framework.

Theoretical Foundation

Maxwell (2013) explains that the theoretical framework, a central component to research design; consist of "actual ideas and beliefs that you hold about the phenomena studied" (p. 33). It is a model of the phenomena, what is going on with the phenomena, and why. In defining key concepts of the framework, the researcher framed the issue and narrows the topic to a manageable size. Shields (2006) sees theoretical frameworks as types of intermediate theory that attempt to connect to all aspects of inquiry (e.g., problem definition, purpose, literature review, methodology, data collection and analysis). Conceptual frameworks can act like maps that give coherence to empirical inquiry. Because conceptual frameworks are potentially so close to empirical inquiry, they take different forms depending upon the research question or problem. My experience in the field of early childhood has given me an insider's perspective to the system of preschool education, leading me to my selection of heuristic inquiry, which is the key concept of the framework and the primary theoretical tradition for my study.

I brought several assumptions to this qualitative study. First, Pre-K education in the U.S. is ineffective in a global sense, stemming from several process and structural issues. Second, attending Pre-K makes higher education more likely for low-income children. Third, Pre-K education yields mediocre achievement results due to factors such as

inadequate teacher quality and a lack of accountability that is present in the K-12 educational system. Lastly, there is an absence of societal beliefs related to the adverse effects of low- and positive effects of high-quality Pre-K education. In general, it is a mix of process quality and structural quality elements that determine what an effective Pre-K program looks like. Based on my career experiences, I believe strongly on a focus on balancing early childhood education. Looking at the infrastructure of Pre-K's, the different programs, and the fiscal and federal policies shaping the education Pre-K children are receiving in this country is indispensable.

While studies have shown that participation in high-quality Pre-K programs produces long-lasting academic and social benefits, especially for low-income children, many families still lack access to adequate early childhood education programs (Barnett, Hustedt, Hawkinson & Robin, 2007; Lamb, 1998; Schweinhart, 1994; Vandell, 2004). For example, private Pre-K programs vary with availability and quality based on location and parental income. Head Start programs, the federally funded Pre-K programs, suffer from success limitations through staff turnover, staff qualifications, low pay, location, and incoherence with curriculum. This leaves state-funded preschools whose policies vary widely in the scope and quality of the programs they provide. Success or failure in a child's early years leads to success or failure in school and, consequently, throughout life (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007).

> As a society, we cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age – a time when it may be too late to intervene…. Early childhood interventions of high quality have lasting effects on learning and motivation. (Heckman, 2004, p. 5)

And yet access to quality, affordable programs remains uneven.

The first conceptual strand of the theoretical framework addresses the historical context of Pre-K. The nation's interest in Pre-K has grown considerably since 1960, when only 10 percent of the nation's three- and four-year-olds were regularly enrolled in a classroom setting (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin & Schulman, 2003). The second conceptual strand looks at leadership and its impact of Pre-K quality. Providing the critical leader in Pre-K settings is essential. Third, uneven teacher quality and its effect on Pre-K programs is examined. The Pre-K teacher is in a unique position to provide opportunities to build the fundamental skills and knowledge students will need for the remainder of their schooling career. In leveling Pre-K programs, teacher quality and capacity is an important first step. Early childhood leaders lay the foundation for a seamless and rigorous system for early learning. Lastly, an examination of high quality Pre-K will provide a global vision for equalizing the education children receive.

The Historical Context of Preschool Education

Conceptually, early childhood education evolved during the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, when women started working outside the home and men were in factories or on farms. "Infant schools" were set up to care for children (Bredekamp, 1987). In 1915, parent cooperative schools began in the United States. Head Start eventually modeled their foundations after these cooperative schools. In 1926, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) was established to improve the well-being of all young children by focusing on developmental services offered to children from birth to the age of eight (Beatty, 1995). Yet, all these programs continued to tackle the coinciding beliefs that children and mothers should stay together.

During the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's, a national war on poverty was underway. Part of this movement spurred the creation of Head Start as way to provide families with comprehensive services that targeted poor children (Spodek & Saracho, 2003). At Head Start's conception, only ten percent of the nation's three and four year olds were enrolled in a classroom setting (Spodek & Saracho, 2003). Currently NAEYC estimates that only three out of every five eligible children in the nation utilize Head Start programming which has been a consistent problem since Head Start's inception.

In most states, there are multiple preschool or Pre-K options for young children. Parents have the choice of sending their child to a federally funded Head Start program, if their income is at the poverty level, state-funded preschool, government-funded special education programs, and for-profit and not-for-profit providers (Levin & Schartz, 2007), including those that accept government subsidies that help low income parents pay.

In February 2013, the President issued a plan to ensure that all four-year olds at or below 200% of the poverty line would be eligible for universal Pre-K (Klein, 2013). This agenda was funded by a 94 cent tobacco tax (Klein, 2013). For states to be eligible for this money, they must meet early learning standards, hire well-qualified teachers, maintain a data and accountability warehouse, and have small class sizes (Klein, 2013).

Teacher Quality in Pre-K Programs

Previous efforts to improve Pre-K education have had little focus on instructional quality, but rather on class size, credentialing, accountability systems, and structural indicators. The concept of Pre-K quality has had a recent focus on professionalizing the early childhood workforce. For example, by requiring Pre-K teachers to have a bachelor's

degree and, increasingly, certification (Pianta et al., 2005). It has been believed that these investments would lead to better teaching and more learning. But the correlation between higher achievement and these structural policies is sparse (Grubb, 2009).

According to Maxwell, Lim & Early (2006), there are more than 1,200 institutions of higher education offering a version of a degree program in early childhood education. Of these, roughly 40% offer a bachelor's degree and 60% an associate's degree, with some institutions offering both. A study by Diane Early and associates found limited correlations between Pre-K teachers' educational credentials and observed classroom (Early et al., 2006). There seems to be agreement among early childhood researchers that early childhood teacher professional development (both preservice and inservice) should be of high quality, but the nature of that quality has not been consistently defined. Quality has been used for many years in early childhood literature, but has been conceptualized differently (Pianta et al., 2005). Researchers have made efforts to define quality criteria for professional development (Tout, Zaslow & Berry, 2005). Frequently, high quality is described (1) in terms of teacher behaviors that are correlated with a positive impact on children's social and academic development and learning (Wilson, Pianta & Schulman, 2007), or (2) when there are direct benefits to young children and their families (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001).

Coaching provides a supportive environment for learning that allows the coach and teacher to jointly examine and reflect on current practices. Coaching can help teachers to apply new skills and work within a supportive context, receive specific feedback, and problem-solve challenging situations. There is a current gap in the literature on coaching in

the preschool setting. Coaching research has predominately been focused on elementary, middle, and high school. Snyder, Fox, and Hammeter (2011) do find that performance based coaching in the Pre-K setting must include incremental application of practices with individualized support. Specifying the coaching framework for supporting implementation of interventions is critical.

A landmark study by Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn and Downer (2007) explained that it is how productive the classroom environment appears in the use of time, the sensitivity of teacher's behavior, how classroom activities spark engagement, and the quality of instruction that help define quality (Pianta et al., 2005). This study also supports the research that demonstrates that many early childhood educators are not prepared to teach literacy (Early et al., 2006; Pianta et al., 2005). The goal must be to build the capacity of all early childhood educators to produce effective teachers of young children.

Pre-K Leadership

Leadership in early childhood education has undergone its own share of different conceptualizations, but most often, early childhood leadership is typically equated with management. Leadership is about creating an organizational vision, where at the core there is "a breadth of vision and thinking that transcends individual programs…is innovative…collaborative and bold" (Kagan & Bowman, 1997, p. 3). Whereas management in early childhood is seen as "attending to the details of efficiently running a program" (Humphries & Senden, 2000, p. 26). Providing the critical leader in Pre-K settings is often easier said than done. The budget shortfalls, multiple preschool delivery systems and a continued disconnect between preschool and the other early learning years from

kindergarten through 3rd grade all impact implementing leadership in a cohesive and rigorous system for early learning. In addition, there is an absence of professional development opportunities for early childhood leaders as they look to foster the skills and knowledge sets to lead their staffs to provide high quality preschool experiences.

Strong leadership in early childhood is critical since directors are the agents to quality. They set the stage for the climate and culture of the center (Bloom & Bella, 2005). It is early childhood administrators, whether center directors or principals that lay the platform for high quality leaning experiences that will carry over into elementary school. Yet, while strong leadership in early childhood is agreed upon, there is very little priority given to training, support, and career development systems for directors. Research shows that the level of training and support for early childhood program directors impacts the quality of services provided (Bloom & Bella, 2005). With the high rate of turnover in early childhood, a study by McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership analyzed if directors who were given leadership training and professional development resources stayed in the field. A three-page self-report survey was mailed to 278 participants who had engaged in the leadership cohort. A total of 182 surveys were returned, with a response rate of 68%. Of that sample, 58% continue to work as directors of center-based preschool, 28% are no longer directors but still work in early childhood, and 14% are no longer in early childhood. Respondent had an average of 18 years of experience with a median age of 45 years. Participant's reflections at the culmination of the leadership cohort and the surveys revealed how they had grown professionally and personally. They reported that the gap between theory and practice had been narrowed and helped them to expand their repertoire

of administrative skills. The same study by McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership (2011) also found that directors with greater levels of administrative training report significant gains in their level of competence enabling them to perform their responsibilities more effectively. More highly qualified directors also have been shown to increase staff retention as well as higher expectations for the program – both of which equate to higher expectations for program quality (Bloom & Bella, 2005). The empirical evidence from this study provides evidence of how leadership training can change the administrate role and function in early childhood.

In addition to professional development, early childhood leaders need to understand developmentally appropriate practice along an early childhood continuum and have a well-developed vision for early learning. Early childhood leaders must align standards, curriculum, instructional strategies and assessment both horizontally and vertically (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2006). The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership (2011) reported the findings of a study that showed clear relationships between observed quality and the role of motivation, extrinsic knowledge and intrinsic beliefs play in shaping the director's view of quality. The study analysis showed that directors with classrooms of the highest observed quality were more likely to express high expectations regarding staff qualifications, communicate respect and support to the staff, integrate new learning, not feel burdened by financial decisions, prioritize resource allocation to professional development, emphasize the importance of good financial planning, and rely on external standards that exceed licensing requirements to help shape program practice. The research on early childhood program leaders substantiates the belief that directors are an important part in

improving the quality of early childhood teachers, facilities, and care for young children (Jorde Bloom, 1997a). Seplocha's (1998) study showed that early childhood leaders play a critical role in creating and sustaining program quality through their beliefs, attitudes, convictions, and decisions.

High Quality Early Childhood Care

Quality is a multidimensional element is that is assessed using a variety of measures, but the core of quality is defined by classroom environment and child outcomes (NICHD, 2001). Quality is further drilled down to two types: process and structural. Process quality relates to the emotional, social, and instructional elements of a classroom as demonstrated through student-teacher interactions (Pianta et al., 2005). On the other hand, structural quality analyzes factors such as class size, teacher training, the length of the school day and support services available (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2005). In 2010, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) introduced a proposal that would use accountability measures to identify the 25% of the lowest performing Head Start programs in the country (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2010). These programs would lose their funding, and would have to reapply in a competitive process to get it back. For the first time, the quality of a federal center's program would start to play a role in their funding. Centers were reviewed using the CLASS Pre-K observation model developed by Pianta (Mashburn et al., 2008) that focuses on the interactions between teachers and students. In addition to the CLASS observations, Head Start centers would need to show compliance and fiscal records. Based on these

measures, schools would be ranked and then the lowest performing 25 % would effectively lose their contracts.

Preschool programs must define the balance between quality, availability, and affordability. Structural and process quality features within individual programs should reflect high quality physical environments, developmentally appropriate curriculum, child-teacher interactions, family involvement, and highly-trained and skilled teachers. A universal Pre-K framework that explicitly clarifies high quality components of a Pre-K classroom can help states make educated decisions about needs and priorities.

I provide next an overview of the methodology, which includes the theoretical traditions, the sampling techniques for selecting the best participants.

Overview of the Methodology

The purpose of this heuristic, multiple case study was to explore the voices of teachers and directors within three preschool systems related to providing a high quality preschool education for all children in the United States. The problem is that there is a large gap in the quality of preschool education in this country. Improving the quality of Pre-K efforts is essential if we are going to elevate the school readiness and long term success of all children. I have used a multiple case study informed through heuristic inquiry with the intent to understand the large gap in the quality and quantity of Pre-K education. Heuristic inquiry, according to Patton (2002) seeks to understand what is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon under review for the researcher and for the participants. Interviews and observations were the main data sources in the multiple case study approach, Document analysis was also utilized.

A case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995, xi). A multiple case study (or collective case study) by definition involves one issue, but the researcher seeks multiple cases to illustrate the issue. Yin (2009) suggests that multiple case study design uses the logic of replication, in which the inquirer replicates the procedures for each case. The collective case study approach will focus on three different preschool settings, each with distinctive characteristics, yet within the system of U.S. preschool education. The unit of analysis in the case is a multisite study. With the intent of the case studies being to understand a specific issue within the larger preschool system, the type of case study is viewed as an instrumental case. I aimed to discover how the system of preschool education across three settings can be made equitable and of high quality through infrastructure, conceptual, and programmatic support to these sites.

Site and Participant Selection

This study took place in three preschool classrooms with distinctive characteristics, each located within a large metropolitan city in the Midwest. I used purposeful sampling which means that the sites selected for the study will purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). The purposeful sampling incorporated maximum variation as a sampling strategy to represent the diverse preschools settings and to fully describe the multiple perspectives about the cases. Maximum variation is often used because it "maximizes differences at the beginning of the study and increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect the differences across sites" (Creswell, 2013, p. 157).

In order to glean an in-depth understanding of the system, I used an urban, federally-funded preschool classroom, a district preschool classroom located within a district situated between large districts of 20,000 plus students, and a private preschool classroom in a suburban setting that is dependent upon tuition. Each setting provided a unique perspective to preschool education.

Classroom A, an urban, federally funded preschool classroom is located in a center in the middle of a large, Midwestern city. Classroom B, a district preschool classroom located within a large suburban area and is sandwiched between two large districts of 20,000+ students. The classroom was in a K-5 school of 598 students. The Pre-K program in classroom B was half day, with a morning session and an afternoon session. My observations remained consistent with the afternoon class. Classroom C, a private preschool, was located in an area in the southern suburban sections of the large Midwestern city.

I developed recruitment strategies focused on demographics of site, teacher capacity, classroom and center characteristics, and director's willingness to participate. Participants included the lead teacher in each classroom and the site director for each setting. As the researcher, I purposefully selected three teachers and three site directors, using criterion sampling, who meet the criteria of three or more years of teaching experience in Pre-K, and have a willingness to participate. The directors met the criteria of more three or more years of leadership experience in Pre-K settings. Teachers and directors were compensated for time and effort to participate in this study. They received a $25 gift card for completing observations, interview, focus group, and survey questionnaire.

Data Collection

The major data sources were in-depth interviews, observations, and documents. In-depth one-on-one interviews were conducted for approximately 45 minutes with classroom A, B, and C teachers and Preschool A, B, and C directors. There was one 45 minute focus group for teachers and directors. Follow-up interviews were conducted through electronic communication methods, or telephone interviews served as supplements if clarification is needed. The observations were in the form of observer as participant, where my identity was revealed, but my interaction with the participants was rather limited. My primary task was to gather information and create description and my participation with the group will be secondary. Each classroom was observed three times during the instructional block in which circle time, whole group, small group, and centers occur. Snack time and transitions was also observed. Circle time lasted approximately 20 minutes in which the class is gathered together to do opening activities such as calendar time, songs, and weather. Whole group time can last 15-30 minutes where is usually a strong literacy focus through direct, explicit instruction and incorporates phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, shared writing, and shared reading. Small group looks differently from classroom to classroom, but typically involves the teacher working on more differentiated instruction with small groups of children to help develop skills that are more challenging or new. Centers are typically free time play for children to explore, create, and engage in meaningful conversations and interactions. Snack time was approximately 15 minutes and offered opportunities for oral language building, as do brief transitions to different activities in and out of the classroom.

For the data source of documents, I utilized subject-produced documents such as lesson plans for coding in order to think deeply about the process of qualitative data collection. I used documents produced by the organization such as minutes of staff meetings, and center policies and procedures.

Applying multiple sources of information in data collection provided a detailed, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) view interviews having seven logical stages that include thematizing the inquiry, designing the study, interviewing, transcribing the interview, analyzing the data, verifying the validity, reliability and generalizability of the findings, and finally reporting on the study. Through triangulation, researchers make use of the multiple data sources to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2013). By double-checking findings and using multiple sources, the verification process will be built into the data collection. I developed triangulation of data using multiple data sources: interviews, observations, and document analysis. This method helped me gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of high quality preschool education.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, the context and setting of the individual cases was described. For the study, the analytic strategy was cross-case analysis. Yin (2009) encourages researchers to make every effort to produce an analysis of the highest quality. In order to accomplish this, he presented four principles that should attract the researcher's attention: (a) Show that the analysis relied on all the relevant evidence; (b) Include all major rival

interpretations in the analysis ; (c) Address the most significant aspect of the case study and (d) Use the researcher's prior, expert knowledge to further the analysis.

An in-depth picture of the cases was painted using narrative, tables, and figures. This in-depth picture addressed the most significant findings of the case studies, both within-case and across cases. I developed naturalistic generalizations from analyzing the data, which Creswell (2013) depicts as generalizations that people can learn from the cases either for themselves or to apply to a population of cases. The analysis was rich in the context of the cases. The multiple case analyses was concluded by presenting these assertions and generalizations that are grounded in current literature which became a larger explanation for the descriptive and thematic analysis. The final interpretive stage was a report on the meaning of the case that is derived from learning about the central issue in the cases.

Significance of the Study

As evidenced above, research clearly has shown that high-quality Pre-K programs significantly help prepare children for school (Barnett, 2005). Yet, there is a definitive mix of ingredients that are agreed upon which determine high quality programs. Some policy makers and researchers believe it is process variables such as student-teacher interactions, some believe it is structural variables, such as class size and teacher certification (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2005). This study aimed to understand high quality Pre-K through the lens of the teachers and the directors. Pre-K studies tend to rely on methods that do not instill the voice of those doing the work – this study will aim to prepare recommendations based on teacher and administrator voice. Because the recommendations

were based upon the voices of the participants, they are feasible to implement within the classroom and center setting. Quality must be raised - for a preschool education to enhance a child's learning and development, it must be high quality. My research study is important because it looked at high quality differently than past research studies; it incorporated the voices of those living and doing the work in order to ameliorate low quality programs. This is important because high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs produce long and short-term positive effects on children's cognitive and social development. When there is large gap in the quality across programs, it impacts children's schooling throughout elementary school. Second, low-income children often begin kindergarten behind their peers. Equalizing preschool quality will eliminate this gap. Being able to reconceptualize preschool education in the United States through research and policy will strive to prevent inequity and inequality.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

Chapter Two contains a literature review providing a theoretical framework for this study. The history of early childhood, Pre-K teacher quality, early childhood leadership, and a global vision for high quality Pre-K will be examined in the literature review. Chapter Three explains the methodology of this study, specifically, the recruitment of participants, data collection procedures, instrumentation, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The findings of the study will be presented in Chapter Four. The final chapter, Chapter Five, discusses the findings of the study, highlight the contributions and implications of these findings, and provide suggestions for further research. The instruments used in this study are included in the Appendices of this dissertation study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Pre-K provides the foundation for success later in life. According to Barnett (2003), "The social, emotional, educational, and economic advantages from high quality preschool translate to better lives for children, their families, communities and society as a whole" (p. 3). Yet, uneven program quality threatens these advantages from being realized, which has its roots from systemic issues over a century old. The care of children outside the home has origins that lie in the traditions of social welfare and education for the youngest of society, with the basic necessity of health and well-being as a central tenet, but to also enhance the employability of parents, improve economic health, and the productivity of the nation at large (Hayes, Palmer & Zaslow, 1990). This review of literature aimed to understand the characteristics of those who care for these children and examine their profession as it relates to quality measures in the context of care. Quality care is much more than teacher education and salary; it is a dynamic discussion that understands the social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and linguistic needs of children. This discussion must move theory to praxis.

Understanding the constructs of care within the field is essential in understanding how the profession evolved and where the profession needs to go. The purpose of this literature review was to understand the current and past contexts of early childhood. This literature review begins by looking at the traditions of early childhood and how it has evolved over the years. The idea of leadership in early childhood will be discussed with an attempt to define leadership. Leadership in a child care setting takes a different perspective

than leadership in an elementary school which will be examined. The idea of preschool teacher knowledge and capacity will be explored next, with a look at teacher knowledge and teacher human capital. Lastly, the literature review will conclude with a global vision for equitable and high quality preschool education.

History of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education in the U.S. has a history that can be traced back to the 1800's. But international early childhood education can be traced back even further to Scotland, where Robert Owen, a cotton-mill owner, created a place for his employee's children to play. This was available for children birth to 6. These became nursery schools, and ran on the belief that the environment shapes the person. Beatty (1995) described the nursery schools in England as including clapping, marching, dancing, and outdoor play, but no reading. In Germany, the concept of nursery schools was transformed into Friedrich Froebel's kindergarten. By 1830, *Kleinkinderbewahranstalten* (public places that offered services to the poor) were established for young children (Shortridge, 2007). Froebel's' kindergarten ideals were further progressed in America. The nursery school movement in America took multi-faceted approaches: the research center nursery school, the cooperative nursery school, the private school nursery schools, the philanthropic nursery school and the teacher-training nursery school (Shortridge, 2007).

Turn of the Century: Nursery Schools Transformation

Research center nursery schools grew out of university programs studying child development. Yale's Dr. Arnold Gesell observed to determine their emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development (Shortridge, 2007). Yale and Columbia University

collaboratively funded and planned two university nursery schools (Shortridge, 2007). Cooperative nursery schools arose out of the same need as the first nursery schools: women going back to work and needing care for their children. During World War I, the Kaiser Company, in Portland Oregon, opened two centers for the children of mothers who were working in their shipyards. Hymes (1995) recalled that the centers, open 24 hours and 365 days a year, served 3,800 children with a peak attendance for a daily session of 1,005 children. The manager of two shipyards, Edgar Kaiser hoped to attract others to work in the shipyards, rather than other professions, but believed "anyone can teach young children; this is not a special field. No special training is required" (Hymes, 1995, p. 26). Yet, he wanted the best of the best managing the nursery schools, so he had the early childhood experts of the time brought in from around the country. The Kaiser centers were tuition run with a health clinic, home service food, where parents could purchase and pick up full meals to take home for dinner, flexible enrollment, rooms for drop in children, parent engagement events, informational booklets for parents, school aged group rooms when the schools were closed for holidays, an extensive community outreach and public relations program, small class sizes, and diversity outreach. Though this center, and others like it, were short-lived because they depended on the war, and "when the particular industry no longer existed, the childcare program no longer existed" (Hymes, 1995, p. 37). These cooperative nursery schools eventually evolved into the private Pre-K's we know today.

Philanthropic nursery schools were a part of the settlement houses where the communities served the needs of poor children within their community. These were "all-day facilities, where children were tended to by caregivers who lived in the same community

as the children…they provided meals, hygiene, and a sanctuary for children who would otherwise be on the street" (Shortridge, 2007, p. 32). The teacher-training nursery schools were on site at teacher colleges and incorporated the new theories of child development.

A Shift in Pedagogical Beliefs

G. Stanley Hall, and American psychologist, believed that the nursery school should fit the child, not the other way around. This brought about a pedagogical shift and started the child-centered movement that is still very prevalent today. In the 1860's in Oswego, New York, Dr. E.A. Sheldon opened the Oswego Normal School where teachers taught children and focused on self-expression, rather than language arts (Shortridge, 2007). Teachers who were trained at Oswego, were eagerly sought after (Vanderwalker, 1971.)

By 1870, industrialization had made an enormous impact in America. With agriculture as a dominant force, the nation moved from rural to urban. The urban population grew from 15 million to 45 million between 1880 and 1910 (Gutek, 1986). Immigration was also at its peak during this period, where nursery schools started enrolling a large population on non-English speaking students. John Dewey, the famous progressive educator, believed that education and social reform should be linked and school became the vehicle for social change (Gutek, 1986). William Heard Kilpatrick, another influential educational progressive, advocated for child-centered education where problem solving was done through child-initiated purposeful activity (Gutek, 1986). He developed the project-method where children would learn without the presence of a teacher (Shortridge, 2007) and rejected traditional teaching methods. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas were not evident in America until almost a century later than when they were published in Europe, but they focused on

child-centered learning and emergent literacy (van Kleek & Schuele, 2010). Lawrence Cremin (1961) summed up the movements of the progressivism movement in education: a more focused attention on the child on the child, the acknowledgement of the importance of the interest of the learner, the need for children's free movement in activities, character development, and championing for the rights of the child.

By looking at the history of early childhood up to this point, it is unmistakable that current practice builds upon and reflects past practice. There are two models of early childhood education today that still dominate: the child-centered model and the academic model. Both are traditional, and each comes from traditions several centuries old.

The Montessori Movement

Maria Montessori emerged in America in 1913 and differentiated herself from other progressives by stating that the teacher must understand the needs of the child, but it is the teacher who decided the options for the child and what is available to the child. A Montessori underpinning is that children should be concrete and tactile by age 4 (van Kleek & Schuele, 2010). The adult only interjects if they believe the child could get hurt. Montessori theorized that if children were able to move around at their own discretion led by their interests, self-discipline would result. William Heard Kilpatrick had serious concerns about Montessori and her ideals and worried her method would become more popular than his (Shortridge, 2007). He and his team flew to Rome to meet her. They prepared by reading her book, *The Montessori Method,* bought her teaching materials for $50, and learned Italian (Shortridge, 2007). Although Kilpatrick appreciated Montessori's concept of giving children more freedom, he thought it was ridiculous to advocate for imaginary play.

His thoughts on Montessori were written into a book in 1914, *The Montessori System Examined*, which had a devastating impact on the American Montessori movement. It was decades later that the movement would experience resurgence with approximately 5,000 schools in America today (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006).

The Reggio Emilia approach was started just after World War II in Italy. It does not have defined methods or accreditation processes (van Kleek & Schuele, 2010). This approach focuses on building the foundation for literacy by engaging children in representing ideas and feelings through a variety of media (van Kleek & Schuele, 2010). Conversely, the Waldorf approach, founded by Austrian Rudolf Steiner in 1919 (van Kleek & Schuele, 2010). There are only 250 Waldorf schools in America today. In focuses on engaging children in artistic and domestic activities such as baking, and cultivates children's imagination through storytelling and imaginary play. Toys are not finished so children can use their imagination to play with them.

Head Start's Historical Roots

Beatty (1995) reports that nursery schools started in England with the hopes of providing compensatory education for working-class children and to close the gap between the rich and the poor. In 1964, America sought the same thing with the passing of federally funded Head Start, a compensatory program. It was part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, where the current and original goal was to prepare children from all backgrounds to be ready for school (van Kleek & Schuele, 2010). At Head Start's conception, only ten percent of the nation's three and four year olds were enrolled in a preschool (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001). Head Start determines eligibility based on federal poverty level

coupled with funding streams, yet; only about half of eligible children are served (Gormley, 2005).

At its inception in 1964, Head Start program officers offered few guidelines in regional and local implementation. There was an overarching saying of "maximum feasible participation" which was a concept that favored local employment offerings and the integration of parents and/or poor into the implementation and decision making of the program (Hale, 2012, p. 519). Local Head Start volunteers lived out "maximum feasible participation" by visiting student's homes to work with parents (Hale, 2012, p. 523). "Maximum feasible participation" also created the space for implementation of the whole-child curriculum. Head Start sponsored eight week training courses, 6-week trainings for teacher aides, and one week intensive training camps for other teachers. Head Start teachers essentially used the program to go back to school and earn credentials from institutions of higher learning (Hale, 2012).

The typical day in a Head Start classroom, according to Hale (2012), was structured around nine 30 minute segments. The day started with a hot breakfast and was followed by half-hour periods consisting of reading, numeracy, and free time. Whole group time that focused on reading followed, with a hot lunch, nap, outdoor time, and one afternoon session of group or individual time finishing the day

In the national context, Head Start's inception suffered from many problems. Bailey, Head Start's federal administrator, noted several changes that needed to be made in retrospect. Bailey (2000) explained that largest change was Head Start did contain a single or overarching goal but had seven objectives. This made it difficult to explain the program

and even more difficult to measure its success. Having a feasible evaluation plan is vital to a program's success, and Head Start did not have one. Head Start did decide to evaluate through the use of IQ tests, which measured intelligence as program success (Spodek & Saracho, 2003). Lastly, defining and paying attention to quality is imperative. Head Start started off so big that the quality became uneven. Head Start went through a resurgence where the administration had a strong commitment to improvement and progress and maintains itself as a strong force in early childhood education today.

The Start of Accountability

In 1929, professional researchers and educators joined forces and established The National Association for Nursery Education (NANE), which became the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC accredits preschool programs, over 11,000 to date (NAEYC, 2013). While accreditation by various programs varies by state to state (state preschools are often accredited by their district, not NAEYC), private preschools make up the majority of NAEYC's accreditations. And since they oversee the majority of accreditations in the country, NAEYC has been able to set the definition for a quality program. This definition was nationally published in the 1997 document *Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age Eight.* The recommendations made throughout the iterations of this document guide the practice of many preschool teachers, directors, and policy makers (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Bredekamp and Copple (1997) show that NAEYC promotes the view that preschool is structured around play and child-initiated activities, and social skill development is paramount. Mallory and New (1994) voice several

criticism of the paper, including (a) it sets up an orthodoxy in early childhood education, (b) it suggests a single approach to early childhood education for one cultural group is best for all cultural groups, (c) it does not address criteria for programs other than developmental appropriateness, and (d) it reflects a maturationalist view of development. A revised version ten years later tried to strike a balance between teacher-initiated and child-initiated activity. There were two more revised editions of the position statement in 1998 and 2009.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are the basis for national disability law. These two pieces of legislation ensure and guarantee those with disabilities a free and appropriate education, and fair access to housing and employment. In 1986, the amendment was passed to IDEA that mandated that preschool programs for children with disabilities. Early intervention for children with disabilities should include four things: inclusion, quality, specialization, and family-centeredness (Bailey & McWilliams, 1990). The question on the research front has been whether quality meant different things for children with or without disabilities (Carta, Atwater, Schwartz & McConnell, 1993). Layered with the quality issue, many argue that inclusive settings should be a goal for all children with disabilities, but these inclusive settings must be of high quality (Bailey, McWilliams, Buysse & Wesley,1990). One study found that segregated programs for children with disabilities had lower quality than programs for typically developing children (Bailey, Clifford & Harms, 1982). Research has also shown that young children with mild disabilities are more likely to be placed in inclusive settings, whereas children with more severe disabilities are more likely to be placed in segregated settings (Buysse, Bailey, Smith & Simeonsson, 1994). In the end, if

inclusion and specialization are competing values, goals cannot be achieved equally in either setting. Increasing effective high quality access should be the first goal. Pre-K children must be placed in a setting that is prepared to meet their needs where an effective model on early intervention is in place.

Pre-K in Business

Starting back in the 1800's, women entering the workforce created a business for childcare By 1982, approximately 600 employers provided some type of child care assistance. By 1990, that number had increased to over 5,000 (Oekerman, 1997). Corporate America has started a shift to the benefits of child care to the benefits for their business though it has not been as methodical or far-reaching as child care in the public schools. Oekerman (1997) describes the child care models that businesses adopt are manifold and look differently from business to business. Direct care involves on-site centers. Indirect care involved companies contracting with existing centers to provide care for their employee's children. Temporary care is when businesses arrange for emergency care for children. Pre-paid care is when companies allow their employees to contribute a pre-tax amount to be used toward child care. Lastly, referral care is when employers contract with referral services that have information on available child care in the area (Oekerman, 1997). All of these options provide benefits to the employers, which include less employee stress, workforce stability, and reduction in absenteeism and tardiness, shortening maternity leaves, and improved morale (Friedman, 1991). In the literature about corporate America and child care, very little interest is paid to the children, who are only mentioned indirectly. It is a financials and productivity game (Galen & McNamee, 1995).

It is then increasingly important for early childhood to market themselves on what they can offer to businesses rather than the other way around. Simply stated, they are economic development and a tax break.

When looking at if corporate day cares are equal in quality to private, state, and Head Start preschools, it becomes apparent corporate care presents some unique challenges (Oekerman, 1997). Businesses have influence over the childcare centers in their buildings, and often these centers are "cut" if businesses need to streamline expenses. Parent-child relationships are a variable in so much as examining if children benefit from having their parent visit their classroom regardless of frequency. If security and attachment are affected for children, parents on site at their business may not be the ideal situation.

No Child Left Behind

The next impact of federal initiatives early childhood has felt is No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This law changes the federal government's role in kindergarten through grade 12 by describing success through standardized test performance (Stipek, 2006). The debate still ensues that NCLB did not focus on improving Pre-K. Though there are several things that can be traced directly to NCLB or the accountability mindset NCLB produced. School districts may use Title 1 funds to provide preschool programs to at-risk children from birth to 5, but only 2-3% of the funds were used for that purpose (Ewen & Matthews, 2007). There were several other requirements that affect preschool, such as districts working with Pre-K and Head Start programs to plan kindergarten transitions, and three big federal programs were funded for Pre-K (Early Reading First, Even Start, and Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Program) (Mead, 2007). The federal initiative, Good

Start Grow Smart, called for states to develop early learning standards for children ages 3-5 in language, literacy, and math that are aligned to K-12 standards (Mead, 2007). Social-emotional development currently does not have mandated standards so understanding child development is a principal concern. States are also increasingly mandating assessments of preschool programs to track the progress of children and its programs (Rothman, 2005). Another policy shift reminiscent of NCLB is a national trend of moving the kindergarten cutoff date up so that children enter kindergarten older (Stipek, 2006). For example, Rhode Island moved their date from December 31 to September 1 and Hawaii moved theirs from December 31 to August 1. It is posited that delaying entry into kindergarten could mean economically disadvantaged children have more time to fall behind their peers (Stipek, 2006). Lastly, with NCLB, there has been an added investment into teacher training for preschool teachers. Professional development must center around a deep knowledge of the subject matters taught, effectiveness at child assessment, and the ability to plan instructional activities that are engaging and based on child need.

Educational Vouchers in Pre-K

Federal policies need to help states and school districts improve early education and become a catalyst for local, state, and federal initiatives to build high quality educational systems Pre-K-12. In terms of providing high quality universal preschool, some policy makers advocate for the use of preschool vouchers. Vouchers are government-financed entitlements or certificates that can be used for a specific purpose such as the provision of housing or health care for a targeted population (Levin & Schwartz, 2007). Educational vouchers were first proposed as a funding option by Milton Friedman (1962). Friedman

acknowledged that the education of individuals provides external benefits to society. More recently, educational vouchers emerged as part of NCLB giving children choice to select an alternative to their home school which is not performing. There is little use of preschool vouchers, but Georgia's universal Pre-K program, Georgia Pre-K, is a voucher like program where parents may choose public or private providers in the district, but the state pays providers directly rather than issuing the entitlements to parents (Levin & Schwartz, 2006).

Levin and Schwartz (2007) report that for a preschool voucher program to be feasible and successful, they must meet four criteria: freedom of choice, productive efficiency, equity, and social cohesion. Preschool vouchers can produce equity and efficiency through reaching all preschool children, whether from disadvantaged background or not by producing greater returns on the educational investment at this age (Witte, 2007). Finance, policy, and support services provide the supports for these criteria to be met. The Georgia voucher-like program was started in 1993 with the goal of providing children with learning experiences needed for kindergarten. The program is paid for with proceeds from the state lottery and is voluntary allowing families to enroll at the preschool of their choice. Any activity performed during the 6.5 hour, 5 day a week program is free to all Pre-K students. Centers may charge for extracurricular activities, as well as charge for transportation, health, and meals to all families above the poverty line. The allocation of less than $4000 a child which contrasts starkly to the allocation of $7000 a child in Head Start and the estimated $8000 amount needed to provide a high quality experience (Levin & Schwartz). Levin and Schwartz (2007) believe the Georgia Pre-K system leans toward

greater equity among families of various incomes since geographical attendance zones are open rather than regulated.

Florida began a preschool voucher program in 2006 (Witte, 2007). It provided a voucher to any child up to $2,500 with an adjustment made for county of residence. The voucher program does not offer transportation which is limiting for poor families, keeping geographically close centers as choices, and those far away are inconvenient (Witte, 2007). But the main thrust of the voucher argument, whether in a universal program like Georgia or Florida, or in a more targeted delivery method, is to provide a system to maximize opportunity through equity, investment, efficiency, and diversity.

A Historical Roadmap

The history of early childhood education has provided a roadmap for educators to use as a guide in moving Pre-K towards a more high quality and developmentally appropriate future. Understanding the history is essential in establishing a perspective needed to evaluate new information and innovative approaches. Understanding why we do today is often the result of what has been done in the past helps clarify the marketplace of ideas that is so prevalent in early childhood education. As Sir Isaac Newton professed, "We stand on the shoulders of giants" (Watts, 2009, p. 106).

Leadership in Early Childhood

Leadership is not easily defined. A review conducted by Cuban (1988) identified more than 350 definitions of leadership, but no clear definition has emerged. Ciulla (2003) found a shift from the hierarchical vision of a leader towards a more interdependent relationship between the leader and staff. Even with this shift, and the ample amounts of

literature on leadership, an agreed upon definition of leadership does not exist. Without a clear definition, it is difficult to follow a concept that is so subjective and identify an image of leadership that will lead us to systems change.

Leadership Models in Education

According to Sergiovanni (1994) leadership in education does not have its own identity. The leadership models used in educational settings are mostly adapted from leadership models in the business world. Southworth (2009) provides explicit expectations about leadership. From his point of view, leadership is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that involves the following elements: (a) leadership as a shared function that is not restricted to upper level management (b) leadership is highly contextualized as being where you are affects leadership (c) it involves setting a direction for the school and (d) there is a process of social influence and lastly leadership entails making an individual and collective difference to the quality of teaching and learning within a school. These norms will provide the framework for leadership in this discussion.

Leadership in early childhood education has undergone its own share of different conceptualizations. Those holding positions of leadership in early childhood usually have the title of director, manager, supervisor, or lead teacher. Kagan and Bowman (1997) provided a setting for early childhood leadership in their book, *Leadership in Early Education and Care.* In the preface, the authors say:

> Leadership in early education has many facets, included and not limited to management and administration…At its core is a deep knowledge of the field, a willingness to take risks, and a breadth of vision and thinking that transcends individual programs, services, or organizations. Leadership in early care and education is innovative, but sensitive to history, diversity and context, and it is collaborative, yet bold. (pp. xi-xii)

Furthermore, they suggest that there are some universal attributes of leadership, like ethics, that span all grade levels, but other attributes differ in early childhood. A commitment to the improvement of a child's outcomes through building social-emotional development provides the fundamental tenets for leadership in early childhood education. Neugebauer (1990) noted that studies in leadership and administration in early childhood had found that the director's style of leadership has a profound effect on the total teaching approach of the center. In particular, Neugebauer proposed that the leader's decision making style was related to the quality of interactions within the center. Neugebauer noted that:

> The director must set the course in order to lay out a vision that all staff can use as a road map to guide their day-to-day efforts. Not only does the director set the course, but she also must keep her finger on the pulse of the organization. (p. 99)

Early childhood leaders are change agents. Preschools are often in fled and must know the political climate in which they exist. To further understand leadership in early childhood, a number of different theories about leadership will be examined: transformational leadership, instructional leadership, distributive leadership, and school based management and leadership.

The transformational model of leadership has been influential since the work of Bass (1985). Transformational leaders seek to motivate, influence, empower, and develop the skills of others (Adamson, 1996). This leadership role reflects second order changes and is aimed primarily at changing the organization's normative structure (Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1994). According to Burns (1978), leadership must be aligned with a collective purpose and effective leaders must be judged by their ability to make social changes. Burns

envisions the transforming leader as seeing "potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower" (p. 4). Transformative leadership explains and describes the importance of the personal aspects of leadership. This form of leadership has been described as a cultural expression because it is about creating with followers a vision for the organization that is relevant for a specific organizational culture such that followers are empowered (Sergiovanni, 1998).

Instructional leadership is harder to define. Instructional practices vary from school to school and principal to principal. Thus, it is not surprising that principals who are asked to be instructional leaders are often unclear about what this means. There have been two general approaches to defining instructional leadership in the past 30 years. The narrow view is that of leadership content knowledge (Stein & Nelson, 2003). This content knowledge includes the knowledge of academic subjects used by administrators when they are functioning in the role of an instructional leader. Knowing strong instruction when a principal sees it and being able to encourage strong instruction when they do not see it.

The problem with this view is that in many schools the principal is not the educational expert and does not have the time to do so (Hallinger, 2003). There are some principals who perceive their role to be administrative and, as such, purposely distance themselves from the classroom environment (Hallinger, 2003). Hallinger's most frequently used conceptualization of instructional leadership proposes three dimensions: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school culture.

A broad view of instructional leadership emphasizes organizational management for instructional improvement rather than day-to-day teaching and learning. "Under this new vision of leadership, principals guide school panning and decision making based on data and are keenly aware of the nature of instructional practice occurring in the school" (Loeb, Kalogrides & Horng, 2010, p. 1). Strong managers develop the organizational structures for instruction more than they spend time in classrooms or coach teachers. Strong organizational managers, as defined by Horng and Loeb, are effective in hiring and supporting staff, allocating budgets and resources, and maintaining positive working and learning environments. This broad view of instructional leadership is believed to increase teacher motivation, creates positive working climates, and provides professional development as a way to reward and retain effective teachers. Loeb and Horng see strong organizational managers consequently being able to support classroom instruction without providing that support directly to individual teachers. Instead, they develop a working environment in which teachers have access to the support they need.

Aviola (1999) states that how a principal understands quality teaching will have an impact on instructional leadership and also impact the outcome. At a minimum, the principal must share his or her ideas of instructional leadership with their teachers to help clarify intended goals. Principals also need to rely on standards to identify what instructional leadership should look like.

Another theory on leadership is known as distributive leadership which strongly emphasizes skill development through collaboration and sharing of ideas. "Distributed leadership is characterized as a form of collective leadership in which teachers develop skills

and expertise through working collaboratively" (Harris, 2002, p. 3). The ideology within this paradigm shifts the "doing" and "thinking" from one to many. It is about the division of labor and creating a workplace that requires collaboration, teamwork, and cooperation (Gronn, 1995). Harris (2002) speaks of distributed leadership involving multiple sources of guidance and direction following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture.

Educational leaders are also required to be active change agents in sustaining a continuous flow of information; obtaining sufficient resources; coordinating feedback from their colleagues, community and outside agencies; defining boundaries and interdependencies between outside agencies and schools, and insisting upon accountability to the organizational mission (Simpson, 1998).

Early Childhood Leadership

In early childhood, strong leadership is vital because directors are the direct link to quality. They oversee and are responsible for creating the climate that promotes optimal growth and development of children as well as implementing the systems to unsure quality is maintained (Bloom & Bella, 2003). But being a leader and director is not necessarily a position that many preschool teachers set out to achieve and occurs through years of experience rather than willingness. This is a common situation in early childhood. It is important in this situation to understand leadership within the context in which it is to be practiced.

Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) found that a key area of leadership practice in the early years involves the identification and shared construction of mutual objectives. It also

involves inspiring others with a vision of a better future. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) identified several key components and capacities early childhood leaders should embrace: (a) identifying and articulating a collective vision; (b) ensuring shared understandings, meanings and goals; (c) effective communication, encouraging reflection; monitoring and assessing practice; and (d) a commitment to on-going professional development. Professional development, as seen by Bloom and Bella (2003) provide greater confidence in the ability to impart change and actively advocate for staff, children, and families. Professional development also offers a way to enhance their perceptions of themselves as directors, their work, and professionals in early childhood. Leadership professional development can change early childhood from the inside out and the bottom up, through the changes in the early childhood leaders themselves (Bloom & Bella).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) proposes six standards that effective early childhood leaders should use as their guiding principles. First, leaders must embrace early childhood learning by supporting an expanded continuum of learning for early childhood through elementary school. Second, effective leaders must engage families and communities by working with families and community organizations to support children at home. Third, leaders must provide developmentally appropriate learning environments. Fourth, effective leaders ensure high-quality curriculum and instructional practices that foster young children's learning and development. Fifth, leaders use data driven decision making through the use of multiple assessments, such as portfolios and authentic assessments. Lastly, effective leaders are advocates for universal early childhood education.

Professionalizing Early Childhood

The current aim is to professionalize early childhood (Children's Workforce Strategy, 2006) and looking at the qualifications of staff in order to increase the quality of care. Coupled with the long standing low status and pay of early childhood leaders, The Maryland Family Network reports that nationally, on average, child care directors earn an annual income of $34, 862. Elementary principals report an annual income of $76,144. Talan (2006) found that director's average salaries vary depending on their role: $38,314 for Director/Teacher, $39,853 for an Owner/Director, and $43, 555 for Director of a single program. NAEYC reports that 40 states have regulations in place that require pre-service qualifications to become an early childhood director and only 8 states require pre-service training in program administration. Talan (2006) reports that only two states, Indiana and Pennsylvania, require a director to have a minimum of an associate degree. In contrast to early childhood center-based directors, elementary school principals must have a minimum of a bachelor's degree and specialized training in school administration. Both center director and elementary principals oversee facility management, curriculum design and implementation, assessment, human resources, family and community relationships, and fiscal issues.

Being a principal or a director in an early child environment is not often a position that is set out to be achieved. According to Jorde Bloom's (1997b) career stages, many directors are promoted to their positions because others have seen their leadership potential. Hayden (1997) found that less than 45% of directors had studied administration; and less than 50% of his sample had any in-service training related to management. Hayden also

reported that 41% of directors worked in the field for less than two years before taking the role of a director. Hayden's findings indicate that the demand for experienced directors is greater than the supply and that many directors have fallen into their position with limited experience or knowledge about the role and responsibilities. Rodd (1997a) has highlighted the reluctance amongst early childhood leaders to accept the label of leader.

Bloom and Bella (2003) believe there is a lack of training and development for early childhood leaders. The lack of support for leadership training and professional development has been suggested as a contributing factor to the low profile of leadership (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). While initial teacher training is aimed at developing capable and competent teachers, those in leadership roles need to be further supported through professional development. Muijs, Aubrey, Harris and Briggs (2004) suggest the consequence of a lack of leadership programs for early childhood is that those in leadership positions are unprepared for their leadership and management responsibilities.

Professional Development for Leaders

Rodd (1997b) found that although 91.7% of her sample of 76 early childhood leaders reported having taken part in some professional development to support their leadership role, but the majority were sit and get over very general topics. Marquardt (2004) suggests that many professional development programs are ineffective because experts rather than practitioners are seen as the experts, and little knowledge gets transferred to the workplace. The lack of opportunities for reflection and self-questioning in many leadership programs is problematic (Dolitch, Noel & Walker, 2004). Raelin (2004) cautions against separating leadership learning from leadership practice. Southworth (2005) stresses the importance of

context in leadership development. West-Burnham (2003) proposes strategies necessary for leadership learning to occur. These include: (a) learning activities that are based on problem-solving in real-life situations, (b) reflection on actual experiences based on appropriate feedback, (c) challenges derived from new ideas and confronting performance (d) coaching to help mediate the perceived gap between actual and desired performance, and (e) the creation of a community of practice to support the above.

Several one or two year programs are offered in different parts of the country that involve leadership training and mentoring (Bloom & Bella, 2005). From studying these programs, Bloom and Bella identified a number of key elements that serve as a framework for planning effective leadership development programs. These were: (a) basing the program on participants' assessed needs; (b) making the training problem focused and specific to the workplace context; (c) focusing on the role of the leader as a change agent; (d) ensuring the needs of busy working professionals were met; providing opportunities for collegiality and networking across different early childhood levels and services; promoting active learning; and ensuring follow-up support is available.

Jorde Bloom (1997b) discussed director's career stages and advocates that professional development should be tailored according to the specific stages. Jorde Bloom interviewed 257 directors to identify professional development needs. While 32% of the participant directors felt confidant when they first became a director, 79% indicated they were not prepared for the kinds of issues they encountered. The study highlighted that directors at different levels of their career cycle have different needs. Stages in the career cycle included: the beginning director, the competent director, and the master director.

Once the stage of the career cycle is identified, then professional development can be tailored to meet needs.

Another issue for early childhood leaders are feelings of isolation, since they are separate and away from a peer group (Bloom & Bella, 2003) Bloom and Bella (2003) found that directors often report that having an assistant director and/or mentor as a sounding board assists them not only in their everyday work but also provides support in addressing macro issues with peers. Directors reported that to better prepare them for their role, training should encompass both practical and theoretical knowledge and some sort of internship.

The vast growth of early childhood has required increased professionalism and a need for many more personnel who have the knowledge and skills to lead and manage early childhood. Leadership in child care services has many functions, "pedagogical, management, advocacy, community, and conceptual" (Kagan & Bowman, 1997, p. 12.).

Leadership and leadership development in the early childhood sector is different than leadership for elementary schools – the context is different. Some of these differences resulting in a muddled leadership definition in early childhood include an increased need for professionalism, feelings of isolation, disjointed leadership standards in early childhood, and the lack of notice for career stages. Educational leadership has been defined as "informed actions that influence continuous improvement of learning and teaching" (Robertson, 2005, p. 41). This vision for educational leadership needs to be extended to early childhood in order to provide the highest-quality care.

Teacher Knowledge and Capacity

In 2011, 1.3 million children attended state-funded Pre-K (Barnett et al., 2011) and 1.12 million children attended Head Start (National Head Start Association, 2005). With this number of our nation's three and four year olds spending their days in various Pre-K environments, it is imperative to have assurance that each child learns in a high quality environment with a high quality teacher. Their preschool teacher has the ability to build the fundamental skills and knowledge they will need throughout schooling. Through a look at the recent literature on Pre-K curriculum, assessment, intervention, teacher professional development, certification, salaries, and teacher retention, we see the influential parts contributing to an effective learning experience.

Academic Content in Pre-K

It has been well established that early childhood is a crucial time for children's cognitive development (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001). Preschool learning experiences in language, literacy, math and science will build the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that prepare young children for future academic success. Recently, it was found that 48 states and the District of Columbia have adopted early learning standards aligned with state academic standards for the elementary grades (Barnett et al., 2011). Observing a high-quality Pre-K classroom makes it clear that children are able to do more now than previously thought possible. It is also clear that high-quality, age-appropriate, academically rich Pre-K experiences are often unavailable to poor and minority children (Raudenbush, 2009).

Researchers have shown that when children in Pre-K classrooms spend time on the key academic content areas, such as literacy, language, math, and science, they have an

academic advantage as they enter elementary school (Downer & Pianta, 2006). Yet, understanding how children learn is the first step in teaching preschoolers. Based on the work of Piaget and Vygotsky, there are theoretical principles of child development and learning that guide developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). Bredekamp (1987) identifies these to be (a) children learn best when their physical needs are met and they feel safe; (b) children construct knowledge through the interactions between the individual and their setting; (c) children learn through social interaction with other adults and other children; (d) children learn through play; (e) children's interests motivate their learning; and (f) human development and learning are characterized by individual variation. In terms of how to teach it to children, the methods must be different than those used in elementary school (Downer & Pianta, 2006). In Pre-K, children should be taught introductory knowledge through developmentally appropriate instructional techniques, such as read-alouds, discussions, games, projects, and other active learning opportunities (Neuman, Roskos, Wright & Lenhart, 2007). Both free play and structured play are particularly important for this age group (Diamond, Barnett, Thomas & Munro, 2007). Play offers children chances to explore, manipulate, imagine, role play, communicate using their vocabulary, and practice new knowledge. By focusing on how children develop and learn, teachers will meet children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs.

Oral language is arguably the most crucial area of academic focus during the Pre-K years. By the time children arrive in kindergarten, most will know an average of 3,000 to 5,000 words (Hart & Risley, 1998). Listening and speaking are the primary ways that Pre-K children learn new concepts and ideas, express their thoughts, observations, and feelings.

Vocabulary size in Pre-K can predict children's ability to comprehend texts throughout elementary school and into middle school (Chall, Jacobs & Baldwin, 2009). This is because children generally learn words in relation to the specific meanings they are meant to convey. Children will not understand the words they encounter in text unless they are part of their receptive vocabulary. As a result, children with large vocabularies and a relatively broad range of knowledge are in better position to comprehend, learn from, and enjoy the books the read (Hart & Risley, 1998).

By the time children arrive in Pre-K, there are vast differences in their oral language skills. One study found that by age 3, children who grew up in poverty has been exposed to half as many words as their middle class peers. The vocabulary gap remained until the children were nine years old (Hart & Risley, 1998). In addition, the quality and quantity of language interactions with adults and other children matter for oral language development (Neuman, 2001). Unfortunately, talk is often lacking in Pre-K classrooms. A study found that children spent almost 60% of their time in Pre-K is not in conversation at all (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). Teachers should make every effort to ensure that children are engaging in meaningful conversations and language use throughout the day.

Linking assessment to instruction can help the teachers ensure they are teaching at the child's level (Neumann et al., 2007). Integrating literacy instruction into all subject areas in the Pre-K classroom helps children gain foundational knowledge (Neuman et al., 2007). In this way, literacy can produce experiences which focus on creating meaning as children learn about their world.

In Pre-K, teachers help children build on their natural interest in math. Children can also benefit from solving problems that promote their mathematical thinking and from opportunities to learn math vocabulary and communicate mathematical ideas (Bowman et al., 2000). In Pre-K, policy makers have determined that preschool children should develop new math knowledge and skills in five key areas: number, patterns, geometry, measurement, and data analysis (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics [NCTM], 2000). These can be incorporated into free play, conversations, manipulatives, and shared reading (NCTM, 2000). The goal is to guide children through a series of engaging math activities that strengthen their knowledge of key concepts and build math thinking processes (Clements & DiBiase, 2004).

In Pre-K, children begin to learn the foundation of scientific inquiry. Science knowledge is developed in three key areas: physical science, life science, and earth science. Through active learning, children learn the steps that scientists use to investigate and problem-solve (Bowman et al., 2000). They pose an interesting question, plan and predict, experiment to test ideas, record findings, and communicate about what has been learned (Bowman et al., 2000). These activities build background knowledge and vocabulary that are essential for future science learning as well as reading comprehension in the elementary years (Hirsch, 2006). The goal is to provide children with engaging science experiences that appeal to their natural curiosity while providing coherent opportunities to learn foundational science skills and concepts (Gelman & Brenneman, 2004).

Curriculum and instruction in Pre-K, whether it is language, literacy, math, or science, must be developmentally appropriate and involve investigation, exploration,

purposeful play and interaction, and contain scaffolded instruction. Developmentally appropriate practice is based on the knowledge about how children develop and learn. Katz (1995) states,

> in a developmental approach to curriculum design…decisions about what should be learned and how it would best be learned depend on what we know of the learner's developmental status and our understanding of the relationships between early development and subsequent development. (p. 109)

Thus, to guide decisions about classroom practice, teachers need to understand the developmental changes that occur from birth – 8, variations in development, and how to best support children's learning and development during this time (Bredekamp, 1987).

Professional Development

The quality of Pre-K classrooms rests on a variety of variables – from the count of children in classrooms to the language skills of teachers to the organization of learning tasks, which are the process and structural variables often discussed in Pre-K research literature (McCabe & Ackerman, 2007). Yet, it has been documented that it is the support provided by Pre-K that is predictive of positive outcomes for children (Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka & Hunt, 2009). There needs to be social-emotional development connected with learning tasks and child-teacher interactions that facilitate cognitive growth (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

The "professional" in professional development implies expertise, pursuit of advanced training, and maintenance of currency in an evolving knowledge base (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). There is a growing recognition that adequate professional development opportunities for building teacher knowledge in the domain of literacy are critical to the academic success of children. Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich and Stanovich (2004) state that constructing such training programs can be challenging because the knowledge base

needed to support the development of emergent literacy skills and the teaching of reading and writing is extensive, complex, and often underestimated. Conversations about building teacher knowledge through preservice programs and professional development have tended to focus on the needs of elementary school teachers and students, rather than the needs of preschool teachers and their younger learners (Cunningham et al., 2004).

The petition to increase Pre-K teacher knowledge is bolstered by research that has revealed significant links between teacher knowledge and practice (Foorman & Moats, 2004; Spear-Swerling & Brucker, 2004). The results of these studies show that educators who have knowledge of phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle, and understand how to apply such knowledge in classrooms, can positively affect student outcomes (Bos, Mather, Narr & Babur,1999; McCutchen & Berninger, 1999). For preschoolers, the achievement gap in the domain of literacy and language starts well before children enter kindergarten (Princiotta, Flanagan & Germino Hausken, 2006). Due to this, early childhood educators are increasingly required to explicitly teacher pre-academic skills in preschool classrooms. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Head Start Association have also emphasized the importance of teaching young children emergent literacy skills in preschool. These emergent literacy skills include phonological awareness, phonics skills, and oral language skills – three significant predictors of later reading success (Seneschal & LeFevre, 2002).

Yet, converging research continues to demonstrate that many early childhood educators are not prepared to instruct students in the domains of language an literacy (Early et al., 2006; Pianta et al., 2005). As mentioned above, Foorman and Moats (2004) argued

that “an empirical base is lacking for how to prepare teachers to teach reading” (p. 53). This is especially true in preschool. It is critical that preschool professional development opportunities are infused with what is known about the needs of beginning readers, especially those in low-performing, high-poverty schools. Although the relationship between high-quality early childhood education experiences and cognitive, social, and emotional development in children is well understood, professional development for preschool teachers “rarely focuses on curriculum , assessment, or a preschool role in kindergarten readiness” (Freeman & King, 2003, p. 77). It is often more on accreditation standards and elements.

Knowledge calibration is another important factor to consider. Cunningham and colleagues (2004) stated, “teachers tend to overestimate their reading related subject matter knowledge, and are often unaware of what they do not know” (p. 140). This finding is important for professional development because researchers from varied disciplines have theorized that as learners and specifically adult learners, we are motivated to learn when (1) we think that a topic is relevant to our daily life (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and (2) we can accurately assess our lack of knowledge on the topic (Cunningham et al., 2004). Thus, the power of recognizing teacher beliefs in determining the type and amount of classroom learning is a necessary component in the creation of effective professional development.

Review of previous research on knowledge calibration among teachers suggest that:

> People learn information more readily when they are relatively well calibrated as to their current level of knowledge because they can focus on areas where their knowledge is uncertain…if teachers of beginning reading are well calibrated in their disciplinary knowledge, they presumably will be more receptive to seeking out and/or receiving information they do not possess. (Cunningham et al., 2004, pp. 143-144)

Therefore, teachers who lack the knowledge in one of the key literacy domains, and are aware of their lack of knowledge, will likely be attentive to professional development about the topic. Conversely, teachers who are not aware or cannot identify their areas of weakness may not be receptive to the professional development because they did not realize they needed the training. Knowledge calibration should include ways for teachers to assess their own knowledge. Cunningham and colleagues (2004) believe that self-reflection is a necessary component of teaching practice; it is only through this process that teachers can seek such knowledge to ameliorate their deficits.

Holochwost, DeMott, Yannetta, and Amsden (2009) believe that professional development should involve a minimum of three stages. The first step is action research by early childhood teachers in their classrooms and of themselves, to solicit genuine data on knowledge problems and challenges. Then, in the second stage, professional development can be collaboratively designed to solve those specific problems and weaknesses, using concrete data from classrooms. Finally, teachers, administrators, and professional developers can agree on long-range classroom outcomes with agreed-on methods to measure results. It is essential to clearly operationalize the knowledge teachers should have and to develop valid and reliable measures that can assess actual and perceived knowledge Holochwost and colleagues (2009) believe that if professional development is based on action research and knowledge calibration, then the documented outcomes related to that research, the voices of the teachers themselves can truly emerge as strong, powerful, and respected through the field of education. Helterbran and Fennimore (2004) state that

excellent professional development combined with outstanding practice can also lead to greater and much deserved recognition of the professionalism of early childhood educators.

Instructional Coaching

Coaching as a form of professional development offers the opportunity to substantially influence the quality of experiences for both the teacher and the children (Lloyd & Modlin, 2012). Coaching with early childhood teachers to improve the learning environment, instructional quality, and child outcomes is starting to emerge as a highly effective practice (Zaslow, Tout, Halle, Vick & Lavelle, 2012). Early educators need to be afforded the opportunity to see examples of specific practices being implemented in everyday settings by skilled role models and to implement these practices with supportive feedback. A recently conducted review of research on coaching (Isner et al., 2011) found evidence from evaluation studies that such approaches when aimed at improving individual and classroom quality, often improve educator practice, and child outcomes. Coaching involved a range of activities, including building rapport, collecting baseline assessment data, setting goals, developing a strategy plan, observation and modeling, feedback, reflective discussion and dialogue, and facilitating the formation of communities of practice. Prior studies strengthen these findings that training alone is not enough to improve teacher skill over time (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Zaslow and Tout (2004) suggest that tightening the linkages between professional preparation and professional development will provide better quality classroom environments. Coaching provides a feasible, sustainable, and highly effective answer to the inequities that exist in who teaches early childhood across multiple settings.

Professional Development in Practice

There have been two Pre-K teacher development models that are widely used in preschools by researchers, directors, and accrediting agencies. The first model – the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), was designed by Robert Pianta from the University of Virginia. The second model is the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM), which is designed by Susan Landry from the University of Texas. They differ in many ways, but both emphasize teacher encouragement of social-emotional development, promote the use of oral language building, include web-based mentoring for Pre-K teachers, work to increase teacher literacy knowledge, and incorporate assessment (Pianta et al., 2005). Separately, the CLASS emphasizes child-teacher relationships, TEEM focuses on improving instructional practices and learning activities.

In the development of the CLASS. Pianta observed 671 Pre-K classrooms across 11 states. While most teachers were sensitive and responsive to the social emotional needs of children, but they lacked the skill to present challenging learning tasks, especially in the areas of language and literacy (Pianta et al., 2005). The development of the CLASS was to provide evidence on the use of (a) a warm and encouraging climate is created, offering high levels of social – emotional support, (b) organized clear routines and structures in which children are expected to engage in learning task, and (c) the extent to which rich language and preliteracy skills are offered. Peer reviewed evaluations of the CLASS model are showing that the effects of improved teaching practices and accelerated child development are visible when the CLASS intervention is implemented with fidelity. Gains have also been observed in the richness of teachers' language stimulation (Pianta et al., 2005).

The second teacher-development model stems from a different theory of action. While CLASS starts with a question, TEEM focuses directly on the use of curriculum in language and literacy. Susan Landry, the lead designer of TEEM, emphasizes, "An alarming number of American preschool children lack sufficient language and literacy skills to succeed in kindergarten" (Landry, Anthony, Swank & Monseque-Bailey, 2009, p. 448). The TEEM intervention shows Pre-K teachers how they can "provide explicit information about vocabulary, number concepts, and letters in a more intentional approach" (Landry et al., 2009, p. 449). Peer-reviewed evaluation show consistent benefits for teachers and children. There have been significant effect on children's pre-literacy skills, including letter recognition, oral vocabulary, and phonological awareness. Effect sizes ranged from.16 to .84 of a standard deviation, depending on the outcome measure and whether the children were with a TEEM teacher for 1 or 2 years (Landry et al., 2009). Both interventions, the CLASS and TEEM, have demonstrated strategies for enriching Pre-K quality and are widely used as evidence of classroom quality.

Teacher Quality Indicators

Teachers' level of training, education, and experience are positively linked to teacher behaviors in the classroom (Berk, 1985), social interaction and conversation with children (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1989), and sensitivity and responsive involvement with children (Kontos, Howes & Galinsky, 1995). Documented relationships between wages (NCEDL, 2000), staff turnover (Whitebook et al., 1989) and quality (NCEDL, 2000) are all issues connected with the early childhood staff. Two predictors of child care quality are believed to be education and wages (Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995).

There is also no pay equity between the wages of preschool teachers and K-12 teachers (Bellm &Whitebook, 2004). Wages in early childhood are notoriously low and are one of the reasons there is such a large amount of turnover among staff of all programs (Whitebook et al., 1989).

American preschool teachers are paid less than half of a kindergarten teacher's salary, less than janitors, secretaries, and others whose jobs require only a high school diploma and a few years' experience (Barnett et al., 2003). Pay for assistant teachers is even lower, with the full-time average wage too low to keep a family of three out of poverty (Blau, 2001). In September 2002, the median American preschool teacher's salary was $21,332 (Blau, 2001). The median kindergarten teacher's salary was $43,152, more than double the preschool teacher's salary (Blau, 2001). Although preschool salaries are low everywhere, some programs pay less than others. Public school programs pay teachers the best, but often preschool teachers are still paid less than elementary school teachers. Head Start programs paid teachers about the average, $21,287 with private programs paying the least and with the fewest paid benefits, with the average teacher earning only $12,118 in 2002 (Whitebook, Phillips & Howe, 1993).

Preschool teacher turnover is high relative to other professions and assistant teacher turnover is even higher. Annual turnover rates of 25% to 50% are common for preschool teachers (Barnett et al., 2003). By comparison, the annual turnover rate for public school teachers is less than 7 % (Barnett et al., 2003). Turnover is directly related to teacher compensation, and preschool programs with the lowest pay have the highest turnover (Blau, 2001). Caregiver stability promotes socio-emotional development, fostering the emergence

of secure attachment (Varnas & Cummings, 1993; Raikes, 1993), while high staff turnover hinders optimal socio-emotional development (Ceglowski & Davis, 2004). In addition, further educational effectiveness suffers from high turnover and low morale because teachers who are less-committed do not teach as well (Berk, 1985).

Higher wages and cash incentives have been observed to lower turnover rates among teachers (Hamre, Grove & Louie, 2003), but other personal and environmental factors also play a role. In a study by Holochwost, DeMott, Yannetta, and Amsden (2009), four personal factors had a significant effect on the intent of educators to remain in the field. Marital status, age, experience, and education all affected retention. Married educators had a significantly higher score when asked how long they planned to remain in the field, as did older and more experienced educators. Beyond 5 years' experience educators' intent to remain in the field reached a plateau. Workers that were most willing to stay are those in the 40-55 year old age range. Young college students or graduates with credits unrelated to the field were seen as risky choice from a retention standpoint.

The study by Holochwost and colleagues (2009) also found that while no one employment policy can be expected to explain why educators remain in the workforce, workers who are offered health, disability, or pension benefits are more likely to profess a commitment to stay The researchers found that those staying for five years or more had better retention rates. The data suggests two possible means to attract workers – through offering those professional development supports most in demand: financial aid, tutoring, and/or mentoring and through benefits.

High-quality preschool education produces substantial long-term educational, social, and economic benefits. Numerous studies have found that the education levels of preschool teachers and specialized training in early childhood education predict teaching quality and children's learning and development (Pianta et al., 2005; Saluja, Early & Clifford, 2002; Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber & Howes, 2001). However, fewer than half of all early education teachers hold a four-year degree, and many have no education (Saluja et al., 2002). In most states, a high school diploma is all a person needs to teach in a licensed child care center. There are also minimal requirements for early childhood teachers in Head Start and many state preschool programs (Barnett et al., 2011). Early childhood qualifications are low relative to other professions and have not been improving over time . Other countries have more rigorous qualifications for their preschool teachers than we do in the Unites States. For example, most 3 and 4 year olds in France attend public schools in which teachers are required to have the equivalent of a master's degree (Helburn & Bergmann, 2002).

American preschools vary widely in teacher education requirement partly because standards vary across preschool programs. Preschool programs operated by public schools employ the best-educated teacher with nearly 90% of preschool teachers having a four-year degree (Saluja et al., 2002). State funded Pre-K programs are not always provided through a public school and thus vary whether they require a four-year degree. Of the 51 state preschool programs in 39 states operating in 2011-12, only 58% required all teachers to have a BA (Barnett et al., 2011). In Head Start programs, less than one-third have a college degree and others may have a Child Development Associate (CDA) which does not require college coursework (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau,

2004). Less than half the teachers in child care centers have four-year degrees, and many teachers have just a high school education (Saluja et al., 2002).

Multi-state studies of child care lead to the conclusion of teacher education as related to the quality of preschool education. In a study of 521 preschool classrooms, Phillipsen and colleagues found that the percentage of teachers with a four year degree was related to the preschool quality as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and to teacher warmth, attentiveness, and engagement (Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes & Cryer, 1997). One recent report from the National Institute for Child and Health Development (NICHD) child career study found that teacher's educational attainment predicted teacher behaviors that in turn predicted children's achievement and social development controlling for the first and indirect effects of mother's education, parenting behavior, and family economic circumstances (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001).

Still, there is research showing that teacher certification levels do not have a significant effect on children's achievement. Diane Early reanalyzed data from seven independent studies, each including similar measures of teacher education levels (Early et al., 2007). In this metanalysis, Early's team found few correlations between teacher's education attainments, including whether they held a bachelor's degree. Data from two of the seven studies found that holding a four-year degree was predictive of stronger care giving or teaching behavior. When looking at children's literacy and numeracy skills, the majority of studies found no significant effect from being in a classroom with a teacher who held a bachelor's degree.

The knowledge and skills required of an effective preschool teacher have increased as the field has learned more about child development, how they learn best, and the importance of early learning for later school success. It is necessary that early childhood teachers have the opportunity to develop professionally and receive the support they need to get a level of high quality pedagogy. As is examined next, there are structural and process pieces that can hold the key to start this grassroots effort.

High Quality Early Childhood Care

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines early childhood education as "any group program in a center, school, or other facility that serves children from birth through age 8. Early childhood programs include child care centers, family child care homes, private and public preschools, kindergartens, and primary-grade schools" (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 1). Yet, because early childhood education is perpetuated by inequalities in achievement, cost, and options, which create variations in quality, it is important to consider what a high quality early childhood infrastructure would and should look like. Jalongo and colleagues (2004) believe childhood should be "carefully defined in all nation as a highly distinct period of human growth and development that deserves careful educational, social, and political intervention and attention" (2004, p. 144). Thus, political, social and economic interventions for preschool children should be designed and implemented to meet every child's needs, creating a more universal system where the three fundamental criteria of quality, availability, and affordability become the norm for every program. Jalongo et al. (2004) see a universal program as one that "serves preschool children with a clearly articulated philosophy, goals that value children, families, cultures,

and communities" (p. 144). Information about these early childhood programs should be made readily available to everyone through a national publicity campaign that uses mass media, special events and door to door campaigns that inform all families about the opportunities for high quality early care. It is then that at-risk children are not separated from other children in receiving sub-par care.

Pre-K Today

In 2011, 28% of 4-year olds and 4% of three-year olds were enrolled in a preschool program (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald & Squires, 2011). Evidence points that an increase in enrollment has not reached all segments of the population, and there are variations in participation rates regionally, with income, parent's education attainment rates, race,, family structure, maternal employment, and geography affecting preschool education program participation (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). This is somewhat analogous to the K-12 public education system, but early education also lacks systemic qualities, such as overarching governance, funding, and accountability mechanisms. Before looking at high quality programs through the lens of governance, funding, and accountability, I first turn to who attends preschool and who teaches preschool.

Pre-K Participants

There are many names for preschool programs in the Unites States. The federal government provides Head Start to children in poverty. Local educational agencies (LEAs) offer preschool and prekindergarten programs. Private for-profit, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations also operate preschool and Pre-K programs. All three are designed to meet the educational needs of the children and the child care needs of the parents. Yet, it cannot be

assumed that either education or child care are adequately met because a child is enrolled in a program (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). Beginning in 1991, the National Household Education Survey (NHES) started collecting information to provide a detailed picture of who attends preschool. The NHES collected data on preschool children in 1991, 1993, 1995, 1999, 2001, and 2005. The NHES allows Pre-K participation to be defined in various ways, but it does exclude educational programs that are offered in-home.

As mentioned above, children's access to preschool programs varies with age, income, parent's education , language, race, family structure, maternal employment, and geography. Preschool participation rates differ by race as well.. African-American children have the highest Pre-K participation rates among the three largest ethnic groups of White, Black, and Hispanic. White, non-Hispanic children attend preschool slightly less than African American children, and Hispanic children have the lowest participation rates (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). Hirshberg, Huang, and Fuller (2005) confirmed this with their finding that among California parents who moved from welfare to work, when childcare became a necessity, Latino and non-English speaking parents were the least likely to use child are. Asian children have the highest participation rates with children under three months, yet when the children reach nine months, they are less likely than black children (63%) and white children (49%) to enrolled in child care. Only Hispanic children (46%) are enrolled less than Asian children (47%) (Flanagan & West, 2005).

Socioeconomic status has two important effects on preschool education. First, children from wealthy families are most likely to attend preschool since they are able to purchase high quality care. Bainbridge, Meyers, Tanaka, and Waldfogel (2005) found that

wealthy children are 23% more likely to attend preschool than children from the lowest income bracket. Second, lower-income families have the greatest availability of preschool programs, due to the federal Head Start program which offsets the effects of income on affordability. Middle income families have the hardest time accessing all forms of early childhood education. A Boston Globe study found that in both high and low income Massachusetts families, there was a one to one match between the number of preschool children and the number of spaces available to them; in middle income communities, there was one space for every four children (Kagan, 2008b). Yet, accessibility does not equate to participation rates. Barnett and Yarosz (2007) found that participation rates for children in poverty were the lowest amongst all income brackets. Four year old children in families who had an annual income of $20,000-$30,000 had a participation rate of 55%, compared to four year old children in middle income families of $50,000-$60,000 had participation rates of 64% and high income families had participation rates of 89% (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). Thus, socioeconomic status creates a two-pronged effect: accessibility of preschools and participation in preschools.

Multiple studies point to children's participation in preschool strongly correlating to parent's education (Bainbridge et al., 2005, Barnett & Yarosz, 2005; Fuller, Kagan & Loeb, 2002; Hirschberg et al., 2005). For both three and four year olds, the highest participation rates are children with mothers with a four year college degree (80% for four year olds and 50% for three year olds) while children with mothers with a high school diploma have participation rates of 60% and 40% respectively. Children of high school dropouts have the lowest participation rates at 55% and 20%. Coupled with parent's education, maternal

employment is equally highly correlated with children's participation in preschool (Bainbridge et al., 2005; Barnett & Yarosz, 2005; Fuller et al., 2002, Hirschberg et al., 2005). NHES found that in 1991, employed mothers had a preschool participation rate of 65% compared to 2005, where the participation rate rose to 74%.

In terms of language, preschool services for English Language Learners (ELL), preschool participation remains lower with ELL children (58%), with Spanish-speaking children having the lowest participation rate (48%), creating a participation percentage difference of 30 points for ELL children in state Pre-K and other preschool programs (excluding Head Start) (Kagan, 2008a). Region of the country also plays a part in participation. Children in the Northeast have the great participation rates (77%), followed by the South (71%), the Midwest with 66%, and lastly the West with preschool participation or four year olds at 61% (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). It is important to keep in mind that states with universal Pre-K programs have the highest participation rates with Oklahoma (90%) and Georgia (67%) leading the nation, while New Hampshire and Nevada only enroll 13% of their four year olds (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007).

Pre-K Teachers

In addition to an inequity in who attends preschool, there is also an inequity with who teaches preschool. 97% of teachers in Pre-K are women (Barnett et al., 2003). Required qualification to teach preschool varies amongst states and programs. Head Start mandated that 50% of its teachers have an AA degree by 2003; two years later, 33% of teachers had a BA, 34 % had an AA, 5% had an advanced degree, and 21% had a CDA (National Head Start Association, 2005). Most state-funded Pre-K programs require a higher level of

education, and 86% of Pre-K teachers working in public schools have a BA (Kagan, 2008a). Yet, only 12 states have any minimum education requirements for teachers (Kagan, 2008a). If quality were to be measured by type of degree held, there would be a large variety based on program.

Pre-K Funding

An additional inequity in early childhood is the funding sources and streams. Early childhood is funded from a variety of sources: federal, state contribution, parents, and corporate. Kagan (2008b) reports the largest source is federal, which is comprised of Head Start, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and funds from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Federal funds also stream from the Department of Education. Federal funding is formula driven and dispersed according to need. Yet, this still creates discrepancies. For example, the average Head Start child allocation nationally is $7,208, but in Washington state the allocation is $9,016 and in Oklahoma it is $5,809 (Head Start Bureau, 2006). States also have been given a great amount of latitude in how federal dollars are spent on early childhood. State Pre-K investments illustrate large discrepancies: Texas ($478 million), New Jersey ($432 million), Georgia ($276 million), and California ($264 million). Yet there are 11 states that do not spend anything on state funded Pre-K – Alabama, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming (Kagan, 2008b). Of those states that do invest, New Jersey spends $9,305 per child while Maryland spends $721 per child (Kagan, 2008b).

Pre-K Quality and Accountability

Preschool child care experiences influence children's readiness for and success in school yet there are variations in quality. Like variations in access, quality variation is often correlated to race, SES, and location. Even despite specific and targeted efforts, low-income children are not receiving the high-quality care that their upper income counterparts experience (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). Several studies have documented that higher quality care is related to better child outcomes in the short term (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau & Sparling, 1994; Dunn, 1993; Whitebook et al., 1989). Other studies demonstrate that most domains of development (social-emotional, cognitive and attention skills, receptive language, math ability, and sociability) had a continued influence on children's skills throughout elementary school (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Their research also points to that there is not a specific threshold at which quality begins to have a positive effect. Rather, better quality child care is related to better outcomes for children across the spectrum of quality, so that the more quality is increased, the better off the children are. This validates that high-quality child care is of universal importance.

Quality, in terms of child care, is a global term that is often disaggregated when referring to Pre-K. There are multiple characteristics to consider when assessing child care quality. Structural quality variables include classroom characteristics such as the ages of the children served, group size, child-adult ratio, the health and safety of the environment and caregiver characteristics such as education and training (Lamb, 1998). These are often seen as secondary assessments of quality (Vandell, 2004). On the other hand, process quality looks at the child's experiences in the child care setting. This may include caregiver

responsiveness and sensitivity, instruction, and behavior. Structural quality measures are often included in licensing and accreditation systems because they are believed to predict process quality (Zaslow, Tout & Martinez-Beck, 2010). Child-caregiver ratios (Howes, 1997; Phillipsen et al., 1997) caregiver education (Lamb, 1998; Phillipsen et al., 1997), caregiver training (Phillipsen et al., 1997) and years of prior experience in working with children in pre-k settings (Phillips, Gormley & Lowenstein, 2009) all showed modest correlations with child outcomes.

It is more difficult to assess process quality than structural quality since it involves quantifying child development. Data collection for this needs to involve a reliable instrument with trained evaluators. There are assessments related to the specific ages of the children in the setting and the type of setting (Bryant, 2010), assessments that focus on the caregiver in relation to all of the children she is for and education (some of these are the Caregiver Interaction Scale, Early Childhood Environment-Rating Scale, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, and the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation), and assessments that focus on the experiences of the individual child (Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment and the Emerging Academic Snapshot).

Quality seems to vary by state in addition to location by location. Barnett and colleagues (2011) report that five states met all ten of its quality indicators recently while fifteen additional states met eight out of ten, but four states lost ground. Kagan (2008a) believes that state variation in process and structural quality exists and favors wealthy states and states that are willing to make their investment in early childhood education.

Much work has been done that promotes increasing preschool quality through establishing an infrastructure that includes a single, coherent system of standards, a program rating and improvement system, assessment and data system, a professional development system, and a clear and fluid Pre-K – grade 3 partnership and accountability system (Shultz, 2009). Standards serve many functions: they anchor and provide the rationale for funding; they guide professional development, serve as a framework for assessment and are dynamic (Shultz, 2009). But the standards need to be developmentally appropriate and take into account the rich context of the classroom. Shultz (2009) believes that an integrated approach to early childhood services hinges on the creation of high-quality learning standard. This must include a vertical alignment to early elementary standards and a horizontal alignment with curriculum and assessments.

In addition to standards, building of the infrastructure of Pre-K involves a systemic program quality and improvement system (Shultz, 2009). A study by Child Trend (Isner et al., 2011) depicted four case studies that incorporated coaching into the quality improvement review. They found that on site quality improvement efforts enjoyed sustainability and helped improve inter-staff dynamics as well. Smith, Schneider and Kreader (2010) saw that when coaching practices, such as observing, modeling, and feedback, were incorporated into quality improvement, centers were more prepared for their ratings and them later to work to improve them. Shultz (2009) believe quality improvement systems need to concentrate the resources on those most in need in order for them to experience change. They believe using assessment data to identify the lower-performing centers will enable the state to offer more

targeted technical assistance. This becomes a dangerous decision of the funding of the center is placed in peril.

Coupled with an improvement system, a data management and reporting system contains in one place information on children, programs, and the workforce and can help address policy and practice questions. Currently, there is a silo approach to data systems in states and has little linkage between K-12 data systems (Shultz, 2009). If a child was assigned a unique identifier number that would carry through PK – 12, it would empower school districts to be able to follow the child's progress over time, even when they move communities, districts, and states. A data system would also support states plan their funding more strategically. It would also provide early childhood administrators and center directors with the knowledge to develop program services that meet the needs of their children and then determine if these services are effective. At present, the Council of Chief State School Officers (2011) has reported that two multi-state consortia's have received $350 million dollars to develop cutting edge assessment tools for students in grade 3-12. Yet waiting until the end of third grade minimizes the systematic picture of children a comprehensive PK-12 data system would employ.

Solidifying a coherent and high quality system design for Pre-K also includes continuity between Pre-K-3 educations. In addition to the vertically aligned standards and unique identification numbers mentioned above, there needs to be a deeper connection between Pre-K and K-3 systems. Mead (2007) suggests restricting elementary schools into Pre-K-3 Early Education Academies serving children ages 3-8 that offer a vertically aligned curriculum emphasizing language, literacy, social-emotional development within the context

of core subjects and provide time for cross teaming. Mead (2007) sees these academies as offering a whole school reform vision.

Preschool programs must define the balance between quality, availability, and affordability. Structural and process quality features within individual programs should reflect high quality physical environments, developmentally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy, attention to responsiveness of the caregiver, a respect for families and communities, highly trained teachers and staff, and comprehensive, ongoing, and longitudinal evaluation. Sustainable early childhood education is a vision that will lead to a system that delivers high quality care, widespread availability, and improved affordability regardless of race, geographic local, or socioeconomic status.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of the literature that forms the foundation for this study. The review began with a historical overview for how early childhood has evolved from the Industrial Age until now. The review then provided a discussion on leadership, both in the broad sense, more generalized for what it means to be a leader in early childhood. The knowledge, beliefs, and constructs needed for teaching Pre-K were then examined. Lastly, a discussion of high-quality Pre-K, and the elements that are essential based on research, provides the theoretical context for this study. This chapter summarizes literature related to these strands of early childhood, the relationships within these strands, and the implications for high-quality Pre-K.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, will report on the methodology of the study followed by a discussion of the findings in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The Problem and Purpose

A child's Pre-K experience greatly impacts their intellectual and socio-emotional development as well as their ability to become engaged and thriving adults in society (Schulman, 2005). Knowing the positive impact Pre-K can have on a child's future makes it worrisome that children's access to preschool programs varies with age, income, parent's level of education, language, race, family structure, maternal employment, and geography affecting preschool education program participation (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). Coupled with access, preschool participation rates differ by race, with African-American children having the highest participation rates and Hispanic children having the lowest participation rates (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). This variability in access and participation greatly influences the children's development and school readiness.

It is imperative to find the specific characteristics and dynamics that lead to high quality care, across site and context. The recent study of the Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (APPLES) supports the current body of evidence indicating that high quality preschool education significantly improves children's learning and development over the long term (Hunter, 2013). The study also highlighted how Pre-K education can have a long-lasting effect on achievement in literacy, language, math, and science at least through 4th and 5th grade, with larger gains for children with two years of Pre-K compared to those with one year (Hunter, 2013). These findings build on previous results for Abbott preschool children at kindergarten entry and in 2nd grade (Hunter, 2013). In addition,

Abbott Preschool Program participation is linked to lower retention rates and fewer children needing special education services (Hunter, 2013). This is one example of research that provides the lens for the necessity of high quality Pre-K care.

Based on the literature review and identified shortcomings in available research, the purpose of this heuristic multiple case study was to develop an understanding of high quality Pre-K components as informed through the voice of the preschool teacher while using my experiences as a backdrop. Case study, as the major strategy of inquiry, was used when the researcher is interested in studying a "program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2013, p. 74). The unit of analyses, determined by research questions, was the quality of education based on infrastructure, process and structural variables across multiple preschool delivery systems. Quality of education is defined by the quality of interactions between teachers and children, high-quality instruction where each child is taught at their developmental level, and an offering of a range of comprehensive services. These all lead to children exiting Pre-K with the ability to be efficacious in a range of skills encompassing socio-emotional and cognitive domains leading to school readiness. Process variables are defined as the child's experiences in the child care setting. This may include caregiver responsiveness and sensitivity, instruction, and behavior. Programmatic variables are defined as classroom characteristics such as the ages of the children served, group size, child-adult ratio, the health and safety of the environment and caregiver characteristics such as education and training (Lamb, 1998). A preschool delivery system is defined as the system which is comprised of for profit and not for profit centers that include

community-based centers, private preschool programs, school district preschools, and Head Start centers. Home-based Pre-K's were not be examined.

This study sought to add to the research knowledge based around high quality Pre-K and how to ensure quality and equity of access to all. The overarching question I wanted to answer will be: *How can the system of preschool education in the United States be reconceptualized to ensure a high-quality Pre-K experience for all children?*

Sub-questions looking at programs and infrastructures of Pre-K education included the following:

- How can teacher quality improve development and readiness for kindergarten for every preschooler?
- What can educational leaders do to support high-quality Pre-K classroom instruction?
- What elements of effective practice contribute to high quality instruction within the Pre-K classroom?

My research study is important because it addressed the problem of uneven quality of preschool education as highlighted in Chapter 1. First, high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs produces long and short-term positive effects on children's cognitive and social development. When there is large gap in the quality across programs, it impacts children's schooling throughout elementary school. Secondly, low-income children often begin kindergarten behind their peers. Equalizing preschool quality will eliminate this gap. More significantly, it addressed the issue through the eyes of Pre-K teachers and Pre-K administrators, rather than methods previously used in research. Pre-K

teachers and administrators understand the daily life of the classroom and center, and know what is tangible and feasible to see change. If it is not purposeful change that can occur within the scope of the center's culture and make-up, change will not happen.

This chapter presents an overview and rationale for the research, paradigms for this multiple case study, and a description of the methodology. The methodology describes the sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis plan for the study. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations and limitations of the study. I begin with a rationale for using qualitative research and a description of the qualitative research traditions selected for this study.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research, according to Maxwell (2013), is a flexible design, rather than fixed, inductive, rather than a fixed process, and reflexive through every stage of the project. Maxwell further explains that the processes of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating on the research questions, and addressing validity threats all rest upon one another and in turn, influence one another. There is no linear relationship among the tasks. Since the study is one of personal inquiry, where I sought to understand my experiences combined with the experiences in several Pre-K settings, using qualitative inquiry enabled a facilitation of a study in depth and in detail. I was able to be unconstrained by definitive categories of analysis. As the researcher, I was the instrument, and guided the study (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative research design helped to ground the goals of this study. Goals, as defined by Maxwell (2013), constitute personal, practical, and intellectual paradigms.

Personal goals are the reasons I did this study, because of an inherent interest in Pre-K as the key to closing the achievement gap. Practical goals are focused on accomplishing something, achieving some objective, such as equalizing Pre-K quality. Intellectual goals concentrate on developing an understanding of the particular contexts within which the participants acted, and the influence this context had on their actions. The practical goals and intellectual goals overlapped with my personal goal and motivation for this research. Thus, my goals shaped the decision to use qualitative research, to develop an understanding of elements in Pre-K delivery that lead to high-quality instruction. A purely quantitative approach would have limited my ability to gain an in-depth understanding of my research questions and to have met the three goals of the research. Quantitative research would have binded me to variables and statistical relationships. Rather, qualitative research opened up the ability to use an inductive approach that focuses on descriptions of people and events.

Power struggles may have arisen between the researcher and the directors, the researcher and the teachers, and between the directors and teachers. To prevent these, it was important to understand the processes by which, and the specific contexts, by which, these power struggles happen and how they are understood by the participants. Since qualitative research is intended to improve current practice rather than to assess the impact or value of something, understanding the meaning and reasoning for power struggles was an important aspect of this qualitative research.

Creswell (2013) states that philosophy means the use of abstract ideas and beliefs to inform the research. I began the process by considering what, I as the researcher can bring to the process. Next, I acknowledged and uploaded into the inquiry process my paradigms

and theories, "the basic set of beliefs that guide actions" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). I then moved on to research strategies, which were supported by the next phases of the research process - data collection, analysis, and evaluation of that analysis. Philosophy, the overarching foundation that oriented my thinking and research, shaped how I formulated my problem and my research questions, and how I went about answering those questions. My philosophical assumptions were then translated into a theoretical lens that guides the study and how to position oneself in the study (Creswell, 2013). Clough and Nutbrown (2002) explain the difference between sufficient research and convincing research is that it is justified not only by reference to other research, but by the use of research paradigms and philosophy that are appropriate for the study. This multiple case study was informed through the tradition of heuristic inquiry, each of which is described in the following sections.

Case Study

Qualitative case study design allows the researcher to study the phenomenon within various contexts. This ensures that the issue is explored through multiple lenses, which allowed for multiple dimensions of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2009) provides rationale for case studies as they provide the researcher an opportunity to explore individuals or organizations, simple through complex interventions, relationships, communities, or programs.

There are two approaches that guide case study methodology, one by Robert Stake (1995) and the other by Robert Yin (2009). Both enable the researcher to explore the topic at hand and reveal the quintessence of the phenomenon while basing their approach to case study on a constructivist paradigm (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Constructivism is built upon the

premise of a social construction of reality (Searle, 2005) and allows a close collaboration between the researcher and participants (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

I chose to use multiple case study as the primary theoretical tradition. A multiple case study enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases. With the goal being to replicate findings across cases, it is imperative that the researcher chooses the cases carefully (Yin, 2009). Yin) believes case study design should be considered when (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions, (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study, (c) you want to cover contextual conditions that are relevant to the study, and (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and the context. The case of high quality Pre-K could not be considered without the context, the classroom and school settings.

Yin (2009) and Stake (2005) recommend that case studies must be bound in order to prevent the case study from being too broad. Several researchers recommend ways to place boundaries on case studies: through defining time and place, defining time and activity, and by definition and context (Creswell, 2013, Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995). By doing this, the scope of my study was controllable. The study was bound by the three Pre-K centers, the fall semester for data collection, a focus on teacher quality, effective classroom practice, and leadership, and through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Once a case study has been bound, it is important to understand that case study research utilizes multiple data sources, which enhances validity (Patton, 2002). Potential data sources include documentation, interviews, and observations. This presents a holistic

view of the phenomenon, with each piece of data acting as a piece to the puzzle. The next theoretical tradition, heuristic inquiry, will be discussed next.

Heuristic Inquiry

Heuristic inquiry is a lens of phenomenology that highlights the subject matter to be investigated (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Patton (2002) explains that the various forms of phenomenology all focus on how "human beings make sense of experience and transform the experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (p. 104). It is about how people experience the phenomenon, through their perception, description, judgment of, remembrance of, and their sense of the phenomenon.

Heuristic inquiry, which is a form of phenomenology, brings to the foreground the personal experiences and insights of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Moustakas (1994), the primary developer of this approach, advocated that heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery. He understands that heuristic inquiry is a process that seeks to illuminate the questions of the study. It is autobiographical, but also connected and significant to society. Patton finds the foundational question for heuristic inquiry is: "What is my experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of two others who also experience this phenomenon intensely?" (p. 107).

I chose heuristic inquiry because I have personal experience and interest with the phenomenon and the participants share an intensity of interest in this phenomenon. "Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behavior" (Douglass & Moustaksas, 1985, p. 42). In its purest form, heuristics is a passionate and discerning personal involvement in

problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self (Douglass & Moustakas). The life experiences of the researcher and the participant become a story that is interpreted through lucid and articulate language (Moustakas, 1994).

To summarize, this is a qualitative multiple case study which will apply the theoretical tradition of heuristic inquiry, a form of phenomenology. In this study I anticipated that different settings of Pre-K classroom will yield different results and descriptions. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that in qualitative research, the description of the process in its specific context of utmost importance. The next steps will describe how this will be carried out and my role in doing so.

The Role of the Researcher

Denzin and Lincoln see that in qualitative studies, the role of the researcher is considered an instrument of the data collection (2003). In other words, the data are facilitated through the human instrument, or the researcher, rather than surveys and questionnaires commonly used in quantitative studies. In order for this instrument to be effective, I, as the researcher, needed to practice reflexivity, be open and forthright with my biases and assumptions, and share past experiences that are relevant to the research. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) state:

> The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned in to the experiences and meaning systems of others – to indwell – and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand. (p. 123)

Creating transparency in the research process makes the data analysis process visible as well as the decisions, thinking, and experiences behind the processes visible to myself

and to the reader. One way to accomplish this was through a reflexivity journal, detailing my reactions and reflections into myself through the process and the research process itself. Self-reflection can allow the research process to be fluid, perhaps to use methods not originally planned and to achieve a greater degree of reciprocity.

Adler and Adler (1987) identified three membership roles of qualitative researcher engaged in observational methods: (a) peripheral member researcher, who does not participate in the core activities; (b) active member researchers, who become involved in the central activities of group without being fully committed to the members values; and (c) complete member researchers, who are fully affiliated or become fully affiliated during the course of the research. My role was etic; an outsider view that is objective (Patton, 2002).

My positionality described above was guided by the research. In case study research, being an insider presents many advantages, such as gaining entrance to the research site(s), defining my role to the participants support from colleagues, and data accessibility. On the other hand, the research questions can seem more muddled, role duality must be considered, and ethical issues must be confronted. In order to build a picture that answers the research questions that is based on existing and emerging themes and theories, keeping exhaustive insights into the experience is essential from an insider-outsider perspective.

The Design of the Study

The purpose of this heuristic, multiple case study was to discover teacher's and director's perspective about the elements of Pre-K quality in order to even variability. The problem is that there is a large gap in the quality and of preschool education in this country.

Improving the quality of Pre-K efforts is essential if we are going to create school readiness for all children.

Case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). As a qualitative approach, the investigator explores a case through multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative case studies are defined by the size of the bounded case and in terms of the intent of the case analysis (Creswell, 2013). Creswell identifies three intents for determining the type of case study to use. Instrumental case studies focus on an issue or concern and then utilize one bounded case to describe the concern. An intrinsic case study focuses on the case itself because the case itself presents an unusual situation. Lastly, a multiple case study looks at one issue, but the researcher uses multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (p. 99). Multiple cases allow different perspectives to highlight the issue (Stake, 1995).

Case study, as the main theoretical tradition, utilizes data collection methods, such as interviews, observations, and questionnaires. With the intent of the case studies being to understand a specific issue within the larger preschool system, the type of case study is described as an instrumental case. To describe the methodology used in the instrumental cases, I begin with a design of the study, including the setting, participants and sampling of participants. Then I provide an overview of the types of data, along with procedures for gathering and managing the data. Next, I define data production and analysis methods. Lastly, I conclude with ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Qualitative research uses the natural setting as the source of data. As Patton (2002) describes empathic neutrality, I attempted to observe, describe, and interpret the settings as they are. The study took place in three preschool classrooms with distinctive characteristics each located within a large metropolitan city in the Midwest. In order to glean an in-depth understanding of the system, I used an urban, federally-funded preschool classroom, a district preschool classroom, and a private preschool classroom that is dependent upon tuition. Each setting provided a unique perspective to preschool education. During recruitment, I drilled down the sites by identifying varying elements of Pre-K based on the research questions: leadership, teacher experience, and classroom support to bring about effective classroom practice. The center recruitment documents used to confirm sites are located in Appendix A.

Center A, Private Preschool A is located in a suburban part of a large Midwestern city. It has 79 students, age's birth through 5. 95% of the students are White, and the remaining 5% are Asian, Hispanic, and African American. There are 16 teachers and assistant teachers and 1 cook. The center is based in a church, buts runs independently of the church itself. There is a Board that is comprised of four parents, church members, and the center director which oversees the program. School District Preschool B is located at the intersection of two large, metropolitan cities. The preschool is located in a K-5 elementary school that has a 78% free and reduced lunch population. The school has 598 students, with 45 certified staff and 33 classified staff. The school represents a fairly diverse population of 13% African American, 37% Hispanic, 40% White, and 9.6% other. There are two district preschool classrooms in the school, one is special education and the other is general

education. Preschool C is a bilingual preschool in a large Midwestern city, serving ages 2.5 – 5. The student population is 84% Hispanic, 10% White, and 6% African American. The preschool is funded by Head Start, Tuition, SRS, CACFP, and grants. The center is 51% free lunch and 5% reduced lunch. The classroom used in the research study is a Head Start classroom.

I used purposeful sampling which means that the sites selected for the study will purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 156.). Purposeful sampling generates a sample that will help answer the research questions. The purposeful sampling incorporated maximum variation as a sampling strategy to represent the diverse preschools settings and to be able to fully describe the multiple perspectives about the cases. Maximum variation is often used because it maximizes differences at the beginning of the study and increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect the differences across sites (p. 157). My sample size was three case studies each with classroom teacher participants and site directors.

Classroom A was identified as a site since it is predominately middle class with many children having a stay-at-home parent. This site was thought about as it offers a stark contrast from the other two sites, Classrooms A and B. It has the opportunity to provide different perspectives as some of the issues the center works with are perceived to be different than other sites. Classroom B is considered because the researcher had done some work in comparable classrooms in the identified school district. Classroom B, as situated within the district, offers classrooms that are diverse, have high special education populations, instructional supports for the teachers, and administration that looks differently

than a center-based director. Classroom C was identified as a research site that is actively involved in improving the outcomes for children and families, and is an advocate for early childhood research. The majority of families are non-English speaking which presents an added element with thinking about instructional quality and quantity.

Participant sampling. Within each site, recruitment strategies were utilized that focus on classroom characteristics, teacher knowledge, leadership involvement and available supports to help teachers carry out effective teaching practices (see Appendix A). Participants included one lead teacher in each classroom and the site director for each setting with approximately three teachers and three site director's total. As the researcher, I purposefully selected teachers and site directors, using criterion sampling, who met the criteria of three or more years of teaching experience in Pre-K, and be willing to participate in the study in order for the classroom to participate and be eligible for this study. The directors must have met the criteria of more three or more years of leadership experience in Pre-K settings as well as to be willing to participate in the study in order for the center to participate and be eligible for this study Teachers and directors were compensated for time and effort to participate in this study. They received a $25 gift card for completing observations, interview, focus group, and survey questionnaire. Shown below is an overview of the sampling for across the three case studies (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Summary of Participant and Site Sampling for Study

	Case Study A	Case Study B	Case Study C
Setting	Private tuition Pre-K	District Pre-K	Federally-funded Pre-K
Individuals	1 lead teacher and 1 center director	1 lead teacher and 1 school principal	1 lead teacher and 1 center director
Purposeful Sampling	Middle class center where children typically attend a half day, many stay-at-home parents. ELL and special education concerns not present.	Diverse population with experienced teachers. Large special education population. Instructional supports available to teacher. Different dynamic present in school administration.	Large population served that offers comprehensive services from pregnancy – 5. Coaching and layered administration present. ELL population.
Criterion Sampling	Three plus years of experience for teacher and director	Three plus years of experience for teacher and school principal	Three plus years of experience for teacher and director

Data Sources

The major data sources were interviews and observations supplemented with surveys, documents such as lesson plans, and minutes from professional development sessions and meetings. Applying multiple sources of information in data collection provided a detailed, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Interviews. DeMarrais stated, "Qualitative interviews are used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences or sets of experiences (2004, p. 52). Patton (2002) believes that interviews are helpful since we cannot observe the feelings, thoughts, and intentions' of others; they support us in entering the other person's perspective. In interviews, the researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused around the predetermined questions related to the study (Merriam, 1998).

Interview approaches included one-on-one 45-minute semi-structured interviews (see Appendices B and C) with Classroom A, B, and C teachers and Preschool A, B, and C directors, and one 45-minute focus group for teachers and directors, with follow-up interviews conducted via electronic communication and phone interviews serving as supplements if clarification is needed.

Qualitative interviewing utilizes open-ended questions that allow for individual variations. Patton (2002) writes about three types of qualitative interviewing: (a) informal, conversational interviews; (b) semi-structured interviews; and (c) standardized, open-ended interviews. I utilized semi-structured interviewing, which applied a checklist of predetermined issues and sentences frames but allow for flexibility in questioning. Although

it is prepared to insure that basically the same information is obtained from each person, there are no predetermined responses, and in semi-structured interviews the interviewer is free to probe and explore within these predetermined inquiry areas. Interview guides (see Appendices B and C) ensured good use of limited interview time; they make interviewing multiple subjects more systematic and comprehensive; and kept interactions focused. In keeping with the flexible nature of qualitative research designs, interview guides can be modified over time to focus attention on areas of particular importance, or to exclude questions the researcher has found to be unproductive for the goals of the research (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) do not believe that by "standardizing procedures you will get more valid answers" (p. 107). Since my goal was to develop understanding of the classroom and preschool processes, I believe it was important to be flexible in my questions to clarify participant responses. In addition to semi-structured interview, focus groups were also be conducted. Focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalize on communication between research participants in order to generate data (Maxwell, 2013).

Focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method by the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view (Creswell, 2013). Focus groups are beneficial when the interactions among the participants helps produce information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with one another, when the data collection period is limited, and one-on –one interviews yield limited conversation (Creswell, 2013). Focus groups have a

limitation of equal participation by all participants, and observing that no one participant dominates or contracts from the dialogue.

A decision going into the interview process is how to record interview data. Patton believes that a tape recorder is "indispensable" (2002, p. 348). Recordings have the advantage of capturing data more faithfully than hurriedly written notes might, and can make it easier for the researcher to focus on the interview. I used a handheld recorder for all the interviews and then transcribed the recordings. Every time a new person spoke, I started a new numbered line, noting on the left who the speaker is (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The transcripts were dominated by the participant's responses and are intermingled with my questions, probes, and points of clarification.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) view interviews having seven logical stages that include thematizing the inquiry, designing the study, interviewing, transcribing the interview, analyzing the data, verifying the validity, reliability and generalizability of the findings, and finally reporting on the study. First, prior to beginning the qualitative interviews, I will introduce my position and purpose with a clear statement in order to provide a context for my visiting with each participant – to look at recontextualizing Pre-K with a focus on the impact of effective teaching practices, coaching, and leadership. As described above, I completed the interviews followed by transcribing, then analyzing the data. I verified the validity and reliability of the findings with the participants. Lastly, I incorporated findings from observations and document analysis results in the final report.

Observations. Observational data are used for the purpose of description of settings, activities, people, and the meanings of what is observed from the perspective of the

participants. Observation can lead to deeper understandings than interviews alone, because it provides knowledge of the context in which events occur, and may enable the researcher to see things that participants themselves are not aware of, or that they are unwilling to discuss (Patton, 2002).

The use of observations in my study allowed me to be a part of the phenomenon and to see what was said in the interviews in action. Observations are a key tool for collecting data where the researcher notes the phenomenon in the field through using the five senses of the observer through recording (Angrosino, 2007). Observations allowed me to describe the setting, the activities that took place in the setting, and the people who participated in those activities, all central parts of a case study. The observations were in the form of observer as participant, where my identity was revealed, but my interaction with the participants was rather limited. My primary task was to gather information and create description and my participation with the group is secondary.

My choice of what to observe was decided by the conceptual framework and the research questions in the study. I observed Classroom A, Classroom B, and Classroom C during the instructional block in which circle time, whole group, small group, and centers occur. Snack time and transitions also were observed. Circle time lasts approximately 20 minutes in which the class is gathered together to do opening activities such as calendar time, songs, and weather. Whole group time can last 15-30 minutes where is usually a strong literacy focus through direct, explicit instruction and incorporates phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, shared writing, and shared reading. Small group looks differently from classroom to classroom, but typically involves the teacher working on more differentiated

instruction with small groups of children to help develop skills that are more challenging or new. Centers are typically free time play for children to explore, create, and engage in meaningful conversations and interactions. Snack time is approximately 15 minutes and offers opportunities for oral language building, as do brief transitions to different activities in and out of the classroom.

I employed focused observation, in which initial categories help structure the observation, but allow flexibility to structure in data collection choices (Angrosino, 2007). My site observation was guided by the following questions: (a) what is going on; (b) what do the student-teacher interactions look like; (c) How is the classroom environment developmentally and age appropriate and address individual ways of learning; (d) What does language and literacy instruction look like? (e) How does the use of conversation affect interactions and instruction; (f) What supports are available to the teacher? And (g) What is the physical space of the classroom like?

I utilized field notes during the observation (see Appendix D), which are running descriptions of settings, people, activities, and sounds (Patton, 2002). Field notes may include drawings or maps. Acknowledging the difficulty of writing extensive field notes during an observation, Lofland and Lofland (1995) recommend jotting down notes that will serve as a memory aid when full field notes are constructed. Using these guiding questions, I created an observation script that incorporated my field notes, reflexive thoughts, and other observations, immediately after leaving the schools. Lofland and Lofland describe it as logging data. I utilized thick and rich description to explain my findings.

Documents. The last source of data for this study was analysis of documents. "Data are the evidence and the clues…subject-produced data are employed as part of studies where the major thrust is participant observation or interviewing" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 118). The data are then translated or derived from or into documents. Patton (2002) sees that

> Records, documents, artifacts and archives…constitute a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs…in contemporary society, all kinds of entities leave a trail of paper and artifacts, and a kind of spoor that can be mined as a part of fieldwork. (p. 293)

With the unobtrusive nature of documents, they provided an in depth look at topics and issues that support my research questions that are more unconstrained than observations or interviews could produce. I utilized participant-produced documents, such as lesson plans, for coding in order to think deeply about the process of qualitative data collection. I also used documents produced by the organization such as minutes of staff meetings, and center policies and procedures. I asked center directors and teachers for these documents. I then coded all documents and transfer the information to a spreadsheet (see Table 3.2)

Data Management and Analysis

As data collection got underway, the extensive amount of data needed to be organized in a systematic way so the data can be analyzed (Creswell, 2013). Even though the data may appear to be fluid and a bit chaotic, in order to understand the information it is essential to enforce some kind of order on the data. I prepared for data analysis by organizing field notes from observations, transcription of interviews and focus group sessions, and transferring coded documents into a spreadsheet. After I identified major categories in the data under which the data can be subsumed.

Table 3.2

Focus of Each Data Source

Interviews	Focus Group	Observations	Documents
Professionalism	Preparation	Classroom	Professional Development
Skills	Career Stages	Environment	Surveys
Knowledge	Role Perceptions	Teacher/	Lesson Plans
Characteristics	Beliefs about three	Student Interactions	
Beliefs about	pronged approach		
three pronged			
approach			

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) define qualitative data analysis as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 145). Qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of data, meaning that the critical themes emerge out of the data (Patton, 2002). Qualitative analysis requires some creativity, for the challenge is to place the raw data into logical, meaningful categories; to examine them in a holistic fashion; and to find a way to communicate this interpretation to others.

In general, "data analysis means a search for patterns in data" (Neuman, 1997, p. 426). Neuman states that once a pattern is identified, it is interpreted in terms of a social

theory or the setting in which it occurred and that the qualitative researcher moves from the description of a historical event or social setting to a more general interpretation of its meaning. In case studies, "the ultimate goal is to uncover patterns, determine meanings, construct conclusions and build theory" (Patton, 2002). According to Yin (2009, p. 67), there are three general analytic strategies for analyzing case study evidence: (a) Relying on theoretical propositions; (b) thinking about rival explanations; and (c) developing a case description.

There are five analytic techniques outlined by Yin (2009) to enable the researcher to draw conclusions from evidence. These are pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis. First, pattern matching compares a pattern which has been established in the past with a predicted pattern. If the patterns match, the internal reliability of the study is enhanced. Explanation building, the second analytic method, is carried out by building an explanation of the case. The third analytic technique is a time-series analysis, where the observed trend using either a theoretically significant trend or a rival trend. The more intricate and precise the pattern, the more the time-study analysis will support the conclusions of the study. Logic models, establish events over an extended time period, and sets up a cause and effect relationship pattern. Cross-case synthesis, Yin's final technique, applies to the analysis of two or more cases. Each individual case in the cross-case synthesis is treated as a separate case.

For this study, the analytic strategy was cross-case analysis. Yin (2009) encourages researchers to make every effort to produce an analysis of the highest quality. In order to accomplish this, he presented four principles that should attract the researcher's attention:

(a) Show that the analysis relied on all the relevant evidence; (b) Include all major rival interpretations in the analysis; (c) Address the most significant aspect of the case study and (d) Use the researcher's prior, expert knowledge to further the analysis.

Emergent design is a key in building meaning in qualitative research. Emergent design is appropriate in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to observe and interpret meanings in context, rather than determining research strategies before data collection has begun (Patton, 2002). Thus, a coding system was developed to assess patterns in the data that appear. For each data source, coding systems were designed in order to identify and group patterns that appear. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe codes as tags or labels that assign meaning to the descriptive and inferential information compiled during the study.

Inductive data analysis helps develop an understanding of meaning in complex and raw data through the development of themes and categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Inductive analysis also helps establish clear links between the research questions and the summary findings, which in turn, creates transparency. Inductive analysis begins with close readings of the transcripts and texts, in which the text is transformed into segments, and the segments are assigned codes. Codes for the research will include A priori codes, codes that are developed before examining the data, and inductive codes, codes that are developed as coding occurs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These codes were primarily descriptive codes that describe the phenomena without subjectivity. Enumeration is the next process, in which codes are quantified. Once enumeration occurs, hierarchical category systems, where codes are organized into different levels, occurred for applicable descriptive codes (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). Once enough data was collected and segmented, the descriptive codes evolved into interpretive codes. These were more explanatory than the descriptive codes and developed into themes. Each theme is discussed in Chapter 4. The themes were further organized and summarized through the use of diagramming. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), diagramming is the process of making a sketch to show and clarify the relationship between the parts of the whole. This was an essential step in cross-case analysis.

Each case study was considered a story, with one larger story being the cross-case analysis of all three cases. Each case study will be portrayed through their exclusive setting and individuals, its distinctive incidents and events, and exclusive actions. These were compiled into one portrait of the preschool system. Keeping in mind the research questions, the cumulative story of the data supported the theoretical framework of coaching, leadership, effective classroom practices, and teacher quality and provided a holistic storytelling of the phenomena. In summary, the coding process product created a story of each case. Below is the depiction of the coding process in inductive analysis (see Table 3.3).

Through triangulation, researchers make use of the multiple data sources to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2013). This is an essential element of developing validity and reliability. Miles and Huberman (1994) identified four basic types of triangulation:

1. Data triangulation – with the variety of data sources
2. Methodological triangulation – through observation, documents, or interview
3. Researcher triangulation – through various researchers

4. Data type triangulation - through qualitative or quantitative text, or recordings

Miles and Huberman (1994) see triangulation as a way of life. By double-checking findings and using multiple sources, the verification process will be built into the data collection. I developed triangulation of data using multiple data sources: interviews, observations, and documents. Patton (2002) cautions that it is a common misconception that the goal of triangulation is to arrive at consistency across data sources; in fact, such inconsistencies may be likely given the relative strengths of different approaches. In

Table 3.3

Summary of the Coding Process in Inductive Analysis

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5	STEP 6
INITIAL READ THROUGH TEXT DATA	Identify segments of information	Label the segments of to create categories	Reduce the categories and redundancy among the categories information	Transform the reduced categories into themes	Create a diagram/matrix to show relationships among the themes
MANY PAGES OF TEXT	Many segments of text	A large number of categories	A smaller number of categories	A manageable number of themes	Visual display

Patton's view, these inconsistencies should not be seen as weakening the evidence, but should be viewed as an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data.

In addition to triangulation, I used the strategy of description and interpretation validity. Maxwell (2013) suggests that the researcher must ensure validity when evaluating description, interpreting data, and validating theory. Validity of description will be

accomplished by keeping audio recordings and checking the transcriptions for verbatim recording. These recordings will be kept in a locked file for a year post research. Validity of interpretation were accomplished through member checks in which the participants review the transcripts of their interviews.

In addition to the analysis strategies listed above of cross case analysis, I also incorporated the tradition of heuristic inquiry into the analysis process with five phases as established by Moustakas (1994). First, immersion requires the researcher to look inward and become present with the experience, where one's life experiences become an avenue for deeper reflection. I continually referred back to my research questions to focus my attention and utilize field notes and reflective journaling to promote immersion.

The second step is incubation. Incubation involves providing time for increased awareness of the experience through "quiet contemplation" (Patton, 2002, p. 486). By taking a step back, it will allow the space and time needed for insight. Third, illumination takes place through a process of identifying themes and patterns and making meaning and becoming aware of new discoveries. This is when I integrated processes for analyzing data sources.

The fourth step of explication allowed for new connections to be made through reflection, and relationships and patterns become more defined (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). I used the available literature to help develop theory, or to validate existing theory. Lastly, creative synthesis is the communication of findings in a creative way, where the entire story is told and the pieces are connected. To synthesize the data, I organized the individual case

study stories into a collective story, leading to the depiction of the co-experience of the researcher and the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

I next address limitations that encompass a deeper discussion of validity and reliability, and conclude the chapter with ethical considerations.

Limitations Including Validity and Reliability

Patton (2002) states that qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in real world settings that the researcher does not attempt to manipulate. Since qualitative research looks to clarify and understand phenomena, find creative ways approaches to familiar problems, understand participant's roles in organizations, and build theory, the trustworthiness of the study is paramount. Merriam (1998) asserts that in assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research, it is important to back up and ask what kinds of questions or problems qualitative research is designed to address. Qualitative researchers also need to test their study to ensure and determine its credibility and since the researcher is the instrument in qualitative studies, there are things he or she can do to ensure the findings are valid and reliable.

In this study, I identified four limitations which generated possible weaknesses of the study and a threat to the validity and reliability of this study: (a) the interpretation of events as seen through my lens as a researcher (bias), (b) influencing the participants during data collection (reactivity), (c) selectivity on document sampling and the people sampled for observations and interviews, and (d) the difficulty in observing all situations within and across multiple sites. These were addressed through communication with sites about the limited collection period in order to begin early in the school year, keeping a researcher

journal to identify bias, minimizing reactivity though keeping a watchful eye on my participation in data collection, selecting documents that align to my research questions, and choosing sites and classrooms that are most representative of the culture, environment, and instruction for the type of preschool. As the main instrument of this study, I have many biases, one of which is my belief that those teachers in Head Start programs are inadequately prepared and thus the level of teaching sometimes falters. This stems from many classroom observations in the past. I guarded against the possibility of influencing the participants with this bias and allowing it to pervade my observational data. In an attempt to avoid influencing the participants, I refrained from asking leading questions during the data collection phase of this study. Critical subjectivity, as described in Maxwell (2013) refers to awareness where we do not suppress our primary experiences as we are not swept away by them either. Rather, we raise it to consciousness and use it as part of our inquiry process. This was reflected in my statement of bias.

Internal validity looks to discover how congruent are one's findings with reality (Merriam, 1995). Thus, the following strategies were employed to strengthen the internal validity of this study First, triangulation which uses multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, and multiple methods to conform of emerging findings (Denzin, 1970). When evidence is documented to code or theme across and in different sources of data, information is triangulated and validity is provided to their findings (Creswell, 2013). Second, I performed member checks where data is collected from study participants and the tentative interpretations of this data is given back to the people from whom it was derived and confirming if interpretations are true. This technique is considered by Lincoln and Guba

(1985) to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Lastly, a statement of my experiences, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study will enable the reader to understand how the data may have been interpreted and assumptions that impact the inquiry (Merriam, 1998). These strategies are necessary since there is little distance between the researcher and phenomenon under investigation and will help ensure this interpretation is true to the phenomenon.

Coupled with internal validity, external validity looks to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations. In other words, how generalizable is are the results of the study to other groups and settings. Maxwell (2013) sees the value of a qualitative study may depend on its lack of external generalizability in the sense of a larger population, rather it may provide an account of a setting or population that is illuminating. Yet, there are strategies I employed to strengthen the rigor of my study. First, I used thick description which involves providing enough information and description of the phenomenon so the reader is able to determine how closely their situation parallels the research situation, and whether findings can be transferred, According to Stake (1995), "A description is rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details" (p. 49). Details emerge through physical description, movement description, activity description, and describing the general ideas to the narrow (Creswell, 2013). Second, using multi-site designs where several sites and cases, each representing variation, allowed the results to be applied to a greater range of other similar situations. These two strategies will provide credibility to generalizations but will not allow the gross extrapolation of results that quantitative generalizations often permit.

On the other hand, reliability is concerned with the question of the extent to which one's findings will be found again. Merriam (1998) sees reliability as being the more times the findings of a study can be replicated, the more stable the phenomenon is thought to be. The real question for qualitative researchers is not whether the results of one study are the same as the results of corresponding studies but rather if the results are consistent with the data collected. Reliability was enhanced with the utilization of several strategies. First, using a recorder aimed to accurately capture the participant' stories. The recordings were then transcribed to demonstrate the trivial, small, and seemingly inconsequential moments during the recording that are important for coding. Each participant was be informed of the use of recorders during interviews in order to be aligned with ethical considerations. To assist with capturing the data, I maintained a reflexive journal to record observations, logistics of the study, and a methodological log for recording decisions and rationales. The recorders, in combination with my journal, assisted me with capturing the accuracy, authenticity, and reliability of the observations (Patton, 2002). Lastly, peer examination provided a check that the researcher is interpreting the data correctly. I strove for consistency and dependability, in which there is internal reliability where the findings of my investigation reflect to the best of my ability the data collected.

In looking to the differences between quantitative and qualitative research in regard to validity and reliability, quantitative methods focus on numbers and frequencies rather than on meaning and experience. Quantitative methods are often experiments, questionnaires and psychometric tests, and provide information which is easy to analyze statistically and fairly reliable. Quantitative methods are associated with the scientific and

experimental approach and are often seen as not providing an in depth description. In quantitative research, methods of observation are submitted to the tests of reliability and validity to establish the credibility of these observations (York, 1998). This can be done by inter-rater reliability, test-retest reliability, criterion validity, content validity, etc. Qualitative methods collect data that is concerned with describing meaning, rather than with drawing statistical inferences. Some scientists argue that reliability and validity are difficult to prove when doing qualitative research. For the qualitative study reported by Belcher, this basic issue (reliability and validity) is addressed in three ways: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation (York, 1998).What qualitative methods, in this situation, interviews and case studies, lose on reliability they gain in terms of validity. They provided a more in depth and rich description.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2013) states that researchers must anticipate ethical issues which arise in writing research questions, collecting and analyzing data, reporting findings, and publishing the study. Weis and Fine (2000) consider ethical considerations when we look at our roles as insiders/outsiders, assessing issues that we may be fearful of disclosing, establishing supportive and trusting relationships that eliminate stereotyping, acknowledging the various voices in the study, and using reflexivity to write ourselves into the study. Participants in this study experienced measures to be sure that they were informed and respected in the research process. First, prior to conducting the study, I obtained approval from the University of Missouri-Kansas City to conduct the study (see Appendix E). I worked to gain local permission and full consent from the site administrators (leaders) and all participants

(teachers) (see Appendices F and G). I also worked to ensure that the sites do not have a vested interest in the study. This was resolved through acquiring local approvals and selecting sites that will not raise power issues. Power issues were addressed through full disclosure of myself, of the study, and ensured collaborative and informed decision-making processes throughout the duration of the study. The power of informed consent cannot be understated when dealing with power issues. When the study commenced, I disclosed the purpose of the study and was vigilant not to pressure participants into signing consent forms. Through full disclosure with participants and respect for all participant differences, participation was voluntary and understood (see Appendix H). During the data collection phase, I worked to build trust and convey any anticipated disruption at the beginning of the process. I openly discussed the purpose of the study, how the data was used and avoid any disclosure of sensitive information. In the reporting data phase, I assigned pseudonyms for participants to maintain anonymity. Lastly, when the study is published, copies of the report will be made available to participants and stakeholders.

The Belmont Report (Sales & Folkman, 2000) stated that all research involving human subjects should be conducted in accordance with three basic ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Respect for persons incorporates two considerations: respect for autonomy; and protection of impaired or diminished autonomy, while beneficence refers to the not harming human subjects through maximizing possible benefits and minimizing possible harms. Justice refers to benefits and risks of research must be distributed fairly. Through informed consent, assessment of risk and dutiful selection of

subjects, basic ethical principles and guidelines that are met in the research with human subjects.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, will report the findings of the study followed by a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Study

This multiple case study incorporated heuristic inquiry (Patton, 2002) to report the phenomenon of high quality preschool as it relates to the dynamics of effective instruction, leadership, and teacher capacity. This research study noted a gap in the literature regarding teacher and leader voice on the elements of a high quality Pre-K. Providing snapshots of the participants perceptions, experiences, and points of view painted the differences between past research findings on the topic. Past research findings have centered on process and structural indicators, such as student-teacher interactions or student-teacher ratios. Yet, the cross case findings of this study highlight a different idea of what makes a high-quality Pre-K.

The problem I addressed is the vast variability among preschool centers that waver based on access, participation and location. This was presented through the lens of the preschool teacher and preschool leader. My purpose was to determine the features and dynamics of preschool classrooms that result in a high quality experience for children. Qualitative research was the basis of the research as it aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and experience and the reasons that govern such behavior (Adler & Adler, 1987). The qualitative method also investigates the why and how of decision making which is essential to understanding the mechanisms that lead to a high quality preschool experience. Heuristics afforded the opportunity to use my own experiences and to be a part of the reflective process in this study (Patton, 2002). In

applying the tradition of heuristic inquiry, I related the findings to my personal experiences and to be a part of the reflective process in this study (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). The following diagram depicts the focus of my study – a three-pronged approach to determining a high-quality Pre-K (see Figure 4.1).

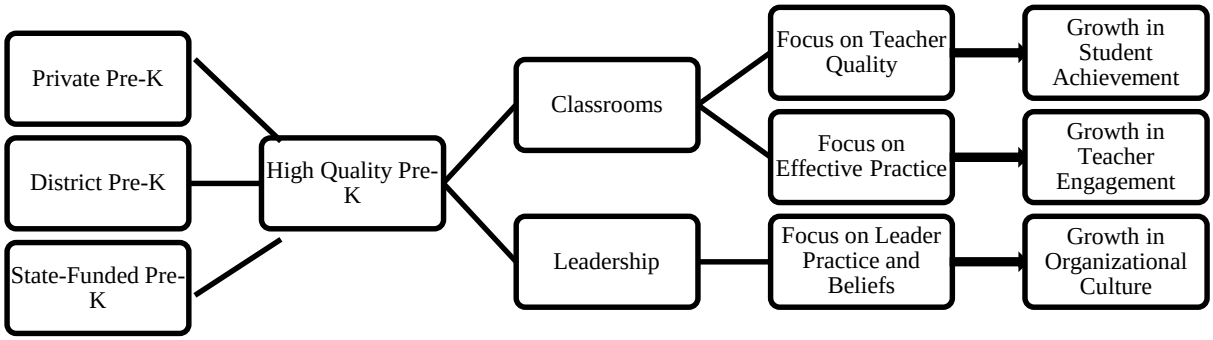


Figure 4.1 Three Pronged Approach to High-Quality Pre-K. Diagram representing the improvement of the Pre-K system through a three-pronged focus on teacher quality, effective practice, and the practice and beliefs of leaders.

Research questions guided this study in which the overarching question I sought to answer was: *How can the system of Pre-K education in the United States be reconceptualized and developed to ensure it is of high quality for all children?*

Sub-questions looking at programs and infrastructures of Pre-K education included the following:

- How can teacher quality improve development and readiness for kindergarten for every preschooler?
- What can educational leaders do to support high-quality Pre-K classroom instruction?

- What elements of effective practice contribute to high quality instruction within the Pre-K classroom?

All data collected were handled in a sensitive manner to protect anonymity of the participants. The information was kept confidential, and the researcher served as an advocate for each participant (Merriam, 1998). Pseudonyms protected the participant's actual identity.

This chapter is divided into sections in order to describe and organize the information. The first section is composed of a brief description of the settings and participants. The next section includes a self-reflection on the data analysis process. The third section offers the findings and discussion from each case study beginning with a profile of each classroom and an in-case analysis of each data source, and a cross-case analysis. Finally, the last section contains the summary of the chapter.

Description of the Setting and Participants

Purposeful sampling were used to identify preschool sites, from an urban, federally-funded preschool classroom, a district preschool classroom located within a large suburban school district of students, and a private preschool classroom that is dependent upon tuition. Each setting provided a unique perspective to preschool education. The purposeful sampling incorporated maximum variation as a sampling strategy to represent the diverse preschools settings and to fully describe the multiple perspectives about the cases. Within each site, recruitment strategies utilized a focus on classroom characteristics, teacher knowledge, leadership involvement and available supports to help teachers carry out

effective teaching practices. The recruitment and data collection occurred over a four month period. Time spent with each participant included the interviews and observations times.

My sample size was three Pre-K center case studies each with one classroom teacher participants and one site director. As the researcher, I used in-depth interviews, a focus group, observations, and document analysis to explore and capture the essence and experiences of preschool teachers that lead to high quality classrooms. The focus group consisted of a different set of questions from the in-depth interview and thus, a second story was built for each participant. Each data set for the individual centers constituted a single case. Within-case analysis consisted of coding all data types for each case, which involves identifying the themes, patterns, and categories threaded through each case (Merriam, 1998). Cross case analysis allowed me to more deeply identify common themes threaded through the observation, in-depth interviews, focus group and documents. The process for coding the data involved descriptive coding, interpretive coding, and themes (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2).

Multiple data sources triangulated the data to augment validity and provide thick, rich description. The multiple data sources include in-depth interviews, a focus group, observations, and documents. Each case will be a preschool classroom, for a total of three case studies.

Self-Reflection

This journey to unravel the components that constitute a high-quality Pre-K was one of the most challenging but worthwhile I have traveled on in my life. It forced me to

Table 4.1

Time and Length of the Study

Participant	Interviews and Focus Group		Observations		Documents	
	Minutes spent interviewing	Minutes spent analyzing	Minutes spent observing	Minutes spent analyzing	Minutes spent collecting	Minutes spent analyzing
Teacher A	60	360	360	720	60	120
Leader A	35	260	-	-	60	120
Teacher B	45	300	360	720	60	120
Leader B	45	300	-	-	60	90
Teacher C	50	360	360	720	60	120
Leader C	45	300	-	-	60	120

Table 4.2

Setting of the Study

Settings				
	Type of Pre-K	Number of Children Served in the School	Number of Teachers	Number of Classrooms
Classroom A	Private Preschool	79	16	Infant - K
Classroom B	District	598	45	Pre-K – Gr. 5
Classroom C	Head Start	63	10	2.5 – Age 5

consider my past thinking and test my beliefs. I found a small voice in my head that would try to be heard as I was conducting interviews and observations, wanting to lead the questions some place they didn't need to go. Based off my experiences in a multitude of different Pre-K's, I had an idea of what I would discover through data collection and analysis. Yet, listening to and observing the participants showed me that those living the work, the work of Pre-K, they demonstrated the different ideas and belief systems they hold, and how they diverge from mine, as an outsider. As noted in my personal journal on December 3, 2013:

> It is becoming apparent that the things I thought teachers would care about in helping as a support, like coaching, are not near as important to the teachers. They care deeply about fostering social-emotional development and supporting their development. Each teacher has expressed an absolute love for children. Cognitive development is also taking a backseat like coaching in terms of priorities.

As a qualitative researcher, I remained open to the process, knowing that each case would provide insight to the everyday world of the preschool teacher. Each case afforded me the opportunity to see the features of a preschool classroom that contribute to a high quality experience as well as those features that teachers deem intimately connected to high quality care. I have always been an advocate that educators must have the opportunity to explore their beliefs and attitudes, and ways of thinking in order to change a behavior. This process gave not only me that opportunity, but the participants as well. Teacher A espoused to me, "This process has been very helpful – it has forced me to reflect on things I have been holding on to and why I do some of the things I do." York-Barr, Sommers, Ghre, and Monti (2001, p. 2) state:

> Reflective practice cannot be done in the fast lane. Although much of educational practice occurs in the fast lane, educators must find or create a rest area along the

> roadside to reflect on past practices and to determine appropriate adjustments for future practice.

To me, that sums up this qualitative research collection.

In Case Analysis of Case Studies

Data analysis included the heuristic approach of immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). I also incorporated features of heuristic inquiry through the use of personal and professional experiences. To review, several types of data were collected for each classroom, leading to three case studies. These data included in-depth interviews, a focus group, observations, and document analysis. To report findings, I provided excerpts from the transcripts and documents.

Findings and Discussion

Case Study One: Private Preschool A

Preschool A profile. Private Preschool A is located in a suburban part of a large Midwestern city. It has 79 students, age's birth through 5. Ninety-five percent of the students are White, and the remaining 5% are Asian, Hispanic, and African American. There are 16 teachers and assistant teachers and 1 cook. The center is based in a church, buts runs independently of the church itself. There is a Board that is comprised of four parents, church members, and the center director which oversees the program.

Teacher A profile. Teacher A is a mixed-age lead teacher (ages 3-5) for 60% of the day and the education coordinator for the center for the remaining 40% of the day. As the Education Coordinator, she works with teachers in a coaching capacity, helps plan professional development and staff meetings, writes grants, supporting teachers as needed, and helps with any administrative tasks that are asked of her. She has been a teacher in the

building for 8.5 years and in education for 14 years. Previously, she taught first grade in a nearby school district and holds a Master's in Early Education. The combination of school district teaching and private center teaching has helped define her teaching philosophy.

Teacher A themes. The first theme that emerged through the interview, observations, and document analysis was *learning community,* defined as *continual learning and coherence between learning, pedagogy, shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff that permeates to the classroom.* The interpretive codes that led to this theme were *collaborative support systems,* and *adult learning and inquiry. Collaborative support systems* is defined as *supports that enable teaching and learning to be maximized, adult learning and inquiry* is defined as *a collection of theories, methods, and approaches for describing the characteristics of and conditions under which the process of learning is optimized* (Merriam, 2001; Trotter & Roberts, 2006; Yang, 2003). Teacher A explained that she always tries to learn from other teachers even though she is the one who coaches teachers to a higher level of capacity. She stated:

> When we get together…I am learning things from them. I try to journal about that. When I see something interesting, I try to write that down and think about how to use that in my own practice, when I see something useful.

Teacher A has a resolute passion for developing teachers. Southworth (2002) believes that effective organizational conditions for instructional leadership include a teacher-culture of collaboration inquiry on their own learning and provision of multiple opportunities for teacher mentoring, coaching and school based professional development. Her vision to support teachers in order to maximize their abilities through collaboration is woven throughout her interview:

> I also want to build teachers up. So whenever I do training – whenever we meet together and I want to make it really clear that I learn from them too. I also try to get them talking. They know a lot so I try to get them talking because they, they are in the classroom every day, they know a lot.

Teacher A reinforced several times her desire for continual learning and growth as a way to become stronger in her current position but also to develop capacity to deepen her skill set. Southworth (2002) sees effective instructional leaders learn most by 'doing the job' and understand the curriculum, pedagogy, student and adult learning. In her interview, Teacher A expressed a fervent interest to learn more about leadership, "It would be great to have a mentor. I have been thinking about if it would be appropriate for me to go to the Director's Roundtable just to get some advice about leadership, and coaching, and things." Teacher A, in her observations, documents, and interview, displayed a drive for the shared purpose of teacher learning through collective responsibility in attaining elevated levels of effective teaching.

The second theme that materialized was the *knowledge creation cycle*, defined as an *aggregation and interaction of knowledge, skills, understanding, and dispositions that informs teaching the whole child* (Shulman, 1986). *Instructional design*, or *teachers using the right tools enabling them to focus on student needs and interests* and *pedagogical theory builders*, the *underpinnings of pedagogical beliefs that determine instructional format in a classroom*, were the interpretive codes that informed this theme.

Coupled with a desire for continual learning, Teacher A had an unyielding belief in developmentally appropriate practice, practice that promotes young children's optimal learning and development (NAEYC, 2001). In the first observation, Teacher A knew she

needed to focus and center the class before starting with circle time. She told the class to "make like a tree and put their feet together, as those are their roots." She then directed them to "sink their roots down into the ground and have wind gently blow them from side to side and then quietly sink to the carpet." The children then individually gave her a high five signaling they were ready for the lesson. After a choral reading of the book *Where the Wild Things Are*, the children participated in an authentic learning experience of making their own wild thing. Teacher A modeled the activity and offered differentiation for the activity based on children's needs and ability levels. In her interview, Teacher A wished she had more time to devote to developmentally appropriate practices, where "they can explore what they are interested in, and I can have conversations with them and observe them in that deep play."

A part of developmentally practice is an awareness and understanding of child development, a consciousness of how children grow and what can be expected based on stages of development, a theory rooted in Piaget. McLeod (2009) explains that to Piaget, cognitive development was a progressive reorganization of mental processes as a result of maturation and environmental experience. Children construct an understanding of the world around them, then experience gaps between what they already know and what they discover. According to Piaget's theory children should not be taught certain concepts until they have reached the appropriate stage cognitive development. As advocated by Teacher A, Piaget sees learning as student centered and accomplished through authentic learning.

Teacher A restates child development as "having a better understanding of why a child is responding in a certain way…seeing children as individuals." The classroom

observations are wrought with examples of the *knowledge creation cycle,* where the teacher's beliefs and foundational principles about teaching guide her pedagogy and practice.

The final, yet surprising, theme from the data analysis was *institutionalized fragmentation,* defined as *when practice and process collide and ways of thinking become fragmented in application due to organizational structure.* The interpretive codes that led to this theme were *structural managers, degenerative vision,* and *behavioral response systems*. *Structural managers* is defined as *elements of an organization that inhibit learning and motivation, degenerative vision* is defined as *a vision that becomes tainted by outside forces and affects our mental models of good teaching,* and *behavioral response systems* is *student management that undercuts feelings of efficacy and motivation and works to hurt classroom climate*.

This theme serves as the competing force against the prior theme of *knowledge creation cycle.* Feelings of isolation, role confusion, resentment for forcing school readiness, and getting children prepared to meet standards, resonated throughout Teacher A's interview. During her first grade teaching experience, Teacher A fervently stated:

> I was very frustrated with the structure of the day and how much time I was telling the kids to sit down and um, do structured things… We were really struggling with No Child Left Behind and meeting that AYP thing. We snuck in time to make applesauce.

These past experiences and pressures for accountability helped develop and strengthen her belief in developmentally appropriate practice and teaching children where they are at, but also act as obstruction to her belief in the system.

Connected to this resentment are feelings of isolation and role confusion. She stated:

"And, what I really struggle with is…the roles not being clearly defined. My relationship with my assistant teacher is not clearly defined." In addition, with her position being created for her, coupled with the change in leadership, understanding roles and responsibilities has been a muddled topic which has taken time and energy to work through.

In conclusion, while Teacher A has had experiences that have tainted and fragmented her thinking, her belief system has been held intact and acts as the driving force for her drive to build a learning community and create a knowledge cycle within her classroom walls. Richard DuFour (2002) asserts:

> people can learn from one another, build shared knowledge, and develop and transfer skill and wisdom only in a "sharing culture"…a climate in which people talk and interact comfortably, in part, because they are not competing against each other. (p. 4)

Teacher A seems to have the resiliency and drive to work towards this vision.

Teacher A focus group. Reminiscent of Teacher A's other data, the first theme that emerged during the focus group was that learning community. Though, during the focus group, the theme of organizational culture developed. Teacher A speaks with an unyielding belief about mirroring best practice in her work. Practices such as reflection, collaboration, and continuous learning are prevalent through Teacher A's discourse. She stated:

> Good teachers are life-long learners. I believe the community between teachers should mirror the classroom community. My best teaching comes about when I am working within a tight-knit learning community where teachers learn from each other and have opportunities to bounce ideas off of each other.

Teacher A values the autonomy given to the teachers in their work, "We have the freedom to try out new techniques and be flexible with our time – we can spend a month learning about by bicycles without being questioned by the director." Yet, she feels the

combination of too much autonomy and role confusion mentioned also throughout her semi-structured interview, has the ability to hinder a true learning community that Teacher A strives for with so much zeal. In the end, Teacher A understands that autonomy leads to empowerment, which can provide the foundation for a strong and vibrant learning community, and this clarity of vision will guide her along her path of continuous learning.

Leader A profile. Leader A had been in a director position for 10 years, and has a degree in Early Childhood Education. She taught in the classroom, was a curriculum supervisor, assistant director, ad area manager for Head Start. She has been at her current center for a little over a year.

Leader A themes. The first theme that emerged from the interview was that of *organizational climate,* defined as *the attitudes, beliefs, and collaboration that affect learning and instruction.* Kim (2001) believes that organizations must tap into the thinking capacities of people rather than the doing of people. These thinking capacities are echoed in the interpretive codes that led to this theme – *shared understandings* and *global quality center indicators. Shared understandings* is defined as *the understandings held in common about effective and necessary support systems,* and *global quality center indicators* is defined as *holistic quality indicators perceived to enhance student learning and teacher instruction through influence on center climate*.

Leader A's interview depicts how she understands that teachers need support systems in order to be effective in practice:

> The large part, they just need to be out of their classroom. You know if they have a tough day…you know they can't just get away. So a lot of time I will go down to the classrooms and just pop in and if I hear a child crying from my office, I will go

> and ask if I can take them, or walk them, just to give them a break….Um, I guess it goes back to, you have to be there, to support both teachers and families.

Leader A discussed in the interview that while she directly supports teachers when she can, she often acts as a buffer for the teachers, a buffer from parent's discontent, a buffer from the board's decisions, a buffer from the Church. and a buffer from management and business decisions. By being the cushion between teachers in the classroom and outside forces, student learning and teacher instruction can occur more seamlessly and without the interruption that jades teachers.

Halpin and Croft (1963) state that organizational climate can be construed as the organizational 'personality' of a school; figuratively, 'personality' is to the individual what 'climate' is to the organization. Thus, Leader A exhibited how she attempted to fashion the organizational climate to be that of supporting teachers so they can get their jobs done.

While *organizational climate* contributes to how the center functions and acts, the overarching theme with Leader A is *organizational systemic structures*. *Organizational systemic structures* is defined as *the systems, structures, policies, and procedures of administration that make the system run and create an ongoing pattern for learning or inhibiting learning.* The interpretive codes that informed this theme were *administrative functions* and *administrative mental models*. *Administrative functions* is defined as *daily overarching tasks that must be accomplished in order for the center to grow, maintain, and sustain*. *Administrative mental models* is defined as *how the day to day happenings affect system learning*.

Almost every piece of discourse was shaped around the business and management responsibilities in running a center, particularly when there had been a change in leadership.

Leader A has been in her position for a year, but took over for someone who had whittled resources away and had allowed too much flexibility and freedom among her staff. Leader A found that she had to increase tuition and transportation costs in order to make up the deficit left by her predecessor. Being located within a church, but declaring the center must be self-sustaining, created a paradigm shift from the past director to the present director. Lastly, the Education Director position has full latitude in all decisions regarding teachers and teaching, which Leader A reigned in to have a better scope of what was happening within classroom walls.

In addition, to change in leadership issues, Leader A has much to contend with on a daily basis on managing a center, "The most challenging is just providing to make sure there is enough staff." Other things such as giving tours to prospective families, outside meetings, working with various personalities and multi-tiered levels of communication can drain time and energy away from Leader A who would like to "start having more time in the classroom for you know – a half hour at a time."

Leader A evoked throughout her interview that the technical and human relations issues are the most difficult and time consuming, and she would like to offer and provide more support systems and be more visible in the classrooms. Yet, she conjured the notion of professional commitment to the management role, even though it has proven that many hats are worn on a typical day. Bloom (2000) identifies the core competencies for early childhood administration (a) personal and professional self-awareness, (b) legal and fiscal management, (c) staff management and human relations, (d) educational programming, (e) program operations and facilities management, (f) family support, (g) marketing and public

relations, (h) leadership advocacy, (i) oral and written communication, and (j) technology. Leader A demonstrates that these conceptual and practical competencies are on a continuum and have variance in application.

Leader A focus group. These competencies listed above were reverberated in Leader A's focus group. The clarifying factor was that Leader A manages Center A through guidance and facilitation, and takes a broad view of leadership. Thus, the theme that emerged was awareness of needs. Staff, family, and programming relations are a fore front issue for Leader A.

> Your staff needs your support on a daily basis, so you need to have support for yourself to offer continued support for them. With that said, I think that Directors are impacted by how the staff is respectful of what occurs in the Center on a whole. Your staff needs to be aware of and buy into what makes the Center successful. Therefore, to be an effective leader in managing a Center, the impacts for me would be to be aware of what our family's need, what staff need to effectively teach daily, and then to be aware of what I would need to continue to be the best leader I can for the Center.

Leader A has taken the theory of change that by having a broad sense of needs at the center, and providing the staff the room to accomplish what is necessary, can lead to student, family, and teacher growth.

Case Study One shows two people who are committed to learning and committed to the staff as a whole. A change in leadership provided confusion in roles, new and perhaps unsettling perspectives and policies, and the struggle to define one's self within the new leadership context. A shared purpose and continual learning helps drive Teacher A, and center oversight with wisdom and prudence drives Leader A. These drivers merge to provide support to the staff.

Case Study Two: School District Preschool B

Preschool B profile. School District Preschool B is located at the intersection of two large, metropolitan cities. Desimone, Payne, Fedoravicius, Henrich, and Finn-Stevenson (2004) highlight that there has been a philosophical shift towards universal preschool that has resulted in the implementation of preschool programs that serve children of all economic backgrounds. The preschool is located in a K-5 elementary school that has a 78% free and reduced lunch population. The school has 598 students, with 45 certified staff and 33 classified staff. The school represents a fairly diverse population of 13% African American, 37 % Hispanic, 40% White, and 9.6% Other. There are two preschool classrooms in the school, one is special education and the other is general education. The school also houses two Head Start classrooms, but they are run by a separate entity and only rent the space in the building. The district has switched program delivery methods, and moved the preschools from being housed in elementary schools to all being housed in an Early Education Center and back to the elementary schools. District officials explained the reason for this final move was that the program had not increased student achievement. The teachers were disconnected from their peers and vertical collaboration was difficult. In addition, the immediate transition from one building to another for a small child was difficult, they ha d to learn all new routines and procedures creating a loss in instructional time. Studies have shown that children who attend preschool have easier transitions to kindergarten (Ramey, Bryant & Suarez, 1985; Taylor, Gibbs & Slate, 2000).

Teacher B profile. Teacher B has been a preschool teacher for 9 years and in education 11 years. She holds a B.A. in Early Childhood. She served as a student teacher to

her current principal when she was in the classroom, and been in the same school district her entire length of teaching.

Teacher B themes. The first theme that emerged through the interview, observations, and document analysis was *knowledge creation cycle*, defined as an *aggregation and interaction of knowledge, skills, understanding, and dispositions that informs teaching the whole child* (Shulman, 1986). *Representing subject matter*, or *helping students to understand academic content through organization of developmentally appropriate approaches*, and *pedagogical theory builders*, the *underpinnings of pedagogical beliefs that determine instructional format in a classroom*, were the interpretive codes that informed this theme.

Teacher B's foundational beliefs lie in providing a safe environment conducive to learning, and works collaboratively with her Para educator to plan learning activities. As evidenced in the *knowledge creation cycle*, her beliefs of a safe environment inform her pedagogy. Classroom observations revealed a very tightly run classroom, with structure, rules, and limited choice being dominant. Teacher B always had ample opportunities for math, alphabet knowledge, movement activities, problem solving, and modeling, but it was done in a very structured and regulated manner.

Center time, which is often called free play or free choice time, looked different in Classroom B. It is structured in a way that Teacher B partners up two children and choose their center for them, in which they switch to a second center after 25 minutes. After probing Teacher B for the thought process in structuring center time in this way, the teacher replied "Learning lab time got to be a very crazy and chaotic time for this group. They were

not able to handle it at that time. So we made it more structured and will try free choice labs again after winter break."

In her interview, Teacher B discussed good teaching as:

> Fun, very hands-on. The children are up moving things and doing things, not just sitting in front of the SMART board and being talked to about it and being able to explore for themselves. The teacher is learning right along with the students. I was using – um – skills as a learner right alongside them.

This shows a dichotomy of thought – one between her beliefs of authentic learning and developmentally appropriate practice, and one where classroom management and district accountability dictate her practice. Different viewpoints seem to be colliding, which lead to the next theme, *paradigm creating loop*, defined as *the process by which our set of beliefs that guide teaching are affected by classroom culture*. Three interpretive codes led to the development of this theme. First, *behavioral response systems* are defined as *student management that undercuts feelings of efficacy and motivation and works to hurt classroom climate.* Second, *minimizing learning* is defined as *when learning is inhibited through a lack of focus.* Lastly, a *belief system for learning* is defined as *a teacher's essential beliefs that guide and challenge student's conceptual understanding and learning.* Together, these interpretive codes create a loop of a belief in developmentally appropriate practice which is affected by a district confusion of focus and clarity on developmentally appropriate practice which is in turn affected by student behavior and discipline.

These individual components do not act with each other, but rather affect the result of the other and are competing forces. While Teacher B has strong beliefs in developmentally appropriate teaching, she also works hard to do what is asked of her by the district central office. "Our district has the last few years, has really focused on academics

and really pushing knowing letters and numbers and pushing that type of thing, so we have come away from doing more play based learning." Yet this work seemed to be challenged by behaviors in the classroom. In my personal notes, I wrote that "Teacher B had very little to do with discipline, and rather it was her Para that took on the role of disciplinarian." As noted in my observations, "The reprimands by the Para are so frequent and for every small behavior, it is distracting from instruction." I found each observation increasingly difficult to focus on the instruction with negative reprimands being frequently directed at the students, but upon reflection decided this system was in place due to district demands for instruction. So while developmentally appropriate practice may have been the goal of Teacher B, the Para's behaviors seemed to be working against this, "Definitely I think knowing what is developmentally appropriate for instruction and how to present the instruction - is probably the most important."

Teacher B seemed to work hard to counteract this with positive reinforcement, but also never spoke to her Para about the consistent behavior or mentioned it in her interview. Behavior was a seemingly hands off topic by Teacher B, and focused much more on social-emotional development and skill development parallel to what her Para was doing in the classroom.

The theme of paradigm creating loop helped to set the stage for the final theme of *institutionalized fragmentation,* defined as *when practice and process collide and ways of thinking become fragmented in application due to organizational structure.* The first interpretive code that informed this theme is that of *structural managers* defined as *elements of an organization that inhibit learning and motivation.* The fragmentation in this theme is

from the second interpretive code, *collaborative supports,* or, *supports that enable teaching and learning to be maximized.* Throughout the interview, Teacher B explicitly stated about district expectations:

> I think my district has really pushed us to do things that I really didn't feel were as developmentally appropriate – not doing the play – I guess I wish that higher people at the board office would have a better understanding of what we are actually doing in the classroom – yeah I guess that would be it.
> I think a lot of the support that I would want for them to be more educated? Does that make sense? So we are all on the same page for what my classroom is supposed to look like, the behaviors that you are going to see, my four and five year olds have, and that is what they are supposed to look like. They are not going to be sitting quietly with their hands in their laps like the older grades.

The lack of early childhood knowledge by central office was reverberated multiple times, "When other people come in from the Board office, like the assistant superintendent, or even the superintendent come and do these walkthrough, they just really don't grasp what early childhood is all about."

The backing of a district is a critical component of school reforms (Fullan, 1993). As evidenced in the literature, districts set the tone for change, establishing priorities and expectations, allocating resources (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988) and providing monetary, informational, and technical support to schools (Bodilly & Berends, 1999). Moreover, Winfield (1991) believes the success of a school wide reform, such as Pre-K, hinges on the district's ability to provide effective service delivery, and coordination between what is happening in the school and district mandates. While Teacher B shows a strong belief of disapproval for Pre-K not being understood, she has strong supports in her building, particularly her school principal, there is also an Instructional Coach and a Curriculum

Specialist in the building, as well as a professional learning team for the Pre-K teachers in the district.

Principals play a critical role in building support for a change effort, providing appropriate resources, and directing the effort (Anderson & Shirley, 1995). Teacher B speaks often about how appreciative she is to have a school principal who understands early childhood, since she taught Kindergarten for 20 years, "I think she is really good at meeting our needs as an early childhood classroom and she also understands the needs of the older grade levels."

The professional learning team provides a unique and uncommon opportunity for the Pre-K teachers in this district to collaborate and problem-solve together. It allows them to meet together once a week for forty-five minutes, which is not an easy task considering it is teachers coming together from across the district on a weekly basis during school hours.

This theme highlights the discrepancy and fragmentation between district organizational structures inhibiting teacher practice and school based collaborative structures supporting teacher practice. If aligned, these two structures could improve all Pre-K student outcomes by preparing students for kindergarten and learning beyond. Collaborative relationships have been shown to improve teachers' attitudes and motivation, as well as their teaching. Professional collaboration allows teachers to interact with each other around problems of practice (Elmore, 1996).

Teacher B focus group. The theme that was grounded in the focus group was that of learning community. The focus group gave Teacher B an opportunity to open up about how valuable the cross-sectional collaboration was that their district and school fostered. "Yes

we are a learning community. Having the support of other preschool teachers and administration directly impacts the teaching in the classroom. Teachers need collaboration time and team work to support the students in the classroom." Teacher B expressed that this level of collaboration offers her motivation to continue to strive for a developmentally appropriate classroom.

Leader B profile. Leader B has been in education for 20+ years and holds a Master's in Administration. She has been a principal at her current building for three years, and describes her job responsibilities as evaluating staff, fiscal planning of building, ensuring quality teaching, student discipline, and many other duties. Leader B's interview had focus on her leadership of the Pre-K, rather than a focus on the elementary grades.

Leader B themes. Leader B had two themes transpire from the data analysis. First, *early childhood instructional leadership*, defined as *A change agent who provides supportive understanding and appreciation for early childhood teachers 's work recognizing their challenges and frustrations, whereas becoming partners in education, learning with and from them* (Hoerr, 2008, pp. 84-85). It became apparent through Leader B's interview, and then supported through Teacher B's interview and observations, that Leader B was an instructional leader in the building and purposefully planned for a school were learning and relationships were at the forefront. This theme of *early childhood instructional leadership* is informed through the interpretive codes of *learning community* and *early childhood.* First, *learning community* is c*ontinual learning and coherence between learning, pedagogy, shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff that permeates to the classroom. Early childhood* is *an*

understanding of the knowledge and skills necessary for a high quality preschool classroom and teacher to possess.

There has been much research supporting principal influence on the success of a program (Fullan, 1993; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992; Sebring & Bryk, 2000) by their support of the program, providing the necessary resources, and directing the effort. This is especially true in preschools as traditionally trained administrators may not have enough a strong enough background in early childhood or possess critical skills to support its implementation. Leadership in school based programs have the added challenge of integration of the preschool with the elementary school. This challenge, along with the additional skill sets cited above, are contextual dilemmas that school leaders must face more often than center directors.

Leader B, who taught Kindergarten for 20 years, highlights the value of her early childhood experience in her interview:

> The other administrators do not have that background just in our district and their always, "I don't know if that is right," or "I just go on down to see what their up to, but I don't really know I have the knowledge or the expertise to know if that is right", and I just really feel that has been to my advantage because I do have that early childhood piece. When I came here to be principal, I would hear them (Pre-K teachers) say, I am glad it is you, because you do know what it is like…It is just really important, if you don't have that, to find out, because it does look different. Their teaching and learning looks different and their teacher needs to be different.

Leader B has worked to develop a learning community where she stated on several occurrences "I would never ask anyone in the building to do something I wouldn't be willing to do myself. I put myself in their place so I have empathy for what they are doing." She also stated:

> I lead by example, I wouldn't ask them to do anything they haven't seen me do, I won't ask them to do anything I wouldn't ask them to do anything I wouldn't do myself…I think they mirror back what they feel. We support each other, we cheer for our successes and lick our wounds when it doesn't go so well. We regroup. It feels like a family and so I would like to make sure I get them the support they need. I put their feet to the fire when needed, but getting them the support they need. Positive can make a difference.

Leader B's drive to provide and support a collaborative learning community is further reverberated when she explained that while it is a priority for her school, she craves the same level of collaboration for herself, "I wish I had that during the day that could bounce ideas off one another…There are things you just want you want to run it by someone, another adult."

To support *early childhood instructional leadership*, Leader B also demonstrated a strong *organizational systemic structure*, the second theme. *Organizational systemic structures* is defined as *the systems, structures, policies, and procedures of administration that make the system run and create an ongoing pattern for learning and getting things done.* This theme was enlightened through the interpretive codes of *administrative functions* and *leadership pathway*. *Administrative functions* is defined as *daily overarching tasks that must be accomplished in order for the center to grow, maintain, and sustain,* and *leadership pathway* is defined as *a deepening of the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to become a school leader.*

Leader B expressed an intense interest in developing relationships, maintaining visibility, and having a strong connection to the staff and children. Her favorite part of the day is car rider duty and lunch duty because she gets to interact with the kids and build connections with them, upon which she draws from "if there are times that aren't so

pleasant, you know, bus referral or if there is something going on. I have built that relationship we can have those hard conversations too as well as the fun ones."

Leader B understands that leadership must involve a connection to what you are leading, and while responsibilities such as lunch duty and bus duty are often dreaded, Leader B sees them as an opportunity to connect to her school and let them know she is genuinely interested in what is happening. This is not only a basic *administrative function* but also a *pathway to leadership*. Murphy and Hallinger (1988) define instructional leadership as collaborative. Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006) define schools as communities, wherein the premise is built on intrinsic motivation. Active learning, stimulating environments, and developmental approaches are prevalent. Together, these views of schools and leadership seem to describe the themes that materialized through Leader B: early childhood instructional leadership through organizational systemic structures.

Leader B focus group themes. The theme that pervaded the focus group questions with Leader B was that of *early childhood instructional leadership*. In the focus group, it was the ideas of collaboration, vision, and forward thinking that informed this theme. By listening to others and collaborating in a cross-sectional format, Leader B is able to drive her actions purposefully and intentionally to meet the needs of the school, its staff, and its students.

In conclusion, both Leader B and Teacher B share a belief system of developmentally practice. Leader B uses instructional leadership and school community to ensure teachers and children receive the support they need to deliver and receive developmentally appropriate practice. Teacher B wants to do what her is district has set as

expectations and mandates, but that often collides with her belief system of developmentally appropriate practice.

Case Study Three: Head Start Preschool C

Preschool C profile. Preschool C is a bilingual preschool in a large Midwestern city, serving ages 2.5 – 5. The student population is 84% Hispanic, 10% White, and 6% African American. The preschool is funded by Head Start, Tuition, SRS, CACFP, and grants. The center is 51% free lunch and 5% reduced lunch. The classroom used in the research study is a Head Start classroom. The center has 63 children with 10 teachers, 1 Director, 1 Assistant Director, 1 cook, and 1 maintenance position. Center C is fraught with research and grants and currently is involved in 7 research opportunities.

Teacher C profile. Teacher C has been in early childhood for 5 years and in education for 16 years. She is the Lead Teacher by title in the classroom, but job titles and responsibilities are often blurred and shared. Teacher C has been with her co-teacher her entire length of time at this center. Teacher C's dominant language is Spanish, and English is a second language, which is represented in the classroom instruction, with the students, and in her belief system.

Teacher C themes. The first theme which encapsulates much of Teacher C's beliefs as well as is woven throughout all of the observations and interview is that of *cultural and linguistic barriers,* defined *as a breakdown in authentic dialogue between families and educators creating a framework of resistance*. This theme came to fruition through the interpretive code of *communication,* defined as *conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, processes, and behavior.* Teacher C reflected on the effect of communication

and mutual language in her interview. She felt that a lot of staff was comfortable with the past director because they shared a common language, where it is much more difficult to communicate with the current director, who does not speak Spanish. Coupled with the language barrier, comes cultural characteristics that have proved to be roadblocks, such as "She's formal and we still don't have that comfortable way to talk about things yet."

Parent communication is also affected by linguistic barriers. Espinosa and Lesar (1994) recommend all communication with Hispanic parents, written and oral, must be provided in Spanish and English. Many programs report that having bicultural and bilingual staff helps promote trust. Center C demonstrated that when the majority of the staff does not speak Spanish, the burden starts to lie on those teachers who can communicate with the parents. With the directors not speaking Spanish, several of the teachers not speaking Spanish, and the majority of parents not speaking English, there is a lot of misinformation and miscommunication occurring. Teacher C finds that when the directors speak to the parents, the parents often reply with "Ok, ok, because they are unclear of what she is saying, and thus the message becomes void.

> Um, so I think this is, in this school, it is very, very important to speak Spanish and both, bilingual. Because the kids, even though they say they understand me, but how do you think the kids, they know, they understand? As a woman, I was here, I just feel like my voice, like I didn't have a voice. One word, if I understand one word, it means everything, I understand. I think this happened with the kids as well too. If they don't speak it, they may hear one word, they understand, that is why they do what they need to do but not really because they understand.

This dialogue evokes frustration and resentment at not knowing the language, not being able to communicate, and missing important understandings. Teacher C feels her voice is silent, yet her voice is being used as a translator to parents. Rodriguez-Brown

(2009) found that having a school culture focused on bilingual and bicultural literacy may create conditions conducive to the positive, two-way home-school communication that is envisioned in a social justice orientation towards education. Genessee and Gandara (1999) posit that contact theory has much weight in bilingual programs. The main hypothesis of contact theory holds that contact between members of different groups leads to increased liking and respect for members of the outgroup, including presumably reductions in stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Equity is critical. Yet, an interesting dynamic that became evident through the interview was that even though these linguistic barriers are affecting teacher motivation leading to affected center climate, the day prior to our interview, the staff had a professional development at night about teaching in the home language, Spanish. Teacher C was revived by the thought of teaching in Spanish, with support for students who are English speaking.

I noted in all my observations that Teacher C and her co-teacher flipped between English and Spanish seamlessly, and the children did not blink about the use of bilingualism. The staff was originally told they would be paid for their time for this professional development since it was after the work day, and then this statement was revoked and told this was teacher time they gave to the organization. Teacher C often mentioned how she was expected to give "charity" of her time. Unpaid time asked of her outside of her work day has seemingly become an expectation, yet Teacher C holds a second job in order to make ends meet. These time demands are adding to levels of frustration that can be seen bubbling beneath the surface. Between the breakdown of communication about pay and the

contradiction of the professional development with the unspoken rules of the center on language, Teacher C was discouraged, resentful, and disheartened the day of the interview.

The second theme that transpired through the data was that of *organizational systemic structure*, defined as *the systems, structures, policies, and procedures of administration that make the system run and create an ongoing pattern for learning or inhibiting learning.* The interpretive codes of *behavioral response systems* defined as *student management that undercuts feelings of efficacy and motivation and works to hurt classroom climate* and *structural managers* defined as *elements of an organization that inhibit learning and motivation,* educated this theme.

During my second and third observations, the co-teacher in the classroom was pulled from classroom B to cover in other classrooms, due to ratio requirements. Teacher C was then left in the classroom by herself. I noted on the third observation that it was chaotic, and with one teacher in the classroom, classroom management became an issue. Teacher C attempted to do versions of small group with the one teacher, but it essentially became controlling behaviors.

On my second observation, the center cook popped in the classroom in the middle of the morning and announced lunch was running late, and Teacher C's class would not be able to eat until 12:45 – 45 minutes later than their scheduled lunch time. I noted, "Even though lunch was pushed back and the co-teacher was in another classroom, Teacher C remained flexible." With the organizational structures running as they are, Teacher C finds her days "exhausting and challenging."

The final theme for Teacher C is *knowledge creation cycle*, defined as an *aggregation and interaction of knowledge, skills, understanding, and dispositions that informs teaching the whole child* (Shulman, 1986). *Representing subject matter,* or *helping students to understand academic content through organization of developmentally appropriate approaches,* and *pedagogical theory builders*, the *underpinnings of pedagogical beliefs that determine instructional format in a classroom*, were the interpretive codes that informed this theme.

Teacher C has received professional development in language, literacy, and math through various and extensive past research projects. This is evidenced in her observations. I noted in my personal journal that there was a lot of questioning, and children were able to engage in a book without words because the teacher was able to draw them into the pictures and connect it to their life. The teacher also did schema building before staring the book, and giving children ample opportunities to practice. Children participated in rich authentic learning during centers here the teacher was able to help them problem-solve, extend their learning, and push their thinking.

Teacher C posited:

> Interacting with kids is the most important thing. Being a part of their playing, conversations, all day is this how we as a teacher, we can support them. Activities, playing, but I think playing is the, uh, better for the teacher to help them, because they feel like they can talk more… To the kids, I think the more questions they answer, we make a question to them, it is better, we give the opportunity to them to answer instead of us as a teacher answer for them.

The three observations were bursting with modeling of a skill and ample opportunities for the children to practice, in both structured and authentic learning experiences. The classroom also had several structures in place to aid with transitions and ensure that was not

a loss of instructional time. Teacher C demonstrated depth as a teacher but struggles with organizational factors that inhibited her feelings of success. A sense of efficacy refers here to the teacher's perceptions that their teaching is worth the effort that it leads to the success of students and is personally satisfying. High efficacy reduces alienation because it signifies a-sense of agency, engagement, and positive regard for the work. A study by Neumann, Rutter, and Smith (1989) found that certain variables were identified that had substantial correlations to increased teacher efficacy: sense of community (.461), administrator responsiveness (.484), teacher influence in decision making (.518), leadership (.478), and orderly student behavior (.456). Each of these variables were represented in the data collected on Teacher C.

Teacher C focus group. Through the focus group, the theme that emerged was knowledge creation cycle in which her beliefs and knowledge informed her pedagogy. Teacher C spoke openly about the need for a safe and welcoming classroom, which is the byproduct of collaboration with your teaching partner. Teaching is a reciprocal activity, and thus, by building trust with your teaching partner enables children to trust in themselves. It was also evident that Teacher C feels a disconnect when it comes to parent-teacher partnerships, and feels that by strengthening this component, her relationships with her children would also be strengthened. "The main elements are many. However, the basic elements are what makes a quality preschool program is the Supporting Social Emotional Development and Communication as well."Teacher C has clearly identified her philosophy of teaching, and with organizational support, Teacher C has the ability to soar.

Leader C profile. Leader C has only been Director at Center C for 5 months, but in early childhood in several different capacities for twenty + years. Leader C served as an Instructional Coach at this center, through a research grant, a few years prior to accepting this position. This enabled her some familiarity of the center and staff prior to starting. Consequently, her belief system is through a coaching lens rather than a leader lens.

Leader C themes. Leader C's data profile looks differently from the other two leaders. The first theme that emerged was that of *role conception*, defined as *the transformative process of going from classroom to leader through a process of learning and reflection and figuring out role identity.* This theme was informed by the interpretive codes of *leadership design*, defined as *developing capacity and efficacy in carrying out the position of leader, director, and manager*, and *administrative functions*, defined as *daily overarching tasks that must be accomplished in order for the center to grow, maintain, and sustain.*

Leader C was still trying to define her role and decide a contextualized portrait for her position. With a Director position and an Assistant Director position, Leader C has the job title of Assistant Director, but is responsible for the majority of all administrative tasks. Leader C is involved with supervising staff, evaluations, overseeing kitchen operations, tuition, parent communication and engagement, Head Start partnerships, curriculum, lesson plans, student behavior, grants in the center, and accountability and governance paperwork. Yet, this overwhelming palate of responsibilities creates little time for classrooms, teachers, and students.

> I would like to spend more time in the classroom, with the kids, getting to know the kids better. You know my time to get into the classroom is in the afternoon so I can

> talk to the teachers, but the kids are asleep, or at least they should be asleep And because I am so new to this and trying to figure things out, like trying to create methods for doing things, forms for doing things, policies and procedures that is where a lot of my time has been.

As this was verified in Teacher C's comments, Leader C believes "I could do a better job in practically any way. I am getting the basic done, if there is any huge concerns, I am able to help them out with those kinds of things." Leader C, with a background in coaching, believes her strength in this role is coaching, and she tries "to approach anything I do from a coaching perspective rather than a leadership perspective." If Leader C could realize her vision of coaching given her time constraints, it may be helpful to communicate this to the staff, as Teacher C demonstrated an unclear idea of what Leader C was doing. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2003) found that past experiences in leadership help to mold the novice administrator's conception of the principalship and adopt an identity, yet the conceptualization of the work does not occur until initial socialization into the system is complete. It is at the stage that the administrator role is transformed into a leader. Leader C is in the midst of this process now – past experiences of coaching informing her vision, but is enduring a daily struggle with management of tasks, prohibiting her from moving along a leadership continuum.

The second theme for Leader C is that of *learning community*, defined as *continual learning and coherence between learning, pedagogy, shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff that permeates to the classroom.* This theme has two interpretive codes: *classroom experience indicators*, which are *indicators that children experience in a classroom setting that lead to a quality outcome* and *global quality center*

indicators, defined as *holistic quality indicators perceived to enhance student learning and teacher instruction through influence on center climate.*

This center has ample opportunities for continuous teacher learning. Part of this is generated through the extra research projects in the school that offer professional development as part of the project design, part of through meeting regulations for Head Start and other funding agencies, but it is also part of the center culture. Once more, it became palpable that this center director's past coaching experience really guides her belief system. In the interview, she explained what she would like the center to have "free exchange of information and ideas, where there is a safe and trusting environment for the adults."

> I think providing the correct climate for teachers to grow and learn to feel comfortable and not worry too much about making mistakes and really being open to new and different things. And as a leader, helping people stay focused on the goals and mission and what's best for children.

She also expressed a fervent desire to be in the classrooms more, observing children and teachers, working with them to improve instruction. Ekholm and Hedin (1987) found that child care organizational climates of team work and attitudes affect teacher interactions with children and were more active in planning activities and interacting with children during play based on the child's needs. Linking this to theme one, this director has the vision and philosophy of practice to do this, but role conception must first be clarified.

Lower and Cassidy (2007) found that program administration and organizational climate are critical variables to quality early care and that leadership and management must be addressed when attempting to raise quality in child care settings. Teacher C is exasperated with the organizational system, due to time demands, breakdowns in communication, changes in leadership, and unclear support. Leader C is trying to find the

path to instructional leadership, but her role is still being conceived and she is drowning in managerial tasks, prohibiting any time to be spent in the classrooms or with teachers. Lower and Cassidy (2007) also demonstrated that both management and leadership practices in the organizational climate, as well as how those practices are perceived by staff, correlate to classroom global quality. Furthermore, participation of the teaching staff in shared leadership rather than top-down leadership positively affects the organizational climate and is reflected in the classroom quality. Center C must focus on aligning its systems and building critical trust with the staff in order to see sustainable growth.

Leader C focus group. Through the focus group, the theme of Instructional Leadership Barriers emerged. Leader C candidly reflected on the many barricades that are present within the system itself, within the position, and within the culture of the center:

> Time and funding are roadblocks to being able to make some changes. Because teachers have been involved in a variety of projects over the years the lack of consistency and differences instructional focus and approaches among classrooms and teachers may affect making changes.
>
> I think the change in directors, the amount of time that the center was without a director, as well as changes in key leadership positions within the agency have all had a negative impact on the center's culture and motivation and so the ability to affect change and the implementation of new practices.

Leader C has an instructional background and works to develop her knowledge through research on best practice and strengthen the groundwork for the Head Start Performance Standards. Yet, because of misaligned systems, role confusion, and an incoherent instructional focus, developing into an early childhood instructional leader has been fraught with challenges and roadblocks.

Both sets of participants, the teachers and the leaders, demonstrated certain themes

that were specific to their role, such as knowledge creation cycle for teachers and instructional leadership for leaders. Yet, some themes revealed overlap as with learning community. The sense of learning community was important to both sets of participants, and was felt to be detrimental to center and classroom success. The theme of organizational systemic structures, while illuminated through both teachers and leaders, was informed by differing perceptions. For leaders it was seen and the functions necessary to be a successful administrator. For teachers, it was the systems in place that provided the foundation for the how teaching was to be done. For the participants, voice intersected with roles, creating similarities and differences across the themes.

Conclusion: Cross-Case Analysis

I used the theoretical tradition of heuristic inquiry in this multiple case study to explore the voices of teachers and leaders in different Pre-K settings. The voices of Teacher A, Leader A, Teacher B, Leader B, Teacher C, and Leader C resonated through document analysis, in-depth interviews, and observations. The research questions that guided this final step in the data analysis were *How can the system of Pre-K education in the United States be reconceptualized and developed to ensure it is of high quality for all children?* Sub-questions looking at programs and infrastructures of Pre-K education included the following: (1a) How can teacher quality improve development and readiness for kindergarten for every preschooler? (1b) What can educational leaders do to support high-quality Pre-K classroom instruction? And (1c) What elements of effective practice contribute to high quality instruction within the Pre-K classroom? Within the cross case analysis of this study, I compared the results of each case with the results of the whole in

order to highlight the findings in regards to the research questions. Miles and Huberman (1994) find that cross-case analysis enhances generalizability and deepens understanding of the phenomenon. Generalizability looks at the findings extending beyond the single case they were discovered in, by asking the question, "Do these findings make sense beyond this specific case?" As represented in Table 4.3 the concluding themes were:

Table 4.3

Cross Case Themes in Qualitative Data Sets

	Cross Case Themes																		
	Themes																		
Participants	Learning	Community	Organizational	Systemic Structures	Institutional	Fragmentation	EC Instructional	Leadership	Paradigm Creating	Loop	Organizational	Climate	Knowledge Creation	Cycle	Role Conception	Cultural and	Linguistic Barriers	Instructional	Leadership Barriers
Teacher A	X				X								X						
Leader A			X								X					X			
Teacher B					X				X				X						
Leader B			X				X												
Teacher C			X										X			X			
Leader C	X																		X

1. Center System Culture is the overarching theme that is illustrated by four dominant themes. It is defined as the hidden and visible attitudes, beliefs, and dynamic

relationships that affect "how business is done," and in turn, having an impact on classrooms, teachers, parents, and students. Elements of culture pervaded each interview and the effects of the system culture were observable during classroom observations. Rather than teachers seeing high quality Pre-K as defined by how many numbers and letters children know, how many conversations they have, or how many students they have in the classroom, it was about how their theory was put into practice, either willingly or forcefully, and how meaningful collaboration and clear communication were for a successful experience for the teacher, the child, and the parent.

2. Knowledge Creation Cycle was the first dominant theme in the three data types. I defined this theme as an aggregation and interaction of knowledge, skills, understanding, and dispositions that informs teaching the whole child (Shulman, 1986). Representing subject matter and pedagogical theory builders, were the interpretive codes that informed this theme. Essentially, each teacher had strong beliefs about developmentally appropriate instruction which was informed by their knowledge and affected their pedagogy. How their belief of developmentally appropriate practice constructed itself in the classroom looked different from case to case, partly because of the next theme. This theme was only felt at the classroom level. It was interesting that all three teachers expressed an interest to become instructional leaders and to leave the classroom within the next five years in pursuit of other ventures in education.

3. Organizational systemic structures was the second dominant theme, described as the systems, structures, policies, and procedures of administration that make the system run and create an ongoing pattern for learning and getting things done. This theme was

enlightened through the interpretive codes of administrative functions, leadership pathway, administrative mental models, structural managers, and behavioral response systems. Organizational systems had an impact on the delivery and efficacy in the knowledge creation cycle.

4. Institutionalized fragmentation was the third most prevalent theme. I described this as when practice and process collide and ways of thinking become fragmented in application due to organizational structure. The interpretive code that informed this theme is that of structural managers, collaborative supports, and degenerative vision. This theme was surprising to me, and found a significant collapse between practice and process, or outside accountability and classroom instruction. This theme was only expressed at the classroom level.

5. The final dominant theme was learning community, defined as a continual learning and coherence between learning, pedagogy, shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff that permeates to the classroom. The interpretive codes that led to this theme were collaborative support systems, adult learning and inquiry, classroom experience indicators, and global quality center indicators. Learning community provided an opportunity for teachers to extend their learning by working with peers and deepening their understanding of their pedagogy. Learning community was cross level theme, evident at both teacher and leader level.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings from the data collection and analysis for this heuristic multiple case study which sought to identify teacher and leader perceptions of a

high-quality Pre-K related to leadership, coaching and teacher quality. These results were illustrated using the frequencies of thematic content and illustrative examples of participant responses. The results exposed five dominant themes that ran through all data sets: knowledge creation cycle, organizational systemic structures, institutionalize fragmentation, and learning community. It became apparent that Pre-K educators feel empowered and affirmed when they are able to collaborate with their colleagues and work in a center that embeds learning and collaboration in their center culture. Yet, there are conflicting forces of institutionalized fragmentation and fractured organizational systems that are working against what teachers believe.

The results, as represented in the four supporting themes and one overarching theme, suggested that center culture dominates (a) instruction (b) feelings of efficacy (c) feelings of contentment (d) teacher beliefs in developmentally appropriate practice and (e) interactions with students. The development of a trusting learning community and for teacher's pedagogy to match their belief system is of inherent essence for a high quality. Pre-K. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study and findings, and describes any recommendations and implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 5 of this research study provides a summary of the multiple case study by first revisiting the purpose and problem of this study including the methodological procedures taken, and next providing a summary of the findings organized under each of the guiding questions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for classroom Pre-K teachers, Pre-K leaders, and policy makers and for future research.

Summary of the Study

This study focused on an in-depth examination of Pre-K quality and variability across different sites: Head Start, District, and Private. There is a gap in the literature regarding research that addresses perceptions and thoughts of Pre-K leaders and teachers on the elements of a high quality Pre-K. The teachers and leaders voices gave depth to the findings that address the phenomenon of high quality preschool as it relates to the dynamics of effective instruction, leadership, and teacher capacity. The purpose was to determine the features and undercurrents of preschool classrooms that result in a high quality experience for children. The research for this heuristic, multiple case study was conducted at three Pre-K centers in a large Midwestern city, where both teachers and leaders had a minimum of three years' experience. Data for this multiple case study was gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with three classroom teachers and three Pre-K leaders, and documents review. Multiple data sources served as methods of triangulation and contributed to validity. Merriam (2001) states that the "rich, thick description provides

enough description so that the reader will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation and hence, whether findings can be transferred." (p. 211).

All data collected were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Inductive analysis was utilized which begins with close readings of the transcripts and texts, transforming the text into segments, and the segments are assigned codes. Codes for the research included A priori codes, codes that were developed before examining the data, and inductive codes, codes that were developed as coding occurs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Enumeration is the next process, in which codes are quantified and then organized into different levels, occurred for applicable descriptive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The descriptive codes evolved into interpretive codes which then developed into themes. These themes paved the path for the summary of findings. Figure 5.1 presents a visual diagram of the themes from this study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), diagramming is the process of making a sketch to show and clarify the relationship between the parts of the whole. This is an essential step in cross-case analysis.

Summary of the Findings

In this study, research questions guided this study. The overarching question I sought to answer was: *How can the system of Pre-K education in the United States be reconceptualized and developed to ensure it is of high quality for all children?*

Sub-questions looking at programs and infrastructures of Pre-K education included the following:

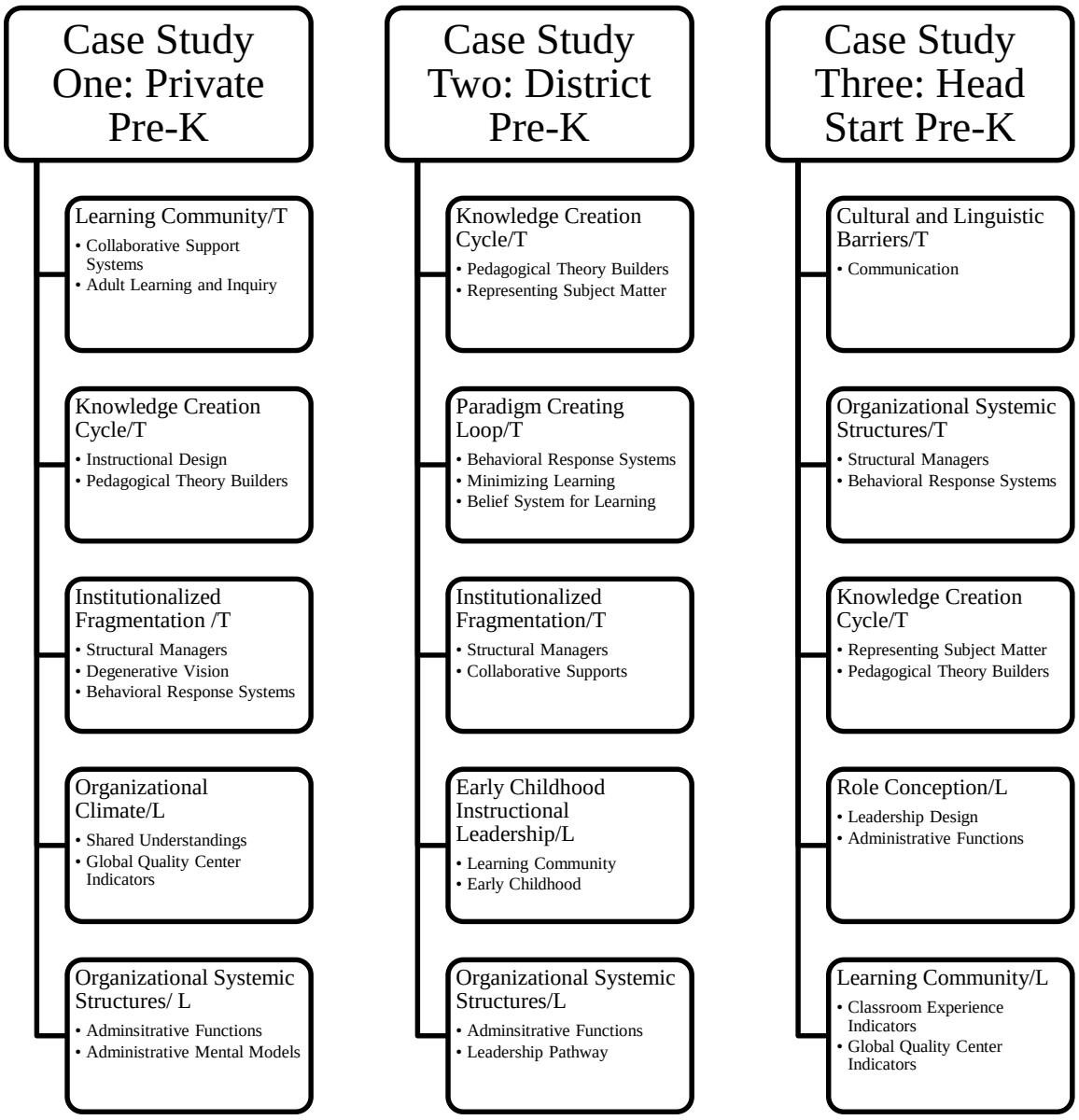


Figure 5.1. Within-Case Analysis: High Quality Pre-K.

Key:
T: Teacher
L: Leader

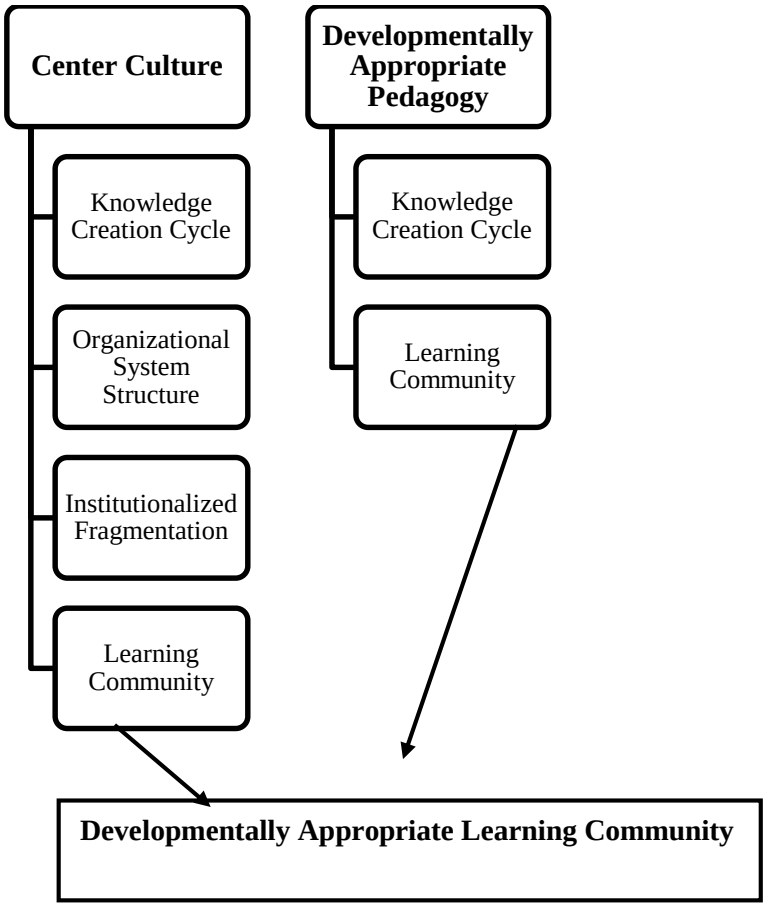


Figure 5.2 Cross-Case Analysis: High Quality Pre-K.

- How can teacher quality improve development and readiness for kindergarten for every preschooler?
- What can educational leaders do to support high-quality Pre-K classroom instruction?
- What elements of effective practice contribute to high quality instruction within the Pre-K classroom?

These questions prompted me to consider events outside cognitive activities within the classroom walls that lead to children being prepared for kindergarten. Rather, by using

multiple perspectives, the role of the teacher and the role of the leader highlighted a need to analyze the center climate as it pertains to teaching and trust, which in turn, leads to student achievement. Pre-K teachers and administrators understand the daily life of the classroom and center, and know what is tangible and feasible to see change. If it is not purposeful change that can occur within the scope of the center's culture and make-up, change will not happen. In order to summarize my findings in the clearest way possible, this section is organized by the guiding research questions.

Question #1: How Can Teacher Quality Improve Development and Readiness for Kindergarten for Every Preschooler?

The themes of knowledge creation cycle, paradigm creating loop, learning community, and organizational systemic structures summarized this theme. Mead (2008) states that social and emotional development, such as learning self-control and resiliency, could prove to be more important to future school achievement than academic content in Pre-K. In Teacher A's interview, the teacher spoke very candidly about the need to focus on the social-emotional aspects of child development, rather than school readiness skills, which is heavily espoused in the literature. She stated:

> School readiness could also be life readiness. You have to get along with other people, you have to take turns, and I want you to learn your ABC's and your 123's and that sort of thing. I think we get caught up – school readiness is really cognitive, social emotional, physical – I mean it is all those pieces. But we are in an age where it is academic and cognitive. But you know, as a first grade teacher I would much rather work on teaching you the basics of phonics and alphabet learning than teach you how not to hit someone when you get mad.

Mead (2008) states that high quality Pre-K programs must start building children's academic and social skills in order to help narrow the gaps and build a foundation for

success in kindergarten. While the teachers would not disagree with this statement, all three teachers felt pressure to evoke drill and skill type activities in the classroom which conflicted with their belief system of developmentally appropriate practice. For example, Teacher B utilized a SMART Board during each of the observations that lacked any opportunity for student-teacher interaction and quality feedback. It was, at best, repetitive, rote, and unengaging, but a part of the district's prescribed curriculum.

Student-teacher interactions are imperative in the teacher's eyes, and they are cut short because of time, system, and center demands. Mead (2008) continues to explain that the quality of interactions between teachers and children are the primary determinant of Pre-K quality and the strongest predictor for how much children will learn in Pre-K. Yet, teachers feel this is being ripped away from them and being replaced with the need to know higher order skills, such as blending and rhyming, addition, and scientific inquiry. Researchers at the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) identified a set of teacher behaviors that are connected to better student outcomes in Pre-K (2000). These include: explicit instruction in key skills, sensitive and emotionally warm interactions, responsive feedback, verbal engagement and stimulation, and a classroom setting that is not overly regimented. Based on these behaviors, there seems to be a schism between policy and practice. Both theorists and practitioners alike understand that these behaviors create a high quality teacher and lead to kindergarten readiness, but the institutionalized fragmentation and organizational system is preventing teachers from crafting these quality interactions. The system needs to allow teachers to strengthen process indicators, which would lead to increased teacher capacity by deepening and solidifying

teaching practices aimed at increasing student achievement, such as conversation routines and open-ended questioning. Lastly, with increased teacher capacity comes stronger and more relevant student-teacher interactions, which are demonstrated to improve social-emotional, cognitive, and behavioral domains for children.

Question #2: What Can Educational Leaders Do to Support High-Quality Pre-School Classroom Instruction?

The themes of learning community, organizational climate, organizational systemic structures, instructional leadership, and role conception guide the findings for this question. The research strongly advocates for a Pre-K leader who can vertically and horizontally align instruction for grades Pre-K – 3 (Mead, 2011). But the teachers are strongly convicted a leader must have a shared understanding of what developmentally appropriate practice is and that the Pre-K classroom will look differently from classrooms in an elementary school. Instructional leadership in Pre-K, then, looks different. Instructional leadership conceptions in this study are portrayed as a focus on communication, trust, collaborative support systems, understanding the classroom experience, and on a balance of managing and leading. Leader B had a strong early childhood background, which led to trust and understanding between herself and her early childhood teachers. A learning community was allowed to evolve in the school. Leader C was still struggling to have a clear conception of her role, which was damaging to the center climate and teacher trust. Mead (2011) states that a leader's most important instructional leadership role is the culture she creates within a school. If Leader B could reframe the role of teaching as collaborative, rather than isolated, and shared problem-solving is encouraged and fostered, center climate could be improved.

Leader A has a sense of this vision, but the recent change in leadership still makes this vision fragile and delicate. The answer to this question goes beyond my original suspicions of leaders supporting classrooms by minimizing distractions in the classroom, clarifying roles, providing the necessary resources and materials, and offering assistance in adhering to district guidelines, but rather, to be a true early childhood instructional leader by driving effective teaching through a culture of mutual respect, trust, knowledge, and feedback. It is no longer human capital management but scaffolding teacher's skills in a climate conducive to learning.

Question #3: What Elements of Effective Practice Contribute to High Quality Instruction within the Pre-K Classroom?

The themes of learning community, knowledge creation cycle, and paradigm creating loop informed the findings for this question. Barnett and Hustedt (2003) have shown that Pre-K benefits children socially and academically. My belief before the study was that one element of effective practice that contributed to high quality instruction was through supports to the teachers, such as with instructional coaching. All three centers had a model of coaching in place. In Center A, it was a teacher who had dual roles. In Center B, the district had a Pre-K coach, the school had a coach, and a curriculum specialist. In Center C, teachers had experienced extensive coaching due to the external research grants they were involved with. While program deliveries across sites varied, this was a constant between all three. Yet, coaching was never mentioned by teachers or leaders as being a variable that led to high quality instruction. Teacher B stated:

> She is just really willing to help us out. If we have any questions about things she is really anything, anything we have ever needed help with she has been there. I, um,

> if, at the beginning of the school year, we had the Centile clickers, and I just wanted to see what my preschoolers could do, so I asked her for the extra help in the classroom and she was more than willing to come in and be an extra set of hands in the classroom.

Teacher A, being part coach and part teacher, really valued the chance for collaboration, learning, and reflection and longed to have a someone offer that to her, rather than just her providing the coaching. But, she never once mentioned that being coached would lead to high quality instruction. Rather, a learning community that is designed to build upon individual learning and individual beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice is a solidified and essential effective practice that leads to a high quality classroom. Developing teachers who have high capacity in the classroom should be a byproduct of support from leadership. Regardless of preschool setting, teacher capacity must be fostered and nurtured, and teachers should be given the autonomy to teach children in a developmentally appropriate model.

Implications for Practice and Theory Development

This study addressed the question of reconceptualizing the Pre-K system in the context of teacher and leader voices informing the findings to this overarching question. In the literature review in Chapter Two, it was found that there is little published research in the area teacher and leader voice as it relates to high quality Pre-K classrooms, but extensive amounts on teacher quality components based on research. In addition, the research reveals that there is tremendous diversity and variation among Pre-K programs exposing the lack of structure that exists in early childhood education.

Implications for Teachers

This research has highlighted the fundamental role that teachers play in providing a high quality education for Pre-K students. Howes et al. (2008) found that children's exposure to pre-literacy activities, the overall instructional climate of the classroom, and teacher-reported close relationships with the children were associated with higher student achievement at the end of the Pre-K year. So for teachers it remains of utmost importance to focus on the whole child – social-emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral, and not allow themselves to be drained by accountability movements that take away from their foundational pedagogical belief systems. One way that this study emphasized this happening was through the development of a collaborative learning system, where teachers can learn with one another, and elements of trust and respect are woven throughout every interaction that occurs in the building. The Erikson New School Project in Chicago partners with preschool leaders and teachers to establish effective learning environments in classrooms and strong relationships in the school setting (Maxwell, 2013). Through the offering of coordinated professional development and a focus on building Pre-K -3 learning communities, 84% of participating teachers reported the professional learning community improved their ability to share goals for teaching and learning and an overall increase in the effectiveness of their teaching. Teachers reported that sharing knowledge and skills with one another helped build a productive learning community and supported sustainable change within their setting (Maxwell, 2013). Another example resides in Pre-K school district teachers from Oklahoma, are given co-planning time with their center-based colleagues so they can "develop a common language about what they are doing and set the same benchmarks for children." Participating teachers learn together, build relationships and

develop a shared understanding of school readiness (Wat & Gayl, 2009, p. 4). A learning community offers the chance for teachers to develop and grow in a supportive way. A limitation of this study in regards to teachers is that I did not collect data on assistant teachers and, as a result, was not able to assess their potentially important impact on classroom processes and hear their perspective on what constitutes high quality teaching and practice in Pre-K.

Implications for School Leaders

School Leaders and Center Directors must have a firm understanding of what a developmentally appropriate approach is. If unsure, it is imperious to spend time in the Pre-K classrooms, talk to experts, and observe students to gain insight into life in a Pre-K classroom. Bredekamp and Copple (1997) advocate that a developmentally appropriate curriculum is meaningful and respects the academic integrity of early learners. Having appropriately high expectations of what teachers can accomplish and children can do in a Pre-K is paramount. Alongside with this, is the need to create a seamless system that incorporates Pre-K, and utilizes them in horizontal and vertical teaming structures to teach other teachers: what is Pre-K? Hull (2011) advocates that developing a shared vision among all partners in the school community is essential in supporting a continuum of learning from Pre-K through third grade. Through vertical teaming that focuses on curriculum development, data-based decision making, and instructional collaboration, teachers can broaden their knowledge of student learning across age groups and develop a coherent understanding of developmentally appropriate practice. There is a definitive disconnect in communication, expectations, and collaboration in the Pre-K world. It would be a daunting

task to move current Pre-K classrooms into a revised system of Pre-K-3 schools, completely changing the landscape and formation of current K-8 schools. But these invisible lines between two parallel systems should be more concrete and visible. School principals can serve as a catalyst for Pre-K-3 alignment by facilitating and implementing program coordination and targeting services for vulnerable populations before they enter kindergarten. The Early Childhood Community School Linkages Project supported found that K-12 leaders who understand Pre-K practice are well-positioned to promote alignment between Pre-K and elementary school. Similarly, Pre-K leaders who understood elementary school norms and practices were able to link their student's transition to elementary school and adjust center practices based on the relationship between Pre-K and kindergarten (Geiser, Horwitz & Gerstein, 2013). Findings from this same study supported that leaders with expertise in both early childhood and elementary education are able to develop creative and appropriate strategies that foster collaboration and cultivate shared responsibility and mutual respect across settings. A limitation of this study is not having an opportunity to interview school principals who are limited in their knowledge of early childhood and to understand their angst when trying to provide descriptive feedback to Pre-K teachers.

Implications for Policymakers

Possibly the most policy-relevant implication from this study is its demonstration that a mixed-delivery system for Pre-K that brings programs of all delivery methods under the same canopy of high-quality, developmentally appropriate, can promote a high quality experience for all children. While centers that had a third party funding agency and were thus accountable to separate entity, such as Head Start and the District Preschool, often

expressed more concern on issues relating to time and money, the end result is the same: without a sustainable culture, high quality experiences will be jaded. Policy makers are often interested in impacts, but also must look at the practical when implementing. Center type seems to be secondary, and instructional design within a conducive climate is primary to producing high-quality classroom experiences for children and thus hold the most promise of generating strong impacts. Early Childhood Academy, a collaboration between the New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood, and with the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, builds communities of practice among New Jersey school districts, where the districts learn and support one another in their application of early childhood learning. The goal is to develop systematic data collection that will be used to cultivate responsive coaching, purposeful cross-site visits, and professional development opportunities. The Early Childhood Academy also focuses on communication amongst all stakeholders in the hopes of building peer learning communities in early childhood settings (Ayers, 2014). This model holds promise for policy makers and state-level personnel in supporting an understanding of the critical issues and their application to a high quality Pre-K. Georgia has developed and implemented the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, which is a performance-based assessment providing teachers with information about instructional supports they need for children entering kindergarten, thereby promoting collaboration and vertical and horizontal professional development opportunities for schools and centers and instilling a culture of learning (Hull, 2011).

Lastly, it may prove judicious to have policymakers review the Common Core for early childhood. This research supports standards that are developmentally appropriate, and

it is of utmost necessity that the Common Core standards being used nationally are developmentally appropriate. As advocated by the Teacher participants, knowing letters and numbers is important for kindergarten, but not of primary importance. Children must learn in a developmentally appropriate way that is targeted at their zone of proximal development.

Future Research Possibilities

This study took place in three centers and analyzed the voices of three teachers and three leaders. Other studies similar to this one need to be conducted with a larger sample, in different areas of the country that can boast different populations of students and teachers. This can broaden the context of the findings. In addition, a longitudinal study examining the correlation between Pre-K setting and the student's educational outcomes from grades K-3 could also provide important information on what works and what does not. By moderating for effects such as instructional and emotional support offered by the teacher, achievement scores could demonstrate if a specific setting has a direct influence on outcomes in later grades. This would provide a quantitative estimate of effect size for a specific Pre-K setting and academic outcomes for early elementary school.

In order for this study to be robust and provide a sound method, it would be necessary to control for relevant predictor and criterion variables, such as race and ethnicity, since the setting is the variable of interest. It would also be necessary to ensure selection bias does not occur. This is important because while differences may appear on the surface (i.e., race), there is probably differences that are not observable, (i.e. attendance or school readiness based on age of child). Through a standardized method of selecting participants for a randomized control trial, the threat of selection bias could be eliminated. The measures

used to determine the amount of growth a student has made would be normed and validated, free from evaluator bias. The measures would consists of several subtests, looking at academic attainment over a period of four years, from Kindergarten through third grade. An added component of this study could be the inclusion of parental advocates and partners working with the system, rather than parallel or separate from their child's in class experiences.

Expansion of this study could also include analysis of teacher experience using the specific lens of cognitive dissonance. By understanding a teacher's professional choices that have been made when entering the field may help identify areas for professional development.

A supplementary study to teacher experience and professional choice is that of looking at teacher certification and impact on student development and readiness for kindergarten. While numerous studies have been done n this topic, they demonstrate conflicting results. Narrowing the scope to a specified center type could be one methodology to take under consideration.

Based on the limitations from this research study, I would advocate for further analysis into assistant teacher impact on center culture and student learning. Expanding the current study to incorporate all teacher voice, rather than just the lead teacher voice. I would conjecture that the voices would illuminate issues of power and deeply explore roles and responsibilities within a classroom context.

By taking a deeper look at school districts and their early childhood programs to show if the different levels work together seamlessly or early childhood proves to be the

auxiliary program that are often an afterthought, could provide school districts with methods for increasing the effectiveness of the multi-level systems.

Lastly, the incorporation of a baseline instrument that gathered information on the culture of a center, or the heartbeat of the school, could provide valuable information in determining center choice. It could also help determine a mixed methods design, or a randomized control design in which centers with a positive culture in place receive a different treatment than centers with a lack of infrastructure weak culture. Growth in effective developmentally appropriate practice and strengthened school culture would then be measured at the end of the study. Nonetheless, culture and leadership need to be further examined under the umbrella of Pre-K.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the summary of the content analysis that is related to leadership, effective practice and teacher quality in Pre-K setting. High-quality Pre-K is a well-researched topic that has empirically identified structural and process structures that can determine the quality of a center. This chapter highlighted that rather than structural and process indicators, a developmentally appropriate learning community offers an overarching answer to how Pre-K quality can be defined. Leaders act as change agents in developing and fostering this developmentally appropriate learning community and provide the leverage for visible transformation in this process. In understanding developmentally appropriate practice and promoting a culture of mutual respect, trust, knowledge, and feedback, leaders create and sustain a climate beneficial to learning and teaching.

In past research studies, teacher voice has rarely been used to inform the evidence. Through this study, it became apparent that Pre-K educators feel empowered and affirmed when they are able to collaborate with their colleagues within a culture of learning and are able to practice their beliefs of developmentally appropriate practice without feeling threatened, minimalized, or dangerous. This empowerment leads to a developmentally appropriate learning community. Organizational growth in a developmentally appropriate learning community is achieved through reciprocal dialogue, inquiry, and reflective practice and is simultaneously buttressed by a leader understanding of high quality Pre-K. A developmentally appropriate learning community and teacher empowerment work together to shape a culture of deep collaboration. A collaborative culture is not forced collegiality, but rather a system that allows teacher voice to be heard, addressed and valued. Teacher voice is powerful, and when grounded in an organizational culture that empowers teaching, teacher voice creates spaces where collaboration is the force driving quality teaching. Maxine Greene (1984) states, "It is when people become challengers, when they take initiatives, that they begin to create the kinds of spaces where dialogue can take place and freedom can appear. Is then, and only then, that people begin thinking about working together to bring into being a better state of things" (p. 65).

The results suggest a reframing of conceptualizations about the elements of high quality Pre-K. Teachers and directors believe they are providing the most effective environment for learning and teaching possible, and these beliefs underpin the actions and decisions made on a daily basis. Yet, in order to have a visible developmentally appropriate learning community, mind frames and beliefs may need to be altered to showcase the

greatest impact for a specific setting, resulting in a culture of collaborative learning. These mind frames are around communication, professional learning, developmentally appropriate practice, and collaboration. The power of deep collaboration is persuasive, submerging an entire Pre-K setting into one of purpose, engagement and learning.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Study of High Quality Pre-K: As Identified By Teachers and Administrators

Aim of Study
This study will be looking at the understanding the Pre-K teacher and administrator viewpoint and vision for a high quality Pre-K experience based on three elements:

- *Teacher quality*
- *Leadership support and practice*
- *Effective classroom practice based on supports available to the teacher*

I expect this study will produce rigorous evidence that support in the classroom through evidence-based practice coupled with strong leadership can be a systematic process, leading to benefits for preschool children's engagement and learning in the short-term and for their cognitive development in the long-term.

Preschool programs that want to improve their practice will benefit from participation in this work.

Study Features
This study involves a commitment as described in the "Study Design" section below. I am seeking participation of teachers and administrator in area early childhood programs that:

- Have English as the primary language of instruction
- Serve children 4-5 years of age per class
- The lead teacher has 3+ years of experience in Pre-K
- The site has a position dedicated to director, administrator, or some leadership role
- The person in this role has 3+ years of experience in some form of early childhood leadership

What will be learned?

- How can teacher quality increase preschooler's development and readiness for kindergarten?
- What can educational leaders do to support high-quality pre-school classroom instruction?
- How can instructional coaching contribute to the teacher's capacity to facilitate high quality instruction within the pre-school classroom?

Study Design
Because this study is developing an a picture of high-quality Pre-K as informed through those who live it, I will use a multiple case study, using three diverse Pre-K sites: a private Pre-K, a district Pre-K, and a federally-funded, Head Start Pre-K.

What will be the benefits of this research partnership?
As part of this study, you will receive a comprehensive picture of high-quality Pre-K instruction as well as strategies for using that information to inform practice. Results of this study also will contribute to evidence-based practices for pre-kindergarten programs in this and other communities.

What will the study involve?
For program directors/leaders this study will involve committing the organization to two months of participation and supporting and encouraging teacher and child/family participation as described below:

For Teachers, willingness to:
1. Participate in the study
2. Sign a teacher consent form
3. Attend an in-depth 45 minute interview
4. Attend an in-depth 45 minute focus group
5. Allow research staff to observe in classrooms (1.5 hours of observation, 3-5 times over the research period)

For Administrators, willingness to:
1. Participate in the study
2. Sign an administrator consent form
3. Attend an in-depth 45 minute interview
4. Attend an in-depth 45 minute focus group
5. Allow research staff to observe in classrooms (1.5 hours of observation, 3-5 times over the research period)

If this study is of interest to you and your center, please contact:

Carla Williams (cs8878@yahoo.com) or (816-716-7886)
University of Missouri-Kansas City

I look forward to hearing from you and answering any questions you may have!

APPENDIX B

TEACHER INTERVIEW FORM

Teacher Demographics

1. How long have you been involved in a teaching or early intervention capacity relevant to Pre-K?

2. What is your current child care or early intervention position?

3. How many years have you:

Been working in education_____?

Working with this age level _____?

Working at this site _____?

4. How would you describe your ethnic/racial background? (check all that apply)

□ □Hispanic or Latino

□ American Indian/Alaskan Native □ Asian

□ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander □□Black or African-American

□ White □ Other

_____

Teaching in Pre-K Preliminary Interview

1. What is your job title?

   _____

2. What are your job responsibilities?

   _____

   _____

3. How many years have you worked in an early childhood setting?

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High School Some College Associate's Degree

Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Advanced/PhD

5. With what age group(s) do you work? (Check all that apply)

0-11 months 1 year olds 2 year olds

3 year olds 4 year olds 5 year olds

Other

6. How often do you participate an in-service training offered through your place of employment?

   Never Less than once a year One-twice a year

   More than three times year

7. How often do you participate an in-service training offered outside your place of employment?

   Never Less than once a year One-twice a year

   More than three times year

8. How often do you participate in college classes related to early childhood?

   Never Less than once a year One-twice a year

   More than three times year

9. How often do you participate in college classes not related to early childhood?

   Never Less than once a year One-twice a year

   More than three times year

10. How often do you participate in other professional development?

    Never Less than once a year One-twice a year

    More than three times year

11. Please check all the other professional development activities you participate in:
    a. Participating in teacher support groups
    b. Having access to professional publications
    c. Visiting other early childhood centers
    d. Serving as a mentor for less experienced teachers
    e. Serving as an intern with a more experienced teacher
    f. Mentoring Undergraduate/graduate students

12. What does professional development look like for you at your center?

_____

_____

13. Is there any person or adult who encourages your professional development as an early childhood teacher?
    a. Yes No
    If yes, who?
    _____

14. Please list any barriers you have experienced in pursuing your professional development.

_____

_____

15. Are there any ways leadership can support you more in professional development opportunities? If so, how?

    _____

    _____

16. What kinds of professional development would you like to receive but have not had the opportunity?

    _____

    _____

17. Please rank the skills and abilities of Pre-K teachers that you consider most important (1=most important and 8 = least important)

    _____ Knowledge of child development
    _____ Ability to observe and assess children's behavior
    _____Ability to maintain a safe and healthy environment for children
    _____ Ability to plan and implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum
    _____Classroom management
    _____Ability to foster relationships with families
    _____Ability to differentiate instruction

18. Please rank the following aspects of early childhood leadership that you consider most important (1=most important and 8 = least important)

    _____ Provide materials for teachers as needed
    _____ Provide a positive center culture
    _____Offer supports for teachers as needed
    _____Building family and community relationships
    _____Provide professional development opportunities
    _____Frequent classroom visits with feedback for teacher
    _____Retention of teachers
    _____Other

Teacher Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. Today we are going to be discussing early childhood education and some of the factors that affect a high quality program. I am hoping to solicit your feedback and impressions. I anticipate this meeting to last about 45 minutes.

I am recording this meeting to allow me to transcribe what is being said so that I can review your feedback later on. The information you provide will be instrumental in shaping the model or Pre-K I am working on developing. So before, we begin; please tell me about yourself and your background.

*Interviewer: "*As I mentioned when we first started talking about the project, I am trying to learn more about what constitutes a high quality Pre-K program through the eyes of those who live it. I'll be asking you questions, and I'll be tape-recording the interview so that later your words can be transcribed correctly. I will be using unique identifiers, so your name will not be mentioned.

I will state clearly into the microphone: "This is interview number _____, and I am interviewing a Pre-K teacher who teaches in a _____ program with children ages ____ to _____.

Q1: What drew you to the field of early childhood?

Q2: What does a typical day look like for you?

Q3: What kinds of activities do you wish you could spend more time on/less time on?

Q4: What are the most rewarding aspects of your work?

Q5: What are the most challenging aspects of your work?

Q6: Describe the skills and knowledge that you believe should be required for Pre-K teacher?

Q7: Describe the qualities or characteristics that you feel should be required of Pre-K teacher?

Q8: How would you describe good teaching in a Pre-K classroom? What would that look like?

Let's shift to supports for you, you classroom, and instruction.

Q9: What are supports you feel you have to help you become a better teacher and have a better classroom?

Q10: What kind of supports would you like to have?

Q11: How do you feel about instructional coaching in your classroom?

Q12: What are some strengths of coaching?

Q13: What are some weaknesses in coaching?

Q14: How do you perceive school leadership in regards to the early childhood program?

Q15: How do you feel leadership could support early childhood more?

Q16: Where do you see yourself in the field of ECE in 10 years?

That is the end of the interview. Thanks so much for participating and providing me with your impressions and feedback. Your comments are indispensable in understanding high quality Pre-K. I will provide you a copy of the final recommendations and findings. Before we conclude, are there any questions you have for me?

Focus Group Protocol

(Teachers)

Preparation

- ✓ Materials needed:
  - Study summary handout (Handout A)
  - Core elements/timeline handout (Handout B)
  - Audio recorder
  - Case study (Handout D)
  - Career stages (Handout C)
  -

Overview of the Model

Wait for questions. Provide group members with a copy of the Project Summary handout (Handout A).

> *"Here is a summary handout of the research study. Please refer to this as we discuss the model."*

Read through the following information (on the handout):

- ✓ ***What is the purpose of the study?***
  Provide a brief explanation of the study and provide examples of how high quality Pre-K increases student achievement for years to come.
- ✓ ***What are the core elements of the study?***

Core Elements

> *"The core elements are described in the second handout provided* (Handout B). *I will briefly describe each of the core elements listed in this table."*

Read through each of the elements listed on the core elements table. When discussing each element, refer back to the figure of the three-elements.

- ? **Any questions about the core elements?**
- ?

Case Example

> *"Now that I have explained the model, I would like to give you an idea for what it would mean for a child, teacher, and family. I am going to read to you a story about a specific child, Joey, to give you an idea for what this model would look like in action."*

Read case study "Joey's Story" (Handout D)

> *"This story helps to give you an idea of how a teacher would use the model in a classroom. Do you have any questions about this example?"* Wait for questions. *"Now, I want to ask some questions and get your impressions of the model."*

- **How effective do you think the proposed study would be at meeting the needs of all children in your classroom?**

- **What do you think are the strengths of the proposed model? What do you think are the limitations of this model?**

- **How does the proposed model fit with what is already being done in your classroom?**

- **What do you think would be challenging about implementing the proposed model in your classroom? What concerns or questions would you have about implementing the model?**

Stages of Career

"Thank you. So far we have talked about what the model would look like, next I want to talk about different career stages for Pre-K teachers and how that impacts the support you would need based on individual level for a high quality classroom. (Handout C)

Read through the following sections:

- ✓ ***What stage are you in?***
  Read through the career stages table.

"Understanding the level of development you are at can be of valuable assistance when understanding our role in the organization.

Ask the following questions:

- **What do you see your role being in your center?**
- **What is your thought about your level of knowledge/skill on the following items: language/literacy, developmentally appropriate instruction, and tiered instruction?**
- **What sense of empowerment do you feel to implement things in your classroom that are considered best practice?**
- **What do you see as being elements of a high-quality Pre-K?**
- **What other supports would be useful in delivering this high-quality experience?**

Wrap up

Handout A Focus Group

Reconceptualizing Pre-K

What is the purpose of this research study?

This study will be looking at the understanding the Pre-K teacher and administrator viewpoint and vision for a high quality Pre-K experience based on three elements:

- *Teacher quality*
- *Leadership support and practice*
- *Effective classroom practice based on supports available to the teacher*

❖ I am focused on how teacher quality, leadership support and practice, and effective classroom practice can help reconceptualize Pre-K, regardless of setting and funding source, in order to equalize the education all Pre-K children receive.

❖ By reconceptualizing Pre-K in this way, a model can be designed to meet the needs of all children by identifying the amount of support based on the elements above. This will be a 3-tiered model, told in a cumulative story of the data must support the theoretical framework of coaching, leadership, effective classroom practices, and teacher quality and provide a holistic storytelling of the phenomena.

What are the key parts of this research study?

❖ Three centers, each with a different funding source, will be studied. One is a district Pre-K classroom, one is a tuition-based Pre-K classroom, and one is a Head Start Pre-K classroom. Each center will constitute a case study.

❖ The researcher will conduct interviews with the lead classroom teacher from each site, the director from each site, observe in the classroom, and ask the lead teachers and

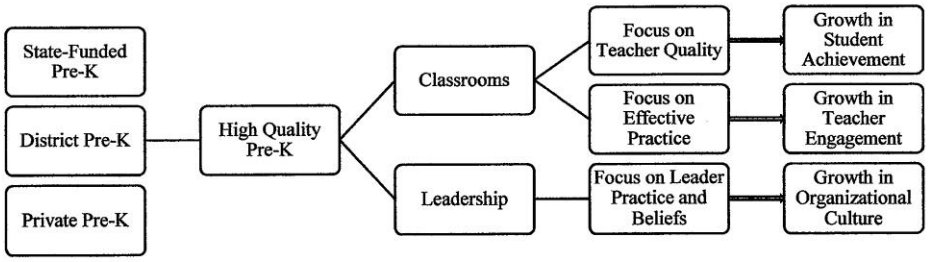
directors to complete a survey regarding their experiences with professional development.

- The data gathered from the observations, interviews, and surveys, will be compiled into a stories reflecting teacher and director voice about their beliefs about high-quality Pre-K. There will be four stories: one from each center, and one story that reports themes across sites.

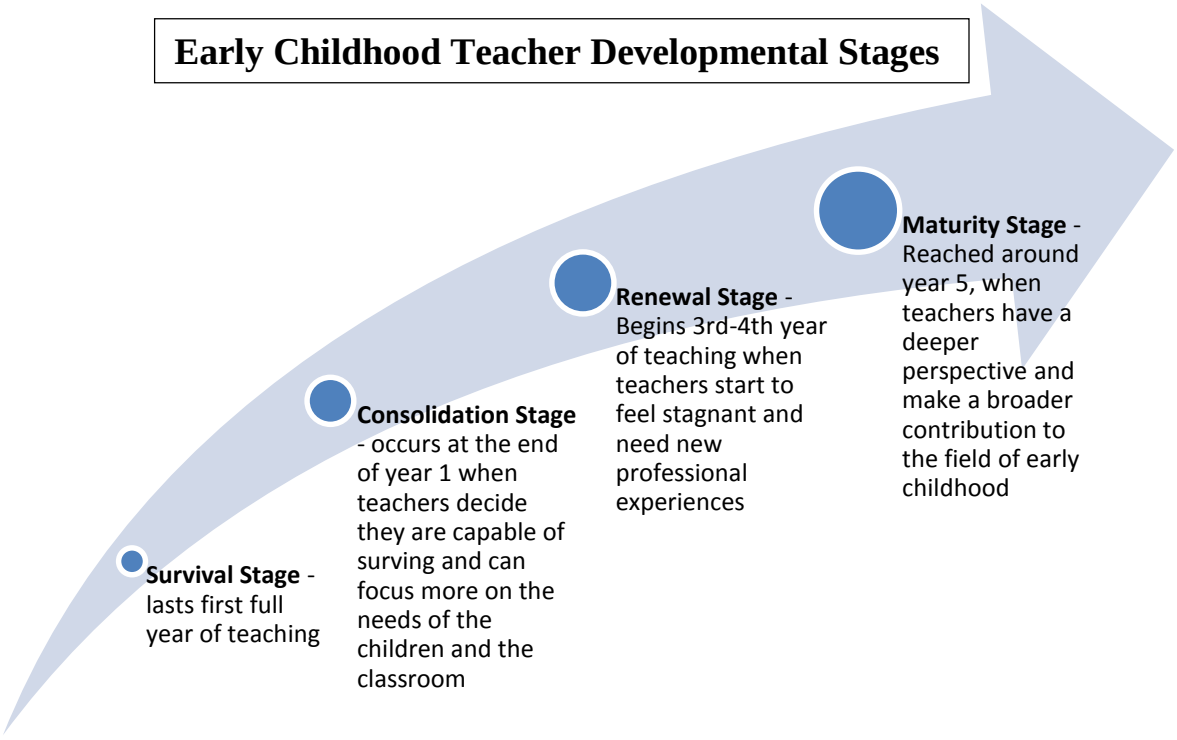
- The researcher will then share this cumulative story that will offer suggestions and recommendations for creating a high-quality Pre-K experience, regardless of setting and funding.

Handout B Focus Group

Theory of Change for High-Quality Pre-K



Early Childhood Teacher Developmental Stages



Handout D Focus Group

Joey's Story

Joey is a four-year-old boy attending his second year in a half-day Head Start program. Joey is a sweet boy who enjoys singing and playing with trucks. Joey gets along well with others and is a good class role-model. Joey's teacher, Ms. Smith, has been teaching the class to recognize familiar letters and words, such as their name, for several weeks. Each time she asks Joey to find his name out of a group of names, Joey starts acting silly and refuses to take a turn or guesses wrong. Joey also has difficulty picking out and naming individual letters when asked to do so.

An instructional coach comes in to do an assessment of children's language and literacy skills, such as letter naming, rhyming, alliteration, and picture vocabulary to track how each child is doing. Ms. Smith wants Joey to be prepared for kindergarten, and this information shows that he is falling behind. Ms. Smith and the instructional coach decide that Joey needs more practice and support in the classroom to help him learn his letters.

An instructional coach comes into observe Ms. Smith and her instruction several times. She observes Joey as well, to see if she sees something differently. She meets with Ms. Smith to discuss her observations, highlight the good things on, and to discuss some possible recommendations. The instructional coach and Ms. Smith set up a specific plan for Joey. First, when working on letter naming activities, Ms. Smith puts Joey with a smaller group of four or five children so she can give him more help and more chances to practice. Joey still participates with the large group of children; he just gets extra practice with a smaller group of children, too. Ms. Smith also tries to find more times throughout the day to help Joey practice, such as pointing out to Joey familiar letters in signs in the hallway or in books when reading with him individually.

The teacher and the instructional coach set a meeting with the center director in order to get her support, and build a plan for the parents to maximize success for Joey. The team discusses the teacher's plan to help Joey in the classroom, as well as ways that the director can help Joey practice letter naming during a transition activity. The director and teacher

will also meet with the parents to show simple things they can do at home to help Joey, such as looking for letters on street signs while riding in the car or while grocery shopping. They also discuss using flash cards both at home and school to help Joey first learn the letters in his name, then gradually learn new letters. They also talk about giving Joey a small prize each time he practices the flash cards to motivate him to try. The instructional coach provides training for Joey's parents, director, and teacher to show them how to use the flash cards and gradually add new letters. The teacher starts doing the letter naming assessment task with Joey each week at school to keep track of how he is progressing.

After four weeks of practicing naming letters in a smaller group, practicing naming letters throughout the day, and using the flash cards, Joey can now correctly name 6 letters in one minute. Although Joey is still behind the other children in the class, he is making progress and no longer refusing to take his turn in class. The team meets again to discuss Joey's progress and decides to keep using the letter naming strategies they have been using to continue to help Joey learn more letters.

They continue to monitor Joey's progress and after another four weeks he is able to name 11 letters in one minute. Joey has caught up to the other children. Ms. Smith continues to observe Joey, but he no longer needs extra practice time with the smaller group of children; he is able to participate in the large-group letter-naming activities. Joey's parents decide to continue practicing naming letters throughout the day and doing flash cards until Joey knows all of the letters. The instructional coach and director gradually fade out of the intervention while Ms. Smith and Joey's parents work with Joey.

APPENDIX C

LEADER INTERVIEW FORM

Director Demographics

1. How long have you been involved in a leader capacity relevant to Pre-K?

2. What is your child care background?

3. What kind of training/degree/certifications do you hold?

4. How would you describe your ethnic/racial background? (check all that apply)

□ □Hispanic or Latino

□ American Indian/Alaskan Native □ Asian

□ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander □□Black or African-American

□ White □ Other

_____

6. If your typical day could be broken into a pie chart, what would it look like? Please list an average percentage spent on each of the following: How much of your day is typically spent:

a. In classrooms? _____
b. Working with teachers in a supportive role? _____
c. Working with parents? _____
d. In Paperwork? _____
e. In Meetings? _____
f. Other? _____ (please specify)

Leadership in Pre-K Preliminary Interview

What is your job title?

_____

What are your job responsibilities?

_____

_____

__

1. How many years have you worked in an early childhood setting?
2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High School Some College

Associate's Degree

Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Advanced/PhD

3. With what age group(s) do you work? (Check all that apply)

0-11 months 1 year olds 2 year olds

3 year olds 4 year olds 5 year olds

Other

4. How often do you participate an in-service training offered through your place of employment?

Never Less than once a year One-twice a year

More than three times year

5. How often do you participate an in-service training offered outside your place of employment?

   Never Less than once a year One-twice a year

   More than three times year

6. How often do you participate in college classes related to early childhood?

   Never Less than once a year One-twice a year

   More than three times year

7. How often do you participate in college classes not related to early childhood?

   Never Less than once a year One-twice a year

   More than three times year

8. How often do you participate in other professional development?

   Never Less than once a year One-twice a year

   More than three times year

9. Please check all the other professional development activities you participate in:
   a. Participating in administrator support groups
   b. Having access to professional publications
   c. Visiting other early childhood centers
   d. Serving as a mentor for less experienced administrators
   e. Serving as an intern with a more experienced administrator
   f. Mentoring Undergraduate/graduate students
   g. Presenting workshops and training sessions
   h. Writing articles for publications
   i. Taking a leadership role in professional organizations
   j. Participating in research/program evaluation
   k. Other: _____

10. Why do you participate in any of the above professional development activities?

11. Is there any person or adult who encourages your professional development as an early childhood leader?

a. Yes No
If yes, who?
_____

12. Please list any barriers you have experienced in pursuing your professional development?

_____

_____

13. Please rank the skills and abilities of Pre-K teachers that you consider most important (1=most important and 8 = least important)
    _____ Knowledge of child development
    _____ Ability to observe and assess children's behavior
    _____Ability to maintain a safe and healthy environment for children
    _____ Ability to plan and implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum
    _____Classroom management
    _____Ability to foster relationships with families
    _____Ability to differentiate instruction
14. Please rank the following aspects of early childhood leadership that you consider most important (1=most important and 8 = least important)
    _____ Provide materials for teachers as needed
    _____ Provide a positive center culture
    _____Offer supports for teachers as needed
    _____Building family and community relationships
    _____Provide professional development opportunities
    _____Frequent classroom visits with feedback for teacher
    _____Retention of teachers
    _____Other

Director Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. Today we are going to be discussing early childhood education and some of the factors that affect a high quality program. I am hoping to solicit your feedback and impressions. I anticipate this meeting to last about 45 minutes. I am recording this meeting to allow me to transcribe what is being said so that I can review

your feedback later on. The information you provide will be instrumental in shaping the model or Pre-K I am working on developing. So before, we begin; please tell me about yourself and your background.

*Interviewer: "*As I mentioned when we first started talking about the project, I am trying to learn more about what constitutes a high quality Pre-K program through the eyes of those who live it. I'll be asking you questions, and I'll be tape-recording the interview so that later your words can be transcribed correctly. I will be using unique identifiers, so your name will not be mentioned.

I will state clearly into the microphone: "This is interview number _______, and I am interviewing a Pre-K administrator who works in a _____ program with children age's ____ to _____.

Q1: What drew you to the field of early childhood?

Q2: What are the most rewarding aspects of your work?

Q3: What are the most challenging aspects of your work?

Q4: Describe the skills and knowledge that you believe should be required for Pre-K administrators?

Q5: Describe the qualities or characteristics that you feel should be required of Pre-K administrators?

Q6: Describe the qualities and characteristics of a professional in the field for Pre-K?

Q7: How would you describe a career ladder for Pre-K administrators?

Let's shift for a moment to classrooms.

Q8: What does a typical day look like for you?

Q9: What kinds of things do you wish you could spend more time on/less time on?

Q10: The teachers you work with – where do you see the support they need lying at?

Q11: What do you feel you do a good job at supporting your teachers with? Where do you feel you could provide more support?

Q12: How would you describe good leading in ECE settings?

Q13: What can educational leaders do to support high-quality pre-school classroom instruction?

Q14: Where do you see yourself in the field of ECE in 10 years?

That is the end of the interview. Thanks so much for participating and providing me with your impressions and feedback. Your comments are indispensable in understanding high quality Pre-K. I will provide you a copy of the final recommendations and findings. Before we conclude, are there any questions you have for me?

APPENDIX D

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Guide

My site observations will be guided by the following questions:

(a) What is going on?

(b) What do the student-teacher interactions look like?

(c) How is the classroom environment developmentally and age appropriate and address individual ways of learning

(d) What does language and literacy instruction look like?

(e) How does the use of conversation affect interactions and instruction and

(f) What supports are available to the teacher?

(g) What is the physical space of the classroom like?

FIELD NOTES

APPENDIX E

STUD Y APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION

UMKC
Office of Research Services

UMKC
5319 Rockhill Road
Kansas City Missouri
TEL: 816 235-5927
FAX: 816 235-5602

NOTICE OF EXEMPT DETERMINATION

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Friend
328 Education Building
Kansas City, MO 64110

Protocol Number: 13-714
Protocol Title: Blocks and Playdough: Reconceptualizing Preschool Education A Heuristic Multiple Case Study
Type of Review: Administrative Review

Date of Determination: 09/13/2013

Dear Dr. Friend,

The above referenced study was reviewed and determined to be exempt from IRB review and approval in accordance with the Federal Regulations 45 CFR Part 46.101(b).

The above referenced study qualifies for exemption under Federal Regulations 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1), (2) and (4) as follows:

(1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal education practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

and

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability or reputation

and

(4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

This approval includes the following documents:

Attachments

Research_Teacher Consent to Participate in Research Project_Version2_Dated_09_11_13
Research_Leader Consent to Participate in Research Project_Version2_Dated_09-11-13
Research_Parent Information Letter_Version1_Dated_09_11-13.docx
Research_Recruitment Protocol_Version_Dated_08_25-13
Research_Observation Form Protocol_Version_Dated_08_25-13
Research_Protocol_Version2_Dated_09_11_13
Research_Teacher Interview and Focus Group Protocol_Version_Dated_08_25-13
Research_Leader Interview Protocol_Version_Dated_08_25-13

You are required to submit an amendment request for all changes to the study, to prevent withdrawal of the exempt determination for your study. When the study is complete, you are required to submit a Final Report.

APPENDIX F

LEADER CONSENT FORMS

Consent to Participate in Research Project

Dear Leader:

You are being invited to participate in a dissertation research project directed by Carla Williams, Research Assistant, of the Juniper Garden's Children's Project (JGCP) at the University of Kansas (KU), and Dr. Jennifer Friend, Associate Professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. You are invited to be a part of this project because you are a Pre-K teacher who provides care for preschoolers in one of the designated settings for this study.

What do I want to learn in this study?

This study will be looking at the understanding the Pre-K teacher and administrator viewpoint and vision for a high quality Pre-K experience based on three elements:

- Teacher quality
- Leadership support and practice
- Effective classroom practice based on supports available to the teacher

What does this study involve?

If you consent to participate, you will agree to:

(1) Allow the researcher to observe three times in a Pre-K classroom for to look at elements of high quality instruction during circle time, center time, small group time, large group, snack, and transition.
(2) Participate in a one-one 45 minute in-depth interview to share your thoughts and perspectives on high-quality Pre-K elements
(3) Participate in one 45-minute focus group with two other Pre-K teachers

(4) Allow the researcher access to staff meeting minutes, sample lesson plans and professional development agendas.

What are the benefits of being in this study?

As part of this study, you will receive a comprehensive picture of high-quality Pre-K instruction as well as strategies for using that information to inform practice. Results of this

study also will contribute to evidence-based practices for pre-kindergarten programs in this and other communities.

Are there any risks in this research?

This study is not anticipated to involve any risks for you or the students in your center. If you have any concerns, you may contact the researchers at any time (see phone numbers and email addresses at the end of this form). Also, if you would like to withdraw your consent at any time, you have the right to do that.

Is there payment for participation?

Leaders will be compensated for time and effort to participate in this study. You will receive a $25 gift card for completing observations, interview, focus group, and survey questionnaire. If you leave the study early, compensation will be prorated to cover the time you participated.

What information will be asked for?

Additional information will include sample lesson plans, as well as the classroom observations, interviews, and surveys mentioned above.

How will we protect your privacy?

Everything we learn from you is strictly confidential. Participants will be identified by ID numbers and will not include names of teachers. I will not share the information with anyone outside the research staff, with one exception. Our study data may be reviewed by officials at UMKC who make sure that research is done in an ethical and legal way, and that participants are treated fairly. When results of this study are reported, you will never be named or identified in any way. By signing this consent form, you give me permission to use and share this information, within the limits described above, at any time in the future.

If you give consent now, can you change your mind later?

Yes. You are always free to withdraw your consent, without any type of penalty.

I will be glad to answer any questions you might have now or at any time during the study – even after the study is finished. So, please feel free to call me at 816-716-7886. If you have additional questions about your rights as a research participant or feel you have suffered an injury as a result of your participation in this research, you should contact the Office of UMKC's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject.

If you agree to participate, please sign below and keep one copy for yourself. Thanks very much for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Carla Williams Jennifer Friend, Ph.D.

==========

I have read the information in this form and have had a chance to ask questions. I have received answers to any questions I had about information that will be used and shared in this study. I know that the information about me and children in my classroom will be kept private. I agree to participate in this study, knowing that I can withdraw my consent if I decide to. I also agree to the use and sharing of my information as described above. By signing this, I verify that I am at least 18 years of age and have received a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____

Your Name (Please print clearly) School Name

_____ _____

Signature Date Signed

APPENDIX G

TEACHER CONSENT FORMS

Consent to Participate in Research Project

Dear Teacher:

You are being invited to participate in a dissertation research project directed by Carla Williams, Research Assistant, of the Juniper Garden's Children's Project (JGCP) at the University of Kansas (KU), and Dr. Jennifer Friend, Associate Professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. You are invited to be a part of this project because you are a Pre-K teacher who provides care for preschoolers in one of the designated settings for this study.

What do I want to learn in this study?

This study will be looking at the understanding the Pre-K teacher and administrator viewpoint and vision for a high quality Pre-K experience based on three elements:

- Teacher quality
- Leadership support and practice
- Effective classroom practice based on supports available to the teacher

What does this study involve?

If you consent to participate, you will agree to:

(1) Allow the researcher to observe three times in your classroom for to look at elements of high quality instruction during circle time, center time, small group time, large group, snack, and transition.

(2) Participate in a one-one 45 minute in-depth interview to share your thoughts and perspectives on high-quality Pre-K elements

(3) Participate in one 45-minute focus group with two other Pre-K teachers

(4) Allow the researcher access to staff meeting minutes, sample lesson plans and professional development agendas.

What are the benefits of being in this study?

As part of this study, you will receive a comprehensive picture of high-quality Pre-K instruction as well as strategies for using that information to inform practice. Results of this study also will contribute to evidence-based practices for pre-kindergarten programs in this and other communities.

Are there any risks in this research?

This study is not anticipated to involve any risks for you or the students in your classroom. If you have any concerns, you may contact the researchers at any time (see phone numbers and email addresses at the end of this form). Also, if you would like to withdraw your consent at any time, you have the right to do that.

Is there payment for participation?

Teachers will be compensated for time and effort to participate in this study. You will receive a $25 gift card for completing observations, interview, focus group, and survey questionnaire. If you leave the study early, compensation will be prorated to cover the time you participated.

What information will be asked for?

Additional information will include sample lesson plans, as well as the classroom observations, interviews, and surveys mentioned above.

How will we protect your privacy?

Everything we learn from you is strictly confidential. Participants will be identified by ID numbers and will not include names of teachers. I will not share the information with anyone outside the research staff, with one exception. Our study data may be reviewed by officials at UMKC who make sure that research is done in an ethical and legal way, and that participants are treated fairly. When results of this study are reported, you will never be named or identified in any way. By signing this consent form, you give me permission to use and share this information, within the limits described above, at any time in the future.

If you give consent now, can you change your mind later?

Yes. You are always free to withdraw your consent, without any type of penalty.

I will be glad to answer any questions you might have now or at any time during the study – even after the study is finished. So, please feel free to call me at 816-716-7886. If you have additional questions about your rights as a research participant or feel you have suffered an injury as a result of your participation in this research, you should contact the Office of UMKC's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject.

If you agree to participate, please sign below and keep one copy for yourself. Thanks very much for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Carla Williams Jennifer Friend, Ph.D.

==========

I have read the information in this form and have had a chance to ask questions. I have received answers to any questions I had about information that will be used and shared in this study. I know that the information about me and children in my classroom will be kept private. I agree to participate in this study, knowing that I can withdraw my consent if I decide to. I also agree to the use and sharing of my information as described above. By signing this, I verify that I am at least 18 years of age and have received a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____

Your Name (Please print clearly) School Name

_____ _____

Signature Date Signed

APPENDIX H

PARENT INFORMATION DOCUMENTATION

Parent Information Letter

Classroom Observations

Dear Parent:

Your child's classroom is participating in a dissertation research project, which is looking at identifying elements of high-quality Pre-K as informed by Pre-K teachers and directors. During this semester, I will observe the class during classroom activities. These observations also will help me learn about the activities that are most beneficial for children. Your child will not be observed, photographed, or captured in any way. This letter is to inform you that I will be in the classroom over the next several months, but not working with your child.

What does this study involve?

This study will involve your child's classroom being observed for instructional quality and elements of instructional quality. No information that I collect will include information about your child.

By understanding the classroom's participation in the research study, it is also understood that your child will be in a classroom where observations are occurring that focus on teacher instruction. The results of this study will give teachers important information about children's development. I will also use this information to develop strategies to improve preschool education in our community, as well as in other communities.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at the number listed below.

Sincerely,

Carla Williams

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VITA

Carla Williams was born on August 8, 1978 in Fullerton, California, and attended elementary and high school in Orange County, California. She attended Creighton University, where she majored in elementary education and French. She received her Master's degree in Urban Leadership and Policy Studies which was completed at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2008, and her Education Specialist in Urban Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2010.

Carla started her career teaching kindergarten and first grade for several years before moving to the position of Instructional Coach. From there, Carla served at the Kansas State Department of Education, working in Title Programs and School Improvement. She was offered a position at the University of Kansas, Juniper Gardens Children's Project and has had the opportunity to work on several research grants targeted at increasing literacy behaviors in preschool children. She then accepted a position at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Institute of Human Development where she works on grants related to professional development, effective teacher practice, and inclusive classrooms.

Carla is married to Jerome Williams, Jr., and they have four children, ages 1 to 10.